

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation
June 1, 2023

SANTA BARBARA WATERFRONT ADAPTATION PLANNING

Project No. 23-025-01
Project Manager: Rachel Couch

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to \$2,680,000 to the City of Santa Barbara to prepare technical studies and feasibility reports and to conduct community outreach for adapting waterfront areas at-risk to sea level rise; and to prepare conceptual designs and environmental review documents for relocation of wastewater and water system infrastructure in the City of Santa Barbara.

LOCATION: City of Santa Barbara Waterfront, Santa Barbara County

EXHIBITS

- Exhibit 1: [Project Location Maps](#)
 - Exhibit 2: [Site Photos](#)
 - 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 a grant of up to two million six hundred eighty thousand dollars (\$2,680,000) to the City of Santa Barbara (“the grantee”) to prepare technical studies and feasibility reports and to conduct community outreach for adapting waterfront areas at-risk to sea level rise; and to prepare conceptual designs and environmental review documents for priority relocation of wastewater and water system infrastructure in the City of Santa Barbara.

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.
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2. Names and qualifications of any contractors to be retained in carrying out the project.

Findings:

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

1. The proposed authorization is consistent with Chapter 31113 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, regarding addressing climate change and potential climate change impacts.
2. The proposed project is consistent with the current Conservancy Project Selection Criteria.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

PROJECT SUMMARY:

Staff recommends the Conservancy authorize a grant of up to \$2,680,000 to the City of Santa Barbara (the City) to prepare technical studies and feasibility reports and to conduct community outreach for adapting waterfront areas at-risk to sea level rise, and to prepare conceptual designs and environmental review documents for priority relocation of wastewater and water system infrastructure in the City of Santa Barbara. The project area spans three miles of the City's popular shoreline and downtown waterfront areas, including Leadbetter, West, and East Beaches and associated recreational assets south of Cabrillo Boulevard. The project area also includes the City's busy working waterfront harbor and marina that supports commercial fishing, recreational boating opportunities, and beach and shoreline visitor serving uses and beach access. Depending on the outcome of studies, environmental review will focus on the portion of the infrastructure needing immediate adaptive actions.

Although the City of Santa Barbara has experienced a relatively small amount of sea-level rise to date from climate change, the rate of sea-level rise in the region is expected to accelerate significantly in upcoming years. The City's waterfront area is already at risk for flooding, storm surge, and erosion during extreme coastal storm events that will become exacerbated significantly with even small amounts of sea-level rise. As such, most of the highest priority actions identified in the City's 2021 Sea Level Rise Adaptation Plan (Adaptation Plan) are located in the waterfront area. The Adaptation Plan identified vulnerabilities to coastal hazards expected from sea-level rise in the City of Santa Barbara and possible actions to prepare for and adapt to sea-level rise. Areas seaward of Cabrillo Boulevard will become increasingly at risk of damage from flooding, erosion, inundation, and storms as sea levels rise to 2.5 feet. Beyond this level, assets north of Cabrillo Boulevard begin to become at risk. The project will plan for the period during which storm damage is likely to significantly affect the area south of Cabrillo Boulevard, but before largescale alterations (such as levees, continuous seawalls, or extensive retreat) may be needed to address flooding impacts north of Cabrillo Boulevard that will occur with larger amounts of sea-level rise. This is typically described as 30 years or 2.5 feet of sea level rise. In light of recent and significant storm damage sustained in the winter of 2023, additional study is urgently needed to inform planning decisions for the short-term adaptation options for specific assets along the waterfront, particularly in the Harbor area. Additionally,

more specific thresholds will be developed for when to begin employing longer term adaptation actions.

