



# City of East Palo Alto

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## Office of the City Manager

### **PRESS RELEASE** **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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#### **East Palo Alto Receives \$17 million for SAFER Bay Levee Project to Protect Against Sea Level Rise**

East Palo Alto, CA - Mayor Lisa Gauthier announced at Tuesday's City Council meeting that the City has received \$17.3 million grant from the California Office of Emergency Services (CalOES) for a levee system to protect homes and areas from the impacts of sea level rise and flooding in the City's most threatened neighborhoods. The grant provides almost all of the funding needed to complete the initial project of SAFER Bay (Strategy to Advance Flood Protection, Ecosystems and Recreation along the San Francisco Bay) in conjunction with the San Francisquito Creek Joint Powers Authority (SFCJPA) and other partners.

"The funding allows us to start with the planning and design, and ultimately the construction of a levee that will greatly reduce flooding risk in the Weeks and Garden neighborhoods. Earlier with the SFCJPA, we were able to protect hundreds of properties and prevent flooding from the creek, but some neighborhoods remain vulnerable to coastal flooding at the shoreline. This project will further protect people's homes and businesses, as well as some of our community institutions like schools and churches that are in harm's way from rising tides," Mayor Gauthier said.

Approximately 50% of the City of East Palo Alto is in the FEMA floodplain. When completed, this project, combined with the results of the previous creek flood prevention project will protect almost 5,000 residents and 1,500 homes, businesses, churches, school and other entities from natural flooding occurrences. City officials anticipate that when completed it will significantly change the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) floodplain mapping and may reduce the level of flood insurance required.

When done, 1.2 mile of levee will be constructed from the O'Connor Pump station to the northern end of Tara Road. It will be adjacent to and help sustain the marshes, and also improve access to the Bay Trail for East Palo Alto residents. The initial area will protect the Weeks and Garden neighborhoods. A second area along the north side of Highway 84 and a PG&E substation will provide for marshland restoration as an environmental mitigation.

"The project has many complicated and interrelated components that cross jurisdictional boundaries in three neighboring cities. The City of East Palo Alto and the SFCJPA have worked on this project for many years. We collaborated with the California Office of Emergency Services, FEMA, and the other impacted jurisdictions. Also, the Resilient by Design Challenge was instrumental in increasing public awareness of this need" said Ruben Abrica, East Palo Alto City Councilmember and SFCJPA Board Member.

"Reducing the flooding risk is a priority for the City of East Palo Alto. The total cost of the project will be \$23.1 million. The City has committed a local match of over \$5.5 million to complement the \$17.3 million from the State," explained Vice Mayor Regina Wallace-Jones.

“The entire SAFER Bay project connects miles of San Francisco Bay shoreline in both San Mateo and Santa Clara Counties to the creek project we just completed. By protecting our communities from a sea level that is approximately 10 feet higher than today’s high tide, the SFCJPA Board is taking leadership and action to safeguard against one of climate change’s major threats to this region,” said Len Materman, Executive Director of the SFCJPA.

With the funding secured, the City will start the formal planning process with its partners. It will take approximately 36 months from planning to end of construction. Next steps include environmental review, completing the design, obtaining permits and then construction.

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### **ADDITIONAL FACTS ABOUT SAFER PROJECT**

#### ***About East Palo Alto and the Flood Plain***

- The City of East Palo Alto is a member of the San Francisquito Creek Joint Powers Authority (SFCJPA). The creek’s watershed and floodplain extend from the Santa Cruz Mountains to the San Francisco Bay. Following the extreme flood impacts in 1998, the SFCJPA was formed to protect the cities of East Palo Alto, Menlo Park and the City of Palo Alto and other regionally significant assets from creek flooding.
- Over 50% of the City of East Palo Alto is in a floodplain from either the San Francisquito Creek, or the San Francisco Bay. Approximately 40% of properties are located in a combination area of the Creek floodplain and the Bay floodplain.

#### ***About SAFER***

Recognizing that no government agency was working to address the threat of coastal flooding, several years ago East Palo Alto Councilmembers worked to expand the scope of the SFCJPA to include coastal flooding from San Francisco Bay, and the preparation for sea level rise. The Strategy to Advance Flood Protection, Ecosystems and Recreation along the San Francisco Bay (SAFER Bay) project – includes the project announced today and adjoining projects to the north and south along the Bay shoreline to protect communities from tidal flooding, while improving marshes and trails at the water’s edge.

#### ***Project Benefits***

- Properties protected include over 1,500 parcels, including homes and apartments with over 5,000 residents, as well as businesses, schools, churches, parks, an electrical substation, and the primary stormwater drainage facility in an area below sea level and designated as disadvantaged by the state and federal governments.
- Possible reduction or elimination of stringent and costly flood insurance requirements.
- Increase recreational opportunities along the Bay and improve the marshes and wildlife habitat.

#### ***Project Funding***

- The anticipated cost of the total project is \$23.1 million. The Cal OES for Hazard Mitigation Grant Program provided funding equal to 75% of the cost of this project. These funds are provided to the State by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). The City is responsible for the 25% local match and has identified a few funding sources, including funds from the SFCJPA.

# LOCATION OF LEVEE PROJECT

