

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation  
September 22, 2022

**CANAL COMMUNITY RESILIENCE PLANNING PROJECT**

Project No. 22-035-01  
Project Manager: Marilyn Latta

**RECOMMENDED ACTION:** Authorization to disburse up to \$700,000 to the City of San Rafael to conduct a community-informed technical feasibility study of sea level rise adaptation options along the shoreline of the City of San Rafael, Marin County with emphasis on involvement of the Canal District communities.

**LOCATION:** Shoreline of City of San Rafael (Marin County)

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EXHIBITS

- Exhibit 1: [Project Location Map](#)  
Exhibit 2: [Project Area Map](#)  
Exhibit 3: [Project Letters](#)
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**RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS**

Staff recommends that the State Coastal Conservancy adopt the following resolution and findings.

Resolution:

The State Coastal Conservancy hereby authorizes the disbursement of up to seven hundred thousand dollars (\$700,000) to the City of San Rafael (“the grantee”) to conduct community-informed technical feasibility study of sea level rise adaptation options along the shoreline of the City of San Rafael, Marin County with emphasis on involvement of the Canal District communities.

Prior to commencement of the project, the grantee shall submit for the review and written approval of the Executive Officer of the Conservancy (Executive Officer) the following:

1. A detailed work program, schedule, and budget.
2. Names and qualifications of any contractors to be retained in carrying out the project.

3. A plan for acknowledgement of Conservancy funding.

Findings:

Based on the accompanying staff report and attached exhibits, the State Coastal Conservancy hereby finds that:

1. The proposed authorization is consistent with Chapter 3 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, regarding the Climate Ready Program.
2. The proposed project is consistent with the current Conservancy Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines.

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**STAFF RECOMMENDATION**

**PROJECT SUMMARY:**

Staff recommends that the Conservancy authorize disbursement of up to \$700,000 to the City of San Rafael to conduct a community-informed technical feasibility study of sea level rise adaptation options along the shoreline of the City of San Rafael, Marin County with emphasis on involvement of the Canal District communities. (Exhibit 1).

The San Rafael Canal District has long been recognized as an underserved community experiencing economic, social, and environmental injustice. The community includes immigrants from Guatemala, Mexico, and Vietnam and a high population density of multi-family renters living in public housing built directly on shoreline fill as part of the urbanized canal that modified the mouth of San Rafael Creek where it connects to the tidal waters and shoreline of San Francisco Bay. The area has flooded during normal high tides and rain events for years, and the area is dependent on a pumping system to manage groundwater and flood waters that is operated by the County of Marin (County) and City of San Rafael (City), in coordination with municipal operators and residential owners. More recently, concerns about climate change impacts related to sea level rise have been recognized by the City and by the County. The 2017 Marin Shoreline BayWAVE Sea Level Rise Vulnerability Assessment, conducted by the County and funded by the Conservancy, recognizes the entire Canal District as a vulnerable asset. Further, a recent case study in the San Francisco Bay Conservation and Development Commission (BCDC) and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) Office for Coastal Management, *Adapting to Rising Tides Bay Area: Regional Sea Level Rise Vulnerability and Adaptation Study (2020)* identifies the Canal District as "by far the hardest hit in the region at earliest total water levels."

There is a critical need to develop a community-informed climate adaptation feasibility study for the San Rafael Canal District and the entire San Rafael shoreline. The high-level guidance documents mentioned above provide a sound call to action and include risk assessments of the areas and infrastructure that are expected to be impacted by sea level rise. But they do not provide detailed site-specific information about what sea level rise adaptation options will be feasible in certain areas; and they lack details on design, constructability, and environmental considerations in technical grey engineering, nature-based approaches, and hybrid green-grey options that might be pursued. Most importantly, the documents to date do not include strong

local community input, which is necessary in order to develop equitable and community-inclusive adaptation plans that are supported by the full suite of residents and partners that need to be engaged.

The project will include robust engagement in priority equity community census tracts 1122.03 and 1122.04 to ensure that underrepresented community members have a voice in adaptation planning and that inclusive decision-making guides the process. The project's engagement component includes working with the County of Marin and community-based organization (CBO) project partners Canal Alliance and Multicultural Center of Marin (MCM), who will lead the project, and develop culturally relevant community engagement methods for these census tracts. A benefit of the project is that will build the capacity of Canal Alliance and MCM, enabling them to expand their staff by one person per organization.