The overarching goal of the proposed project is to advance the City's plans for preparing the public waterfront for increased storm surges, erosion, and flooding while continuing to provide critical services, coastal dependent boating uses, recreation, and beach access over approximately the next 30 years. Project goals include planning for the relocation of critical infrastructure such as sewer mains and other major utility lines out of the immediate hazard area and maximizing retention of beach and dune areas and coastal access to the extent feasible. The waterfront area provides low- to no-cost recreation, beach access, and boating opportunities for area residents and visitors. Resilience measures undertaken in the harbor and waterfront would not only protect important public assets in these locations, but also reduce impacts to West Beach, Lower Westside, and Lower Eastside neighborhoods from flooding and other coastal hazards. These neighborhoods are identified in the Adaptation Plan as particularly vulnerable to the impacts of sea-level rise given their classification as low-income, disadvantaged, low-English proficiency, and high percentage of minority residents. Protections along the waterfront will directly affect flood levels anticipated in these areas. The waterfront beaches are the most heavily used beaches and recreational areas for communities that live in these neighborhoods, as these communities can easily walk, bike, and take public transit to the local beaches. Engaging these nearby communities will involve directly working with trusted leaders and entities and will be critical to the success of the project.

The project consists of two related efforts – one that will prepare a feasibility report, conceptual plans and environmental review for retreat of the wastewater and water infrastructure along the coast; and a second that will prepare studies and feasibility reports to identify and evaluate options for shoreline adaptation of other public infrastructure and resources from Ledbetter Beach to East Beach and will explore incorporating nature-based adaptation measures where feasible (Exhibit 1). Each of these project components is described below.

Wastewater and Water System

A Wastewater and Water Systems Climate Vulnerability and Adaptation Report will be developed to further assess vulnerabilities and identify alternatives for relocating and flood proofing major sewer mains and water lines currently located under portions of West and East Beaches. The report will include plans for the redesign of the lower wastewater and water systems and any needed service point improvements, and mid- and long-term adaptation options for El Estero Water Resource Center located just landward of East Beach. El Estero Water Resource Center is the City's wastewater treatment and water recycling facility. The report will include a detailed evaluation of alternatives, feasibility, and order of magnitude cost estimates for all options identified as a priority to complete in the first phase of adaptation of the system, including the infrastructure south of Cabrillo Boulevard. This will include hydraulic modelling of alternative designs of the wastewater and water systems. Additionally, the report will consider triggers for decision making on future adaptation options for the systems. Following completion of the report, the City will prepare conceptual level plans (30% design), additional technical reports, and environmental review, and conduct agency consultations for

the relocation of wastewater and water systems that are identified as a priority for relocation in the report and the restoration of the areas from which infrastructure will be removed. These are expected to include the relocation of sewer mains and co-located infrastructure located south of Cabrillo Boulevard and restoration of the associated beach areas. This water system project is key to maintaining sewer service for the entire City while providing space for the beach to migrate landward without the need for shoreline protection in the waterfront area. Outcomes include enhanced beach habitat, increased resilience of the wastewater system, protection against sewer system failures and associated water quality and habitat impacts.

Waterfront Adaptation

The project also includes adaptation option studies for each of the three beach areas (Ledbetter, West, and East) and the Harbor Area, as described below from west to east along the waterfront. All study areas will include wave uprush analysis, sediment transport, and the potential for alternate sediment management practices or dune formation. There will be a specific study looking at use of the sand currently dredged out of the Harbor for these purposes, which is currently released into the surf zone down coast of the Harbor. All area studies will also include transportation analysis of appropriate and safe paths of travel for the bike and pedestrian path, which is the most seaward infrastructure in many locations along the waterfront. The analysis will also evaluate impacts and benefits to biological resources along the waterfront, including overwintering snowy plover. The project will also consider other environmental, coastal access, and economic impacts, and include preliminary cost estimates for potential future adaptation projects. For all options identified, an anticipated lifespan of the potential future projects will be included as well as identification of triggers for when further adaptation is needed based on that lifespan.

