

October 13, 2021

The Honorable Judge Leland Davis, III
 Presiding Judge
 San Mateo County Superior Court
 400 County Center, 2nd Floor
 Redwood City, CA 94063

Dear Judge Davis:

The City of South San Francisco (“City”) has approved the following response to the San Mateo County Civil Grand Jury Report titled “San Mateo County: California’s Ground Zero for Sea Level Rise” released on August 11, 2021 (“Report”). The capacity and activities of OneShoreline are the focus of the Report, and, as requested by the Civil Grand Jury, this response indicates whether the City agrees with, or disagrees with (in whole or in part, with explanation), each of the Report’s thirteen Findings and responds to Report Recommendations R1, R2, and R4.

City of South San Francisco Response to Each Finding

F1. Sea level rise will seriously damage critical San Mateo County infrastructure and assets unless the County and its cities and towns prepare now.

Response: The City of South San Francisco ***agrees*** with this finding. San Mateo County is the most vulnerable county in California to the first three feet of sea level rise (SLR) with respect to population, including underrepresented population, number of homes, property value, and number of contaminated sites. Building resilience to future climate conditions will be easier and less costly by planning for it today.

F2. Sea level rise infrastructure projects can take more than a decade to plan, fund and build.

Response: The City of South San Francisco ***agrees*** with this finding. However, it doesn’t have to be this way. Beyond local leadership and a sound technical plan, the three fundamental needs to build large SLR projects are land rights, funding, and environmental regulatory permits. Frequently, the last two of these can take years to acquire.

F3. Complex federal and state regulations and procedures delay and increase the costs of already expensive sea level rise mitigation projects. They need to be revised.

Response: The City of South San Francisco ***agrees*** with this finding. Federal and State agencies can provide critical funding for these projects and fulfill an important role in ensuring that large projects do not harm the environment. However, the permitting and funding regimes of these agencies were largely developed decades ago and are not well suited to address a transformative and dynamic challenge like climate change. The regulatory review process is intended to mitigate the negative impacts of a new project while the anticipated climate change projects are protection mitigations. The City of South San Francisco is currently with in partnership with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) on a shoreline feasibility study to address Sea Level Rise.

F4. Delaying sea level rise projects will increase costs.

Response: The City of South San Francisco **agrees** with this finding. Studies have shown that the costs of reactive, emergency repairs or retrofitting developed lands far exceed the costs of proactive planning and construction focused on future conditions.

F5. To remain effective, OneShoreline needs steady, long-term, operational funding.

Response: The City of South San Francisco **agrees** with this finding. Without a long-term, stable source of funds for its operations, OneShoreline cannot meet its objective to make all of San Mateo County resilient to the climate change impacts listed in the response to F4.

F6. Coordination between neighboring jurisdictions is important to reduce costs and improve the effectiveness of a SLR project.

Response: The City of South San Francisco **agrees** with this finding. Meeting the transformative challenge of sea level rise in this county requires a holistic approach across jurisdictions. OneShoreline was created as a countywide agency to leverage partnerships to build long-term regional solutions that cannot be realized on a city-by-city basis. OneShoreline should also coordinate the required ongoing operational and maintenance costs associated with multi-jurisdictional projects.

F7. Competing budget priorities among the entities in a sea level rise project make the projects difficult to fund and manage, leading to risk of delays and missed deadlines.

Response: The City of South San Francisco **partially agrees** with this finding. Funding projects from many local government entities and external sources is more complicated and time-consuming than funding projects from a single source. However, all government functions, including projects to protect against sea level rise, must compete with other budget priorities, and this issue is not unique to these projects or even as the primary obstacle to achieving our objectives.

F8. Numerous hazardous material sites in the County must be protected from sea level rise flooding.

Response: The City of South San Francisco **agrees** with this finding. The County's 2018 Sea Level Rise Vulnerability Assessment found that nearly half of all hazard material sites in the County (183 sites, including four Superfund sites) are at risk from the current FEMA 100-year tide and approximately six feet of sea level rise. Furthermore, to improve our understanding of the vulnerability of hazardous sites to elevated groundwater due to SLR, the San Francisco Estuary Institute (SFEI) is studying where sea level rise will impact groundwater, and then how this impact may cause contaminants to be mobilized.

F9. Storm surge and sea level rise threaten the County’s wastewater treatment plants affecting everyone in the County – even inland County residents.

Response: The City of South San Francisco *agrees* with this finding. The 2018 Sea Level Rise Vulnerability Assessment found that seven of the nine wastewater treatment plants in this County will be substantially impacted by the current FEMA 100-year storm plus approximately six feet of sea level rise. This issue is not unique to San Mateo County; a NBC Bay Area investigative [report](#) earlier this year found that 30 out of 39 treatment plants in the San Francisco Bay Area are at risk from climate-driven flooding.

