



Sea Level Rise Policy for County-Owned Assets

I. PURPOSE

The Board of Supervisors is committed to environmental, economic, and social stewardship through reducing greenhouse gas emissions and preparing and protecting San Mateo County communities from the threat of climate change, including impacts from sea level rise, storm surges, coastal erosion, and flooding. Building climate adaptive and prepared communities today is the most responsible and fiscally prudent course of action. The changing climate and rising seas pose many risks to the people and places in San Mateo County, and collaboration and climate adaptation strategies will be vital to protecting San Mateo County's residents and managing its valuable resources responsibly.

Implementation of this policy is expected to increase the useful life of County facilities; protect residents and staff today and assure County operations will be continuous; reduce the current and future risks from sea level rise and flooding; reduce liability; and reduce insurance premiums and impacts to property value.

II. BACKGROUND

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the leading international scientific body on climate change, states that global greenhouse gas emissions must be reduced to net zero by 2050 to protect the earth from severe impacts, including substantial sea level rise.¹ Sea level rise impacts include flooding, stronger waves, rising groundwater tables and saltwater intrusion, and increased erosion of the shoreline; all of which are exacerbated by coastal storms. In addition, high water levels can prevent water from draining to the bay or ocean, which can cause flooding, further inland far from the shore.

The County's Sea Level Rise Vulnerability Assessment was finalized in 2018, highlighting San Mateo County as the most vulnerable county in California to sea level rise in terms of property value at risk. Based on the Vulnerability Assessment modeling, 43 County-owned facilities are at risk from 3.3 feet of sea level rise and 51 are at risk from 6.6 feet of sea level rise.

Implementation of this policy will provide critical information on near term risks occurring before 3.3 feet of sea level rise and allow for planning and adaptation strategies over the life of the property. The goal of this approach is to ensure actions are taken when needed and will encourage fiscally responsible decisions.

¹ http://report.ipcc.ch/sr15/pdf/sr15_ts.pdf

This policy draws on State of California’s 2018 Ocean Protection Council guidance which indicates that sea levels could rise by approximately 3.3 feet by 2070 and approximately 6.6 by 2100 under the medium-high risk projections. El Nino and atmospheric river-based winter storms have in the past and continue to have the ability to accelerate and exacerbate flooding impacts on the ocean and Bayfront of San Mateo County. Therefore, this policy also incorporates coastal storms, using the 1% storm as the storm assumption, which is based on the Federal Emergency Management Administration’s (FEMA) Special Flood Hazard Area.

The IPCC states that the local level is the best scale to implement climate change preparedness strategies. The County of San Mateo has already adopted a Green Building Policy and is taking steps to reduce emissions at County owned facilities. Creating a more resilient infrastructure to sea level rise and flooding is an important, and complementary next step. The County recognizes that climate change will also impact people, infrastructure and ecosystems in the region, as rising temperatures and changes in precipitation contribute to inland flooding, wildfires and hotter days. The County emphasizes the need to plan for these impacts in the future.

III. POLICY

It is the policy of the Board of Supervisors that sea level rise is considered in all County-owned and operated assets, design and construction projects, leases, and property acquisitions, as described below. Furthermore, it is the policy of the Board of Supervisors that these projects consider and take into account local and regional sea level rise adaptation and flood mitigation projects that could reduce impacts on County-owned assets prior to developing plans to modify existing facilities.

The intent of this policy is to understand the vulnerability of County-owned property and assets over their life cycle; develop an incremental approach to adaptation based on the current and future level of risk; and coordinate with other communities on developing regional solutions.

Based on this policy, all new facility projects funded by the County shall be sited, designed, constructed, and adaptively managed to minimize sea level rise risks over the life of the project. Following a baseline assessment of sea level rise vulnerability, existing facilities and properties will be subject to this policy during the Capital Improvement Planning or acquisition process, if major renovations or replacement of existing facilities and infrastructure are located in areas at risk from sea level rise beyond what will be protected through local or regional planned sea level rise adaptation projects.

Acquisitions exempt from this policy include: tax defaulted properties and rights of way, easements, and temporary property rights ancillary to existing County facilities, utilities, or properties. This policy does not apply to private development or development by other public entities.

IV. FISCAL IMPACT

All County acquisitions, dispositions, capital planning, leases, and replacement or renovation projects must appropriate/include funding sufficient to meet the requirements of this policy if adaptation costs will occur in current budget cycle and/or have a plan or commitment to meet the requirements if adaptation costs will be included in future budget cycles.