The project will simultaneously prototype and model a collaborative planning process that elevates the community's role in decision-making to be used in future resilience and adaptation planning work and other critical local policy decisions. This will build on prior work completed in the BayWAVE Vulnerability Analysis, San Rafael Sea Level Rise Adaptation Study, and other regional studies to confirm physical asset vulnerabilities within the study area for the selected sea level rise scenarios. The project will review and confirm asset vulnerabilities along the entire city shoreline. This will include a comprehensive consideration of stormwater, drainage, existing flooding, and future sea level rise, in dialogue with City of San Rafael Department of Public Works. The asset review also includes having communities review vulnerable assets identified in BayWAVE and other prior work and adding any physical asset vulnerabilities not already identified. The project includes opportunities for residents along the entire City shoreline, with an emphasis on engagement with the underserved Canal District communities. The lighter engagement with residents along the full shoreline includes outreach methods such as flyers, media, online information, updates at City Council and other City and County-led meetings, block parties, and other avenues to make sure residents are aware that this feasibility study is taking place, and they have opportunities to attend meetings to hear information and otherwise learn about and give input to the feasibility study.

The project team will organize, attend, and lead trainings with City and County staff to promote competencies in the foundational areas of this project: sea level rise, equitable community engagement, and cultural competency. The City will work with County of Marin Department of Public Works staff to develop and conduct a series of six trainings on the causes and implications of sea level rise, flooding, time scales, compounding effects, and the adaptation pathways approach to planning for sea level rise impacts. A minimum of three trainings specific to inclusive and equitable community engagement, and a minimum of three cultural competency trainings specific to the residents of the Canal, will be organized and conducted by the two CBOs with MCM taking the lead and supported by match funding from the Marin Community Foundation. MCM has experience in this area and will build upon prior efforts with a particular focus on the project. Language, culture, norms, perceptions, and empathy training will be included, with a focus on the immigrant experience of people from Guatemala, Mexico, and Vietnam living in San Rafael. These will include information on the variety of affinity groups, resources, programs, and service providers currently engaged with residents. Trainings

will be primarily focused on City and County staff and open to other government agencies and stakeholders.

The project includes conducting at least eight community workshops in multiple languages to engage the communities of the Canal District in the process of the feasibility study. The project team will work closely with the feasibility study consultant to decide on and design content to provide participants with meaningful opportunities to contribute and provide feedback. Earlier workshops will be used to help refine the focus of the consultant, while later workshops will be geared toward identifying recommendations and priorities for future implementation.

The project includes conducting a technical feasibility study that identifies, evaluates, and recommends nature-based, hybrid, and hard infrastructure sea level rise adaptation measures within the project study area. These will include but not be limited to consideration of the full range of nature-based solutions such as ecotone levees and subtidal habitat restoration, green-grey riprap, and traditional engineered solutions such as sea walls and a tide gate at the mouth of the Canal. Through the technical feasibility study and collaborative community planning process, a minimum of at least one project will be identified for further development, design, and implementation with separate additional future funds.

As part of preparing the feasibility study, a broad set of possible adaptation measures identified by technical consultants will be refined and developed into more detailed analyses based on the community's expressed priorities and community discussions with technical consultants and the project team about the feasibility of and tradeoffs across different measures. The community will engage on a series of measures that address sea level rise over time and spatially along the stretches of shoreline. Place-based renderings will be prepared to support informed discussion about the measures. "Adaptation pathways" or other tools that show when critical decision-points require a change in plan based on thresholds like water levels and preferred near-term adaptation measures will be prepared to demonstrate trade-offs and assumptions about future risks.

The project includes preparation of summary materials to capture design decisions made by the community, including preferences that may eliminate or facilitate other future choices. These summary materials will also include information on the other aspects of project prioritization including ecological performance and regulatory feasibility. Documentation of community decisions and project prioritization will remain important beyond this grant-funded process. The project includes presentations regarding the completed feasibility study to the San Rafael City Council, Planning Commission, and other relevant bodies. This will include prepping the Steering Committee and working with the feasibility study consultant to prepare materials, catalogue feedback, and integrate comments. The project includes development of final community needs and policy recommendations and integrating this information into City policies, programs, plans, and implementation activities. Potential documentation may include the Citywide climate adaptation plan, General Plan, Local Hazard Mitigation Plan, Capital Improvement Program, or a neighborhood specific plan, among others.

**Site Description and Background:** The project study area consists of two nested scales: geographic and social. Geographically, the project study area is the entire City shoreline area

loosely framed by downtown San Rafael on the west, the Richmond-San Rafael Bridge to the east, and the McNears Beach to the north (Exhibit 1). Specific project boundaries will be confirmed by a Steering Committee that will be assembled for the project. Socially, the study's focal community engagement area is the Canal Neighborhood, census tracts 1122.03 and 1122.04.

