



**SAN RAFAEL**  
THE CITY WITH A MISSION  
*established 1874*

**Agenda Item No: 5.a**

**Meeting Date: March 3, 2025**

## **SAN RAFAEL CITY COUNCIL AGENDA REPORT**

**Department: City Manager, Sustainability  
Division**

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Climate Adaptation and Resilience Planner**

**City Manager Approval:** 

**TOPIC: UPDATE ON SEA LEVEL RISE PROJECT**

**SUBJECT: PRESENTATION AND UPDATE ON THE CANAL SEA LEVEL RISE  
COLLABORATION PROJECT**

**RECOMMENDATION:** No action. Receive and file.

### **BACKGROUND:**

According to regional and national assessments, San Rafael is the most vulnerable community in the Bay Area to the effects of sea level rise. The Canal neighborhood is particularly at risk due to a variety of factors, including the prevalence of subsidence (i.e. the land is sinking), population density, and potential for displacement, among other factors. According to national screening tools, the Canal neighborhood ranks in the 99<sup>th</sup> percentile for projected flood risk, the 96<sup>th</sup> percentile for expected building loss rates, and the 97<sup>th</sup> percentile for expected population loss rate.

Over the past several years, the City, community organizations, and other agencies have been working to understand the implications of the flood risks amplified by subsidence and sea level rise. In 2022, the City and its partners were awarded grant funding from the State Coastal Conservancy and Marin Community Foundation to support adaptation planning to prepare for sea level rise. The grant application was developed collaboratively by staff from the City's Sustainability Division, the County of Marin's Department of Public Works, the Multicultural Center of Marin, and the Canal Alliance, all of whom comprise the Sea Level Rise Collaborative. The collaborative then partnered with the University of California Berkeley and sought and received additional funding to bolster data and citizen science initiatives.

The overall goal of the collaborative is to develop a community-informed feasibility study of the various options to reduce the risks posed by flooding exacerbated by sea level rise. This feasibility study is the first step in developing potential interventions, most of which are expected to take decades to plan, develop, permit, and construct and will require significant financial resources.

One deliverable of the Coastal Conservancy grant is to identify opportunities to integrate key recommendations into local plans and strategies. Over the past year the collaborative has been

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**FOR CITY CLERK ONLY**

**Council Meeting:**

**Disposition:**

working with community members to articulate near-term priorities and actions that can help mitigate the compounding effects of flooding, such as housing displacement and emergency preparedness. More information about the project, including details of the grants and community engagement materials, can be found on the City's Adaptation [web page](#).

**ANALYSIS:**

The collaborative has developed a set of community-informed near-term priorities that can help reduce impacts to residents and businesses regardless of which direction is finally chosen for long-term adaptation. These priorities include (1) preparing for an emergency, (2) protecting existing residents and businesses, and (3) building and rebuilding safer. To prepare for an emergency the recommendation is to refine and develop emergency plans, training, and educational materials in multiple languages to prepare for a flooding emergency, including evacuation plans and projects. To protect existing residents and businesses the recommendation is to partner with stakeholders to develop a short-term strategy to protect business and residential tenants from displacement and a long-term strategy to plan to preserve and develop affordable housing that is mixed-use and climate resilient. To build and rebuild safer the recommendation is to ensure critical infrastructure and new development in the flood zone adequately accounts for sea level rise so that assets remain functional over time.

This presentation will review community feedback and priorities identified as a part of this collaborative. The City is currently in the process of developing new City Council Goals and Objectives for Fiscal Years 2026-2028. As a part of this process, Staff has incorporated the near-term priorities identified in this project which can then be considered by the City Council in the broader context of the Goals and Objectives.

**Next Steps**

These priorities represent initial and immediate steps that can begin now to make the community safer, while a longer-term sea level rise feasibility study continues to provide more insight into more comprehensive approaches to reduce risks from flooding. However, given the information available currently, it is clear that there will be a need for substantial and ongoing planning, financing, coalition and consensus building, and external partnerships in order to make the tangible changes needed to meaningfully prepare the community. For these reasons staff recommend continuing to move expeditiously to advance the planning, review, and ultimate approval of adaptation policies and projects that will be identified over the course of this work.

**COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT:**

A hallmark of this project is that it is community-informed. Written into the grant are requirements for community capacity-building and education, and robust, equitable engagement that produces tangible actions based on community priorities. Over the past two years dozens of engagements have been conducted in various ways, most of which can be found on the City's [Adaptation web page](#). These include hosting a monthly 14-member resident Steering Committee, focus groups, surveys, block parties, field trips, open houses, and workshops.

**FISCAL IMPACT:**

There is no immediate fiscal impact to receiving this report. The current project is funded through grants from the State Coastal Conservancy, Marin Community Foundation, and the Governor's Office of Land Use and Climate Innovation totaling \$1,464,200. However, in the future physical flood protection measures are likely to require very significant local and external funding via grants and other sources.

**RECOMMENDATION:** No action. Receive and file.