Ledbetter Beach

Flooding and erosion during extreme storms predominantly affect the eastern side of the beach in the location of a restroom, the Shoreline Café, and Harbor West parking lots. In this stretch of beach, studies will analyze alternate inland paths of travel for a dedicated bike and pedestrian path, adaptation options for the exposed restroom, and potential removal or relocation of some parking to accommodate the bike and pedestrian path. Studies will also analyze if use of dunes or alternate sediment management practices could help protect the area from erosion.

Harbor Area

The beach area in front of the harbor commercial area is subject to severe erosion and during major storms has resulted in flooding of the harbor commercial area. In addition to looking at options to raise or modify the harbor breakwater, groins, and walkways surrounding the marinas, the feasibility study for this area will also look at options to floodproof the harbor commercial area factoring in sea level rise and considerations for relocation over time of some of the most seaward structures.

West Beach

Major sewer, water, and electrical infrastructure are located under West Beach and portions of East Beach; they need to be relocated to avoid hazards associated with sea level rise and flooding in the near term (see above).

East Beach

During large storms, the middle section of East Beach experiences erosion that can threaten the bike path and other recreational facilities. The project will analyze alternate locations for the bike path and other paths of travel. The study will also analyze the potential for additional beach nourishment or formation of dunes to protect this area. The need for a backstop seawall or other device to protect Cabrillo Boulevard will also be considered.

Site Description: The City of Santa Barbara includes approximately six miles of shoreline and is a major coastal tourism destination. The project focuses on three miles of shoreline from Leadbetter Point east to the bluffs near Andree Clark Bird Refuge. This low-lying beachfront area is heavily developed with waterfront recreation and commercial enterprises, visitor-serving amenities, residential areas, and urban infrastructure. The City owns all of the land to be studied. The land is managed by various City departments, although primarily by the Waterfront, Parks & Recreation, and Public Works (which includes managing the water and wastewater systems) departments.

Leadbetter Beach spans from Leadbetter point east to the harbor commercial area. Leadbetter includes an expansive shoreline area generally divided into a sandy beach area to the south and an elongated turf area with landscaped picnic areas to the north. A large percentage of land area is devoted to parking, circulation, and bicycle and pedestrian access. Bicycle and pedestrian paths in this area are dangerous as they largely rely on access through parking lots without barriers to cars. The Harbor Area includes a breakwater; a sandspit that is essentially a rock groin that extends out from the breakwater; a rock groin on the west side of West Beach; the City Pier, which supports a fuel dock and Coast Guard facilities; several marinas; parking lots; and the Harbor commercial area west of the breakwater, which includes City and Coast Guard offices, several restaurants, a fish market, kayak rentals, the Santa Barbara Yacht Club, a boat yard, and other commercial uses. West Beach is located between the Harbor and Stearns Wharf and is generally an area where sand accumulates. In addition to large areas of beach, there is a bike path, volleyball courts, and community swimming pool facility. East Beach is generally considered the beach area situated east of Stearns Wharf and spanning east to the Clark Estate. The area includes Mission and Laguna Estuaries, a skateboard park, a continuous bike path, large parking facilities, the Cabrillo Pavilion and Bath House, a greenbelt picnic area, play equipment and volleyball courts, among other recreational facilities. A seasonal sand berm is constructed at the beach every winter.

Grant Applicant Qualifications: The City has a long track record for leading collaborative projects involving interested stakeholders, community groups, and public agencies to address complex natural resource and land use issues. The City has administered and carried out projects including completing a comprehensive Coastal Land Use Plan, a Sea-Level Rise Vulnerability Assessment, and a Sea-level Rise Adaptation Plan funded by two Coastal Commission Local Coastal Program grants totaling \$418,892, as well as numerous park, open space, creek, and estuary restoration projects with Coastal Conservancy funds.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S PROJECT SELECTION CRITERIA:

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

Selection 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.