The City's Department of Public Works recently completed a Sea Level Rise Technical Guidance Study that contains specific recommendations that inform this project: to pursue and conduct feasibility studies for near-term and medium-term adaptation and flood mitigation projects. The City recently completed their General Plan 2040, which includes an Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Element and a Safety and Resilience Element. This includes a Flood Risk and Sea Level Rise Report calling for the City to develop a City-wide adaptation plan. The General Plan has several Land Use Element measures that specifically address sea level rise and flooding, which will inform an upcoming Specific Plan for the San Rafael Canal area.

Several organizations are working in the Canal District on social justice issues and climate adaptation, including the Canal Alliance and MCM. The City has been partnering with these groups and others to start initial educational discussions and preparedness planning for climate change and sea level rise. "Drawdown: Marin" is a Marin County effort aimed at increasing collaboration and coordination to implement local climate and equity solutions, has identified community inclusivity and empowerment as a challenge to this effort. To this end, Drawdown: Marin launched a Community Ambassador program in 2019 aimed at recognizing existing community leaders, offering them capacity-building training, and asking the Ambassadors to interview neighbors, friends, and family members about existing community priorities and share with them information about climate change. The responses from that outreach effort serve as the basis for many of the strategies in this proposed project, including training community members to do outreach; providing monetary, food, and childcare incentives for participation; and equity training for city and county staff.

The BCDC staff report "Toward Equitable Shorelines: Environmental Justice and Social Equity at the San Francisco Bay" includes the suggestion that "the most impacted communities determine what projects get funded," which is what this project proposes. The report further states that an effective approach to implementing meaningful public engagement is "by partnering with local community-based organizations (CBO's), as these organizations are already trusted entities within communities, can provide engagement expertise, and can be partners in leveraging resources." This project takes that recommendation a step further by helping the community-based organizations to increase internal capacity for outreach and education efforts.

**Grant Applicant Qualifications:** The City has substantial experience in managing, reporting, and billing many types of projects funded by grants from federal, state and regional public agencies. Canal Alliance and MCM serve the Canal community through a range of services and expertise. They are trusted organizations in the community and understand that sea level rise threats require engaged community decision-making. The experience during the pandemic continually demonstrated how much extra time and effort it took to get key messages into the community. No one outreach source is adequate, as residents come from many different backgrounds and

cultures and speak several languages. Of critical importance to issues of land use and planning is the ability to have time, access, and knowledge of complex issues. It is essential for governments and CBOs to spend adequate time meeting people where they are, understanding the needs, values, and cultural milieu of the various subpopulations in a community, and creating materials and processes that work for them. The two CBO partners in this grant application are clear that although they serve this community directly, they do not represent the community per se and that something as significant as adaptation planning will require developing community ambassadors and a capacity within the community to be part of the decision-making.

**CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S PROJECT SELECTION CRITERIA & GUIDELINES:**

The proposed project is consistent with the Conservancy's Project Selection Criteria, last updated on September 23, 2021, in the following respects:

**Required Criteria**

**1. Extent to which the project helps the Conservancy accomplish the objectives in the Strategic Plan.**

See the "Consistency with Conservancy's Strategic Plan" section below.

**2. Project is a good investment of state resources.**

This project is a good investment of state resources because it builds on and leverages prior state-funded work with sea level rise risk assessments in Marin County, it is meeting a major need in downscaling that risk assessment to the San Rafael shoreline and underserved San Rafael Canal Community, and further developing and assessing the feasibility of adaptation designs that have strong community input and engagement. The project is feasible and the budget is reasonable, considering the strong focus on community engagement and the necessary resources and paid involvement with local community partner leads. The project leverages non-state resources from the Marin Community Foundation, the Local Early Action Planning grant, and the in-kind contributions of San Rafael and Marin County staff.

In addition, this project helps to advance the planning and protection of natural resources and shorelines in San Francisco Bay, will provide a model for sea level rise adaptation feasibility assessments and community engagement in other cities and counties. The project includes evaluation of the community engagement and feasibility planning process in order to assess areas of success and also lessons learned and recommendations for future efforts.

**3. Project includes a serious effort to engage tribes. Examples of tribal engagement include good faith, documented efforts to work with tribes traditionally and culturally affiliated to the project area.**

The City of San Rafael and community partners will include efforts to communicate, consult, or engage with tribes who are traditionally and culturally affiliated to the project area as early as possible in project development. Conservancy staff have sent initial introductory letters about this project to several tribes, and the City will invite each of these tribes to meet individually and also join in the community focus groups and feedback meetings as part of the Feasibility Study development process.

