



## Legislation Text

---

**File #:** 21-737, **Version:** 1

---

Staff report regarding adoption of a resolution authorizing the City Manager to send a letter in response to the San Mateo County Grand Jury study, “San Mateo County: California’s Ground Zero for Sea Level Rise.”  
(*Christina Fernandez, Chief Sustainability Officer*)

### **RECOMMENDATION**

**It is recommended that the City Council adopt a resolution authorizing the City Manager to send a letter in response to the San Mateo County Grand Jury study, “San Mateo County: California’s Ground Zero for Sea Level Rise.”**

### **BACKGROUND/DISCUSSION**

The San Mateo County Civil Grand Jury is an independent investigative body created by the California State Constitution. Composed of nineteen citizens, the San Mateo County Civil Grand Jury serves as a "watchdog for citizens of the county."

The Civil Grand Jury serves as an ombudsperson for the citizens of San Mateo County. The jury may receive and investigate complaints by individuals regarding the actions or performances of county or public officials. The attention of the entire county is centered upon an active Civil Grand Jury, and its every act is a matter of public interest.

Empowered by the state judicial system, the San Mateo County Civil Grand Jury submits meaningful solutions to a wide range of problems. The San Mateo County Civil Grand Jury is a volunteer, fact finding body with the potential to recommend constructive changes.

The County of San Mateo Civil Grand Jury published a report titled, “San Mateo County: California’s Ground Zero for Sea Level Rise.” (**Attachment 1**) The San Mateo County Flood and Sea Level Rise Resiliency District (OneShoreline) began operating in 2020 and was designed to coordinate countywide efforts to combat sea level rise (“sea level rise” or “SLR”) and harm caused by climate change. The final report seeks to answer the question: “Is OneShoreline on course to adequately address the sea level rise challenge that has been assigned to it, and does it have the support it needs?”

The report provides background information on sea level rise and threat to San Mateo County. It finds SLR to be a serious threat to San Mateo County indicating that the County has the highest risk of damage in the Bay Area and is one of the hot spots in the nation. At least 32% of San Mateo County’s population live in vulnerable areas. The County’s three airports (San Francisco, San Carlos, and Half Moon Bay) are all threatened by SLR.

Additionally, the report explores the formation and purpose of the San Mateo County Flood and Sea Level Rise Resiliency District (OneShoreline). OneShoreline’s mission is to address SLR, flooding, coastal erosion and large-scale storm water infrastructure improvements through integrated regional planning, design, permitting, project implementation and long-term operations and maintenance.

OneShoreline's work in its first year is explored. Their current activities include:

- Obtaining long-term support, along with its constituent cities, to address funding of projects identified as necessary to mitigate hazards caused or exacerbated by sea level rise;
- Addressing projects inherited from the San Mateo County Flood Control District;
- Overseeing the Bayfront Canal project, with construction starting in 2021;
- Offering to assist communities with other SLR and flooding projects;
- Consulting with cities and towns about new projects; and
- Managing multi-jurisdictional projects.

The report explores the need for a dedicated funding source to operate OneShoreline after initial funding runs out in 2023. The report looks towards the future in its role in coordinating sea level rise and flooding mitigation countywide.

The Grand Jury findings include:

- F1. Sea level rise will seriously damage critical San Mateo County infrastructure and assets unless the County and its cities and towns prepare now.
- F2. Sea level rise infrastructure projects can take more than a decade to plan, fund and build.
- 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.
- F4. Delaying sea level rise projects will increase costs.
- F5. To remain effective, OneShoreline needs steady, long-term, operational funding.
- F6. Coordination between neighboring jurisdictions is important to reduce costs and improve the effectiveness of a SLR project.
- 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.
- F8. Numerous hazardous material sites in the County must be protected from sea level rise flooding.
- F9. Storm surge and sea level rise threaten the County's wastewater treatment plants affecting everyone in the County - even inland County residents.
- 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.

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.

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.

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.

The Grand Jury recommended the following actions:

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.

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.

R3. OneShoreline consider establishing and administering a low interest revolving loan fund to enable jurisdictions to prepare the initial engineering and planning necessary to obtain federal and state funding for SLR projects, establishing such program by December 31, 2021.

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.

Pursuant to Penal Code 933.05, the Grand Jury may request responses from government entities. As such, the County of San Mateo Grand Jury has requested the City of South San Francisco provide written comments to their findings and recommendations by November 13, 2021.

In consultation with OneShoreline, City staff have drafted the attached response (**Attachment 2**) for Council's review and approval.

#### FISCAL IMPACT

There is no known fiscal impact.

RELATIONSHIP TO STRATEGIC PLAN

This resolution meets the City's goals of building and maintaining a sustainable city.

CONCLUSION

It is recommended that the City Council adopt a resolution authorizing the City Manager to send a letter in response to the San Mateo County Grand Jury study, "San Mateo County: California's Ground Zero for Sea Level Rise."

Attachments:

- 1- San Mateo County Grand Jury Report
- 2- South San Francisco Draft Response letter