The project is a good investment of state resources because it builds on previous investments and is supported by various state and federal agencies. The project is consistent with the California Climate Adaptation Strategy's priority to "build public health and safety to protect against increasing climate risks". Specifically, the project is consistent with Goal B to "consider future climate impacts in governmental planning and investment decisions" and "improve infrastructure's climate resilience to protect public health and safety" by planning to maintain multiple coastal uses with near-term sea level rise including public access, commercial and recreational fishing, and non-motorized transportation options. The project is also consistent with the Strategy's priority to accelerate nature-based climate solutions and strengthen climate resilience of natural systems, specifically Goal C to integrate nature-based climate solutions into relevant infrastructure and investments. The proposed project contributes to studying a range of future infrastructure relocation and interim sea level rise adaptation project options including living shorelines that will serve as a model for other nature-based climate adaptation projects in both the Santa Barbara region and other parts of the state.

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 will engage with local Chumash Tribal bands as part of public outreach on the project. The City is already working with Tribes and the Coastal Conservancy on several projects of cultural significance along the waterfront with the goal of cooperating to reestablish access to ancestral lands and village sites. The City adheres to strict requirements for Tribal consultation and protection of archaeological and cultural resources contained within the City's Master Environmental Assessment procedures.

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

The project is centered around resiliency and climate adaptation, and plans will identify the expected lifespan of proposed actions in light of sea-level rise or other climate change impacts. The options considered will avoid making future climate adaptation more difficult.

5. Project delivers multiple benefits and significant positive impact.

The project will advance planning and adaptation efforts that will: a) provide co-benefits and alleviate multiple stressors within communities, such as improving public health, improving

flood protection, improving beach habitats, maintaining beach access, protecting water quality, and other environmental benefits, b) increase equity and environmental justice by benefiting underserved and systemically excluded communities living near the shoreline on the lower east and west sides and c) activities will increase community-preparedness and resilience to future climate change impacts such as sea-level rise, storm surge high tide events, and flooding.

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

The City will hire a consultant to assist in preparation of an outreach plan which will include assessing important uses and priorities for waterfront users and the residents of the lower east and lower west sides. The City will partner with community organizations such as the Santa Barbara County Promotores Network, who work within the low-income and Spanish-speaking communities to assist with identifying key partners and members of the community to engage in the planning effort and the best approaches for successful community engagement. Likely approaches will include conducting door-to-door outreach and surveys, distributed information, and culturally appropriate meetings and events. The City will provide translation of written materials as well as translation during meetings.

PROJECT FINANCING

Coastal Conservancy	\$2,680,000
Coastal Commission Local Coastal Program Grant	\$1,240,000
Project Total	\$3,920,000

Conservancy funding for the project is anticipated to come from a Fiscal Year 2022/23 appropriation from the Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund (GGRF) to the Conservancy for the Climate Ready Program to protect communities and natural resources from sea level rise, with a focus on the adaptation of public infrastructure along the coast including urban waterfronts, ports, and ecosystems. (Budget Act of 2022, as amended by AB 178, Chapter 45, Statutes of 2022).

The Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund Investment Plan and Communities Revitalization Act (Health and Safety Code (HSC) Sections 39710 – 39723) requires that GGRF funds be used to (1) facilitate the achievement of reductions of GHG emissions consistent with the Global Warming Solutions Act of 2006 (HSC Sections 38500 *et seq*), and (2) to the extent feasible, achieve other co-benefits, such as maximizing economic, environmental and public health benefits and directing investment to disadvantaged communities (HSC Section 39712(b)). The Global Warming Solutions Act of 2006 sets forth (among other things) certain GGRF funding priorities (HSC Section 38590.1). The California Air Resources Board (CARB) has adopted guidelines that establish program goals that agencies must achieve with their GGRF funds.

