

CITY OF CHARLESTON

# Imagine the Wall

Charleston, South Carolina



*Visionary designers offer a resilient, nature-based alternative to proposed 9-mile seawall for protecting a coastal city from the impacts of a changing climate.*

## SERVICES

Engage  
Assess  
Plan

Located in a tidal system at the confluence of the Ashley and Cooper Rivers, Charleston’s downtown peninsula is characterized by historic streets and buildings. It draws over five million tourists a year, and its business center and Medical District drive the regional economy. Today, this section of the city faces regular flooding from high tides and rainfall and is also vulnerable to sea level rise and the storm surges that accompany hurricanes. To address storm surge, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) recommended building a nine-mile, \$1.75 billion seawall at 12.0’ elevation around much of the oldest part of the city.

In response to the USACE’s request for comments, Biohabitats assembled a world-class team, including DesignWorks, One Architecture & Urbanism (ONE), and Applied Technology and Management (ATM), to envision an ecologically grounded form of perimeter protection that could offer additional benefits and fit into Charleston’s storied urban fabric. The plan lays out an interconnected system of living shorelines, horizontal levees, living breakwaters, stormwater infrastructure, and other locally inspired, nature-based solutions to protect the City center from the breadth of water management challenges it faces.

Naming their vision, “Imagine the Wall,” and establishing a website to share it, the design team invited decision-makers, public officials, and the community to build on the solid foundation of USACE engineering to rethink a traditional sea wall approach and explore an alternative that would naturally adapt, regenerate, and strengthen Charleston’s unique ecology and cultural heritage over time.