The City of South San Francisco’s Wastewater Quality Control Plant located adjacent to San Francisco Bay on Colma Creek, provides secondary wastewater treatment for the cities of South San Francisco, San Bruno, and Colma. It also provides the dechlorination treatment of chlorinated effluent for the cities of Burlingame, Millbrae, and the San Francisco International Airport prior to discharging the treated wastewater into San Francisco Bay. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers developed Project Management Plan (PMP) to determine the best approach to mitigating against sea level rise and flooding to protect this critical infrastructure.

F10. OneShoreline is uniquely positioned to augment San Mateo County’s ability to combat sea level rise by its planning, funding, permitting expertise, and guidance.

Response: The City of South San Francisco *agrees* with this finding. As the countywide agency established to focus on this issue and leverage resources and partnerships across jurisdictional boundaries, OneShoreline plays a key role in bringing together key stakeholders to establish common objectives and assumptions; utilize public and private land rights to meet project goals; and share technical information, environmental mitigations, and project costs.

F11. Destruction of low-cost housing on the Bay and coast by flooding and erosion due to sea level rise will further increase inequities in communities such as Belle Haven (Menlo Park), East Palo Alto, Redwood City, and Pacifica.

Response: The City of South San Francisco agrees with this finding. A study by Stanford University researchers published in July 2021 found that flooding in San Mateo County – more than any other Bay Area county – disproportionately impacts communities most at risk of financial instability.

F12. OneShoreline effectively collaborates with the Office of Sustainability and others on public engagement campaigns to educate individuals on how sea level rise will affect San Mateo County.

Response: The City of South San Francisco *agrees* with this finding. OneShoreline communicates regularly with the County’s Office of Sustainability (OOS) on areas where our efforts can complement one another, and OOS has augmented OneShoreline’s outreach efforts as OneShoreline builds its capacity. OneShoreline also works with cities, other special districts, the County Office of Education, and the League of Women Voters (LWV) chapters to educate individuals on the risks facing this county and approaches to building resilience. This has included a year-long series of public forums co-hosted by OneShoreline and the LWV on climate issues related to water and wildfire throughout the county.

F13. A loan program to provide cities and towns funds for the required preliminary engineering necessary to obtain partial state or federal funding for SLR projects would be beneficial.

Response: The City of South San Francisco *agrees* with this finding. A source of funding to assist municipalities with the planning and design activities necessary to obtain state and/or federal funding for SLR projects would be beneficial.

South San Francisco Response to Recommendations 2, 3, and 4

R1. At a public meeting, each city and town council, or board of supervisors should take at least one concrete action toward establishing a continuing funding source for OneShoreline, identify that action in response to this report, and potentially adopt a resolution expressing support for a parcel tax or property tax by June 30, 2022.

Response: The City of South San Francisco remains committed to mitigating sea level rise and the harmful effects of climate change. The City recognizes that capital improvement projects relating to sea level rise are very expensive and that grant funding is sparse and competitive. This recommendation requires further analysis and study in consultation and coordination with OneShoreline's current efforts. The timeframe for implementation is dependent on ongoing discussions with OneShoreline.

R2. A coordinated lobbying strategy with participation by the County, by San Mateo County cities and towns, by OneShoreline, and by other interested Bay Area cities and counties for federal and state regulatory simplification by January 31, 2022.

Response: The recommendation has been partially implemented, and implementation will be ongoing beyond January 31, 2022. OneShoreline has worked with San Mateo County and its lobbyists in California, as well as coalitions of water-related agencies, on many issues, including simplifying the process to permit climate resilience projects. As discussed in the response above to F3, today's climate crisis has highlighted the need to simplify environmental regulatory requirements for restoration and climate resilience projects. There has been progress on this issue at the State level, including through the just-passed Senate Bill 155, which allows certain habitat restoration projects to be exempt from CEQA.

Additionally, the City currently utilizes legislative advocacy firms at the state and federal levels to advance the city's priorities, including policy changes to Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) and coordination with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to ensure that local governments and agencies can work with federal agencies on Sea Level Rise. The City updates OneShoreline on these legislative efforts and seeks their technical expertise regarding feasibility studies.

R4. The County Board of Supervisors and each city and town council should ensure that their general plans regarding SLR protection include transportation and utility infrastructure, schools, public safety facilities, and hazardous material sites by March 31, 2022.

Response: The City of South San Francisco began work on a comprehensive General Plan Update in the Spring of 2019 and anticipates a Public Review draft of the document being published in late 2021/early 2022, followed closely by a coordinated Zoning Ordinance Update, Climate Action Plan Update, and related environmental review. The draft

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General Plan elements include goals and policies related to Seal Level Rise protection of transportation and utility infrastructure, schools, public safety facilities, and hazardous material sites. The City anticipates adopting the comprehensive General Plan Update by the Summer of 2022.

On behalf of the City of South San Francisco City Council, thank you for taking on the complex and urgent long-term task of addressing sea level rise and other flood risks in San Mateo County. Please contact me at mike.futrell@ssf.net for additional assistance.

Sincerely,

Mike Futrell

City Manager, City of South San Francisco

Cc: City of South San Francisco City Council
Len Materman, OneShoreline, Executive Director
Mike Callagy, County of San Mateo, County Manager