



Suisun City Hall stands in front of the waterfront harbor, Tuesday, Sept. 6, 2022. Suisun City residents have urged the city to take steps to reduce climate change vulnerability. (Aaron Rosenblatt/Daily Republic)

Suisun residents urge city to take steps to reduce climate change vulnerability

By **Todd R. Hansen**

SUISUN CITY — The sea level is expected to rise by as many as 10 inches by 2030 and by as many as 23 inches by 2050.

At 3 feet, downtown Suisun City would flood, the City Council was told Tuesday night as part of a presentation on the summary of findings from a Community Resilience Building Workshop held in June. The report outlines 13 priority actions to take and 30 additional steps to take.

Alex Lunine and Elena Karoulina, with Sustainable Solano, gave the presentation, with the central emphasis on flooding resiliency, and more specifically, flooding in the harbor area and other high-risk areas of the city.

The conclusion was clear: The city needs to act now to avoid the worst possible outcomes.

Lunine noted that if sea rise increased enough to flood the downtown, then 750 homes would be flooded, 850 jobs would be lost and train service would be greatly affected.

“The important work is up ahead,” he said.

The report indicates that city residents want a plan in place that makes them less vulnerable to extreme weather, climate change and other related concerns.

The report addresses land-use and development decisions based on flooding risk, strategic planning for sea rise, taking steps to mitigate wildfire risk, and working with neighboring Bay Area communities on an integrated plan. It even addresses homeless issues with the hopes of reducing the fire risk within encampments, but also identifies the homeless as a vulnerable population due to excessive heat and other weather issues.

Securing grants and other funding sources is viewed as essential, the report states.

“The hazards of greatest concern included flooding from higher tides and storm surge, sea level rise, earthquakes and wildfire. The impacts from wildfire were expressed as both reduction in air quality and the threat of localized grassfires in association with high wind events,” the report states.

“Intense and extended heatwaves and associated droughts” also were identified.

The 32-page report that came out of the community meeting was compiled by the city, Sustainable Solano and The Nature Conservancy.

It includes a section on the top hazards and vulnerabilities in the city, including city infrastructure that is in low-lying areas and has been subjected to flooding already.

It specifically notes the deterioration of the public waterfront, the public boat launch, increased vandalism in the area, the bathrooms being shuttered and an uptick in theft and damage to vehicles and boat trailers.

Recent events such as severe wildfires, extreme precipitation events, high winds and extended heatwaves have reinforced this urgency and compelled communities like Suisun City “to proactively collaborate” on planning and developing actions that “mitigate risks and enhance resilience across their municipality,” an overview of the report states.

Much of the discussion during the meeting was about dredging the harbor, which was last done three years ago and is not scheduled again for another 10 to 15 years.

Still, members of the public believe the city should be setting money aside now and not count on having federal dollars later.

Four broad themes were developed during that workshop.

- Long-term vision and growth (i.e. sustainability, conservation, transportation, housing, water and waste management, vibrant local economy, regionalization).
- Infrastructure improvements (i.e. facilities improvements, green stormwater infrastructure and waste management systems, multimodal transportation, levee flood protection system, waterfront/downtown).
- Quality of life improvements (i.e. housing, affordability, mobility, walkability, sustainability, open space/park quality and access, food availability/affordability, water security, demographic diversity, air quality, urban tree canopy).
- Emergency management (i.e. education, outreach, continuation of services, sheltering, jurisdictional constraints, vulnerable populations, wildfire management).

It was from those themes the priority actions were determined.

- Continue to access grants that advance resilience efforts in Suisun City including further protection against flooding, development of engineering plans for sea level rise mitigation, installation of “living levee” concepts, and flood-proofing critical pump stations, among other projects.
- Conduct a comprehensive assessment of current zoning regulations in hopes of identifying alternative approaches that could help reduce future risk from hazards such as “no-development” or exclusionary zones, overlay districts, and/or areas of managed realignment in high-risk areas of the community which would also help to create the space needed for installation of flood reducing infrastructure longer-term.
- Provide presentations to City Council in hopes of stimulating the adoption of policies that will drive strategic planning and subsequent dedication of funding to address risks of sea level rise and storm surge. Examine and incorporate approaches and methods being considered and used to manage flooding in prevalent cities around the Bay Area (i.e. Redwood City) and elsewhere.
- Secure funding and advance the development of a flood mitigation implementation and operations plan that identifies, prioritizes and designs projects along with an implementation over the next 10 years.
- Create an inventory and list of projects that could help to mitigate wildfire risk through the progressive management of open space within and adjoining Suisun City within the context of better understanding the influence of wind on intensity and magnitude of wildfire.
- Design and install prominent warning signage along roadways in flood-prone areas to help build awareness among residents of issues related to sea level rise and flood risks.
- Continue to support the recently initiated Homeless Committee within the city that is helping to provide more attention and resources to homelessness prevention locally and at the regional level.
- Engage with the homeless/unhoused population to explore alternatives to campfires in encampments which put them and Suisun City at greater risk as well as creating devastating ecological impacts on the adjoining Suisun Marsh.

- Review, coordinate and prioritize with neighboring communities and partners innovative solutions for living alongside Suisun Marsh such as “living levees” or horizontal levees and the beneficial reuse of dredged material.
- Initiate efforts to further protect Suisun Marsh through better coordination of agencies and organizations and encourage greater public access, education and community engagement including additional educational signage (i.e. marsh ecology and sea level rise) at prominent locations such as the marsh near City Hall, build walkway near the boat launch for greater access, school field trips with local experts, and promotion of critical research needs to better protect both people and the ecosystem.
- Learn from other communities about successful options to increase engagement and capacity building among residents such as resilience hubs and climate education academies.
- Look to initiate greater regional coordination at the county-scale with regularly reoccurring meetings where regional and local entities can gather, issues can be raised and solutions can be discussed in the context of federal and state funding opportunities. Effort would help to elevate the needs of Solano County among other counties across the state.
- Engage and encourage scientists and other academic practitioners to examine how the Suisun Marsh can better protect communities such as Suisun City and Fairfield through socio-ecological focused research on marsh structure, configuration, hydrology and morphology, among other attributes.

Read for yourself

- The full report can be viewed <https://tnc.app.box.com/s/wg7eby3hcn01ngvyon42rirm1srotw0d>.

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