

# The corporate climate migration has begun

[Andrew Freedman](#) Dec 10, 2021 - [Energy & Environment](#)



Companies large and small, some with longtime roots in their neighborhoods, are on the hunt for new real estate that is less prone to weather and climate extremes.

**Why it matters:** The corporate migration underway indicates vulnerable communities may see an exodus of large employers in the coming decades as oceans encroach. Inland areas prone to flooding or wildfires may see similar challenges.

**Driving the news:** Within the past three years, tech giant Hewlett Packard Enterprise, a major hospital in South Carolina, and the nation's eighth-largest

airline by passengers carried have all decided to move their infrastructure to higher ground.

- Last month, Roper St. Francis Healthcare's 332-bed facility on Charleston peninsula, home of a larger medical campus, [announced a \\$500 million plan to move inland](#) after repeated bouts of flooding during both coastal storms and so-called "sunny day flooding."
- Sunny day flooding does not require a storm but can occur simply due to the combination of astronomical high tides plus sea level rise.
- According to the Charleston Post and Courier newspaper, the hospital [has been located downtown for 165 years](#).
- The new building "will be technologically and structurally upgraded to better withstand natural disasters, such as floods, hurricanes and earthquakes," according to a [hospital statement](#).
- The paper called the move "An early signal that living and working on the low-lying peninsula is becoming more tenuous."
- According to the newspaper, the hospital system had already devoted \$9 million to measures needed to keep critical medical systems functioning if a major hurricane struck. Roper Hospital did not respond to Axios' request for comment.

**Threat level:** The current Roper Hospital is located in an area that floods during heavy rainstorms, along with water coming in from the Atlantic.

- According to a [NOAA report published last summer](#), Charleston saw a record 14 days of high tide flooding during 2020 and is predicted to have as many as 35 to 90 such days by 2050, depending on the rate and extent of sea level rise.
- Global average sea levels are projected to rise at least 3 feet by the end of the century, barring steep near-term cuts in greenhouse gas emissions.

- Sea level rise will not be uniform, however. In Charleston, due to an unlucky combination of capricious ocean currents and sinking land, seas are rising far faster than in many other coastal cities.
- According to the [U.N. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change](#), sea level rise through 2100 could range from 1 foot to 3.3 feet, though higher amounts, on the order of 6.6 feet, cannot be ruled out due to uncertainties in ice sheet dynamics.

**Meanwhile**, in Houston, Hewlett Packard Enterprise is working to complete its [new global headquarters](#) in Spring, Texas, after experiencing extensive flooding at its former Houston-area campus in 2016 and then in 2017 during Hurricane Harvey.

- Harvey dumped 5 feet of rain on the city in what was the [most ever recorded](#) from any single storm in U.S. history.
- Subsequent studies found [climate change supercharged](#) that storm's moisture content, contributing to the deadly flooding.
- HP Inc., the company that remains after a spinoff of HPE, moved their Houston-area offices away from the flooding-prone campus in 2018 — soon after Harvey's damage.

**Separately**, in Florida, the discount airline Spirit is making an extreme weather resilience move of its own.

- Earlier this year, it announced that it would add a second operations center in Orlando to supplement its current headquarters in Miramar, Florida, just southwest of the airline's largest hub of Fort Lauderdale-Hollywood International Airport.
- That region was battered by high winds during Hurricane Irma in 2017 and is vulnerable to damage from future storms.
- The building housing the new facility will be hardened against high

winds and flooding from hurricanes, according to the [trade publication Simple Flying](#).

- Airline operations centers are essentially the brains of an airline — they track all flights and make crew, flight dispatch and other critical decisions. If a facility is knocked out of service, it can cripple the airline, even if most of its planes are well outside of a storm zone.
- The hurricane susceptibility of southeastern Florida helped motivate the decision, according to news reports. Spirit Airlines did not respond to Axios' request for comment.
- Climate studies [show that](#) human-caused global warming is causing hurricanes to rapidly intensify more frequently, and is leading to a greater proportion of stronger storms in the Atlantic Ocean.

**The bottom line:** Many more businesses are no doubt contemplating similar protective actions, including at the international level where this would manifest itself in a shift of corporate capital and jobs from less climate secure nations to ones with fewer extreme weather risks.