The City and partners will respect tribal knowledge and concerns in the project. Any materials about the project will include tribal land acknowledgement and accurate historical information in signage, communications, and other project information.

**4. Project benefits will be sustainable or resilient over the project lifespan.**

This planning project will use best available sea level rise projections from the County's 2017 Sea Level Rise Vulnerability Assessment, and other sea level rise scenarios such as the Ocean Protection Council's Sea Level Rise Guidance (updated 2022). The adaptation methods, specific design considerations, and expected benefits will be described within the framing of these sea level rise scenarios. The time horizons for planning will be developed with attention to near-term (2030), mid-term (2050) and long-term (2100) adaptation pathways.

**5. Project delivers multiple benefits and significant positive impact.**

Although the project planning focus is on developing a feasibility study of adaptation alternatives to sea level rise, it will also consider co-benefits where possible to alleviate multiple stressors within communities along the San Rafael shoreline, such as improving public health, addressing the need for additional recreational amenities, reductions in pollution burden, access to parks and open space, habitat enhancement or other environmental benefits.

This planning project will be a step in increasing equity and environmental justice by involving underserved and/or frontline communities in the planning for sea level rise adaptation and designing adaptation strategies to provide benefits to the San Rafael Canal Community and other underserved communities in San Rafael. The project increases community-preparedness and resilience to future climate change impacts such as sea level rise, drought, extreme heat, floods, and other climate-related impacts by providing training and education to both municipal staff and community members on these issues. The adaptation feasibility study will seek to focus on adaptation methods that increase urban greening, open space, and tree canopy. One adaptation project will be selected to move forward with future 30% design planning with separate additional future funds.

**6. Project planned with meaningful community engagement and broad community support.**

This project is planned specifically to increase meaningful community input and engagement in climate change education, and sea level rise adaptation feasibility planning for the San Rafael shoreline. The City of San Rafael staff, and Marin County staff, along with two lead community-based organizations, will engage with local and regional communities in public co-visioning processes before sea level rise adaptation plans are developed to reflect community needs and desires. Project concepts are anchored in community priorities and expertise.

The San Rafael Canal District community will be engaged in a meaningful way to build mutual trust and relationships. The project involves staff, board members, and consultants who are from or have experience working with respective communities. The process includes dialogue between all affected and necessary parties, and direct involvement of local community groups.

The staff from City of San Rafael and Marin County will engage in trainings on unequal power dynamics between communities and government, historic inequity, injustices, and trauma. Community members will have a decision-making or co-leadership role in the development of

the sea level rise adaptation feasibility study, and the engagement process will be diverse and inclusive of the community members.

The City of San Rafael is partnering with local CBOs to implement the community engagement. The engagement process is planned to make it easier for community members to participate by, for example, providing stipends, meeting in convenient locations and times, using virtual venues, and providing childcare and food. Outreach will be facilitated in a manner appropriate for the intended community/audience, and may include mailers or flyers, telephone calls, newspapers, publications, and social media. The project team has a track record working within communities and incorporating insights gained from community engagement into project planning. Materials developed during the project will be made available in multiple languages that are representative of the languages spoken in the engaged community.

**PROJECT FINANCING**

<b>Coastal Conservancy</b>	<b>\$700,000</b>
Marin Community Foundation Grant	\$61,526
Local Early Action Planning Grant	\$60,000
<b>Project Total</b>	<b>\$7,121,526</b>

Conservancy funds are anticipated to come from FY2018/19 and FY2021/22 appropriations to the Conservancy from the “California Drought, Water, Parks, Climate, Coastal Protection, and Outdoor Access for All Act of 2018” (Prop 68, Public Resources Code Division 45, Chapters 1-13, Sections 80000-80173). In particular, Chapter 10 of Prop 68 allocates funds to the San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program for projects to improve a community’s ability to adapt to the unavoidable impacts of climate change; improve and protect coastal and rural economies, agricultural viability, wildlife corridors, or habitat; develop future recreational opportunities; or enhance drought tolerance, landscape resilience, and water retention. (Pub. Res. Code sections 80130 and 80133(b)). In addition, Section 80008(a)(2) states that at least 15 percent of the available funds shall be allocated for projects serving severely disadvantaged communities. Finally, Section 80008(b)(1) states that up to 10 percent of these available funds may be allocated for technical assistance to disadvantaged communities. The Climate Ready RFP defines technical assistance as “project development” activities that will help identify specific solutions and projects, i.e., the process of providing necessary education and resources for project scoping and development and project implementation assistance.