Consistent with the CARB 2018 Funding Guidelines, the proposed project will help the Conservancy meet its GGRF program goals because the project will plan adaptation efforts that will:

- Facilitate GHG emission reductions (which includes increases in carbon sequestration) and further the purposes of AB 32 and related statutes.
- Benefit Priority Populations (disadvantaged communities, low-income communities, or low-income households).
- Maximize economic, environmental, and public health co-benefits to the State.
- Encourage projects that contribute to other State climate goals.
- Avoid substantial burdens to disadvantaged communities and low-income communities.
- Leverage funds to provide multiple benefits and to maximize benefits.
- Conduct outreach to help potential applicants access funding, particularly for disadvantaged communities, low-income communities, or low-income households.

The proposed project will help meet these objectives by contributing to a future coastal adaptation implementation project to ensure the waterfront will be resilient to sea-level rise and storm surge, which will enable avoidance of flooding and infrastructure damage and the resulting GHG emissions from remediation and rebuilding. In addition, the project will explore incorporating nature-based adaptation measures where feasible, thereby supporting the research, development, and deployment of innovative measures and practices. The project will provide economic benefits to the State by facilitating the resilience of a commercial waterfront thereby protecting jobs in the tourism and commercial fishing industry.

The City will provide approximately \$400,000 of in-kind support to these planning efforts. This includes administrative overhead, and staff time from various City departments.

Unless specifically identified as “Required Match,” the other sources of funding and in-kind contributions described above are estimates. The Conservancy does not typically require matching funds or in-kind services, nor does it require documentation of expenditures from other funders or of in-kind services. Typical grant conditions require grantees to provide any funds needed to complete a project.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY’S ENABLING LEGISLATION:

The proposed project will be undertaken pursuant to Section 31113 of Chapter 3 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, which authorizes the Conservancy to address the impacts and potential impacts of climate change on resources within the Conservancy’s jurisdiction (Section 31113(a)).

Pursuant to Section 31113(b), the Conservancy is authorized to award grants to 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.

Pursuant to Section 31113(c), the Conservancy must prioritize grants for projects that maximize public benefits and have one of several purposes, including reducing hazards to harbors and ports, and providing recreational opportunities.

Section 31113 also requires the Conservancy to prioritize projects that use natural infrastructure to help coastal communities adapt to climate change and projects that provide multiple public benefits, including, but not limited to, protection of communities, natural resources, and recreational opportunities. See Section 31113(d)(1). As discussed above, the proposed project will help develop future adaptation measures to protect or relocate critical shoreline infrastructure, some of which are anticipated to be nature-based adaptation measures.

Consistent with these sections, the proposed project will facilitate the relocation or rebuilding of coastal infrastructure that is resilient to sea level rise and help develop nature-based shoreline infrastructure along the Santa Barbara waterfront to reduce the threat of sea level rise and enhance coastal dune and wetland habitats, where feasible.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S [2023-2027 STRATEGIC PLAN](#) GOAL(S) & OBJECTIVE(S):

Consistent with **Goal 4.1**, the proposed project will complete two plans to adapt public infrastructure along the coast including urban waterfronts, public access infrastructure, ports, and ecosystems to protect communities and natural resources from sea-level rise.

Consistent with **Goal 4.3**, the proposed project will prepare one plan that includes options nature-based climate adaptation to mitigate climate impacts to infrastructure, such as sea level rise and flooding.

CEQA COMPLIANCE:

The proposed planning project consists of preparing feasibility and technical studies, preparing preliminary designs, and conducting California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) review. Thus, the proposed project involves only data gathering, resource evaluation, planning, and feasibility analyses for possible future actions that have not yet been approved or funded. These activities are statutorily exempt from review under CEQA pursuant to Title 14 of the California Code of Regulations Section 15262, which exempts planning and feasibility studies for possible future actions that have not yet been approved, adopted, or funded; and categorically exempt under Section 15306, which exempts data collection and resource evaluation activities that do not result in a serious or major disturbance to an environmental resource. Consistent with Section 15262, the project will consider environmental factors. Consistent with Section 15306, the data collection and resource evaluation components of the project will not cause major or serious disturbance to the environment.

Upon approval of the project, Conservancy staff will file a Notice of Exemption.