The recommended project is within the San Francisco Bay Area Program and will be undertaken pursuant to the Climate Ready Program established in Chapter 3 of the Conservancy’s enabling legislation. Consistent with Chapter 10 of Proposition 68, the recommended project seeks to improve a community’s ability to adapt to the unavoidable impacts of climate change, specifically by supporting a community-informed process to understand and consider a range of nature-based options to address sea level rise and flooding in one of the Bay Area’s most vulnerable areas. The project will be sited in the Canal District of San Rafael, which is located



within a “severely disadvantaged community” (“SDAC”) as defined by Proposition 68. Consistent with Section 80008(a)(2), funds for the recommended project may count towards the 15 percent SDAC requirement. The Conservancy is tracking its SDAC allocations. Consistent with Section 80008(b)(1), the recommended project will help identify a suite of sea level rise adaptation options. The recommended project is therefore consistent with the intended funding source.

The other project funds are provided by Marin Community Foundation who will provide \$61,526 in grant funding, and \$60,000 from a Local Early Action Planning grant. In addition, the City will provide \$137,574 in in-kind match, and the County will provide \$70,698 in in-kind match. These amounts are provided as estimates. Unless specifically identified as “Required Match,” the other sources of funding and in-kind contributions described above are estimates. The Coastal Conservancy does not typically require matching funds, nor does it require documentation of expenditures from other funders. Typical grant conditions require grantees to provide any funds needed to complete the project.

The proposed project was selected through a competitive grant process under the Conservancy’s “Proposition 68 Guidelines San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program - Climate Adaptation Funds” adopted August 22, 2019. The proposed project meets the evaluation criteria in the Proposition 68 Guidelines as described in detail in this section, the “Project Summary” section above, and in the “Consistency with Conservancy’s Project Selection Criteria” section above

**CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY’S ENABLING LEGISLATION:**

Section 31113 of Chapter 3 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code authorizes the Conservancy to address the impacts and potential impacts of climate change on resources within the Conservancy’s jurisdiction (Section 31113(a)). The recommended project will address resources within the Conservancy’s jurisdiction because it will be undertaken within one of the nine counties of the San Francisco Bay Area (Chapter 4.5 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code).

Section 31113(b) authorizes the Conservancy to award grants to nonprofit organizations and public agencies to undertake projects that include reducing greenhouse gas emissions, and addressing extreme weather events, sea level rise, flooding, and other coastal hazards that threaten coastal communities, infrastructure, and natural resources. Consistent with this section, the recommended project will provide a grant to a public agency to conduct a community-informed technical feasibility study of sea level rise adaptation options.

Section 31113(c) states that the Conservancy must prioritize grants for projects that maximize public benefits and have one of several purposes, including reducing emissions of greenhouse gases, preserving and enhancing natural lands, conserving biodiversity, and providing recreational opportunities. Consistent with this section, the recommended project maximizes public benefits (see the discussions of investment of State resources, and multiple public benefits in the “Project Selection Criteria” section above) and seeks to develop specific actions consistent with these purposes.

Section 31113(d) states that when allocating funds made available pursuant to Chapter 10 of Proposition 68 the Conservancy shall prioritize projects that (A) use natural infrastructure, (B) provide multiple public benefits, and (C) give consideration to projects in a variety of ecosystems. Consistent with this section, the recommended project will factor in these criteria when identifying and considering specific sea level rise adaptation options, which are expected to be multi-benefit and will included options based on natural infrastructure.

**CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S [2018-2022 STRATEGIC PLAN](#) GOAL(S) & OBJECTIVE(S):**

Consistent with **Goal 8, Objective B**, the project will plan for projects to increase resilience to sea level rise or other climate change impacts using nature-based solutions.

Consistent with **Goal 12, Objective C**, the project will plan for enhancement of shoreline and subtidal habitats.

**CEQA COMPLIANCE:**

The proposed authorization is statutorily and categorically exempt from review under CEQA pursuant to CEQA Guidelines (14 California Code of Regulations) Sections 15262 and 15306, which exempt projects that involve feasibility and planning studies for possible future actions that have not yet been approved; and basic data collection, research, experimental management, and resource evaluation activities which do not result in a serious or major disturbance to an environmental resource. Upon approval of the project, Conservancy staff will file a Notice of Exemption.