



## 2020 PG&E Better Together Resilient Communities Project

### Suisun City Resilient Neighborhoods / Urban Flooding Final Report

With the end of the Resilient Communities project, we have taken residents on over a dozen Flood Walks, organized and planted the seeds for an annual Environmental Day, transformed 2 neighborhood gardens into flood-resilient community hubs, worked with residents to create an actionable flood resilience plan for the city to follow, and led 3 student interns in taking the path of environmental stewardship and leadership.

In early 2020, the Bay Conservation and Development Commission published a report, *Adapting to Rising Tides*, that projected that Suisun City would be significantly affected by increases in sea level due to anthropogenic climate change. At just 2 feet of increased total water level, low-lying neighborhoods and several government buildings would be impacted by flooding. By the time the total water level — resulting from a combination of sea level rise, tidal forces, and storm surges — reaches 3 feet, over 820 household units will be affected along with 750 jobs lost and 450 rail passengers per week displaced. Despite the gravity of these estimates, there was very little communal awareness of this hazard and little political will to take action. Further, demographic characteristics in Suisun — including unemployment, unhoused, poverty, and chronic disease rates — indicate that many Suisun residents are also particularly vulnerable to the potential relocation that severe flooding could force upon them. The potential city and human toll flooding could inflict upon Suisun illustrated the prime need and importance of addressing these risks and planning for resilience through the PG&E *Better Together Resilient Communities* grant.

With the funding provided by the grant, Sustainable Solano set out to create an education and outreach campaign surrounding the impacts of flooding. The timeline of our work can be broken down into three phases during the project: outreach in 2021; drafting a community-based action plan from January 2022 to June 2022; and a second stage of outreach from July 2022 to December 2022.

- 1) During the first phase, spanning the whole of 2021, Sustainable Solano focused its efforts on establishing an outreach strategy and campaign in Suisun City. To get a community-level understanding of Suisun's current flood resilience, Sustainable Solano connected with hydrology and permaculture experts Anne Freiwald and Lydia Neilsen to conduct a walkaround consultation of Downtown Suisun and its surrounding neighborhoods. Their expertise was instrumental in our own understanding of Suisun's baseline flood resilience and informed our educational efforts. Some highlights from our outreach in 2021 include the beginning of our "Flood Walk" walking tours and the planning and execution of a Climate & Environmental Festival in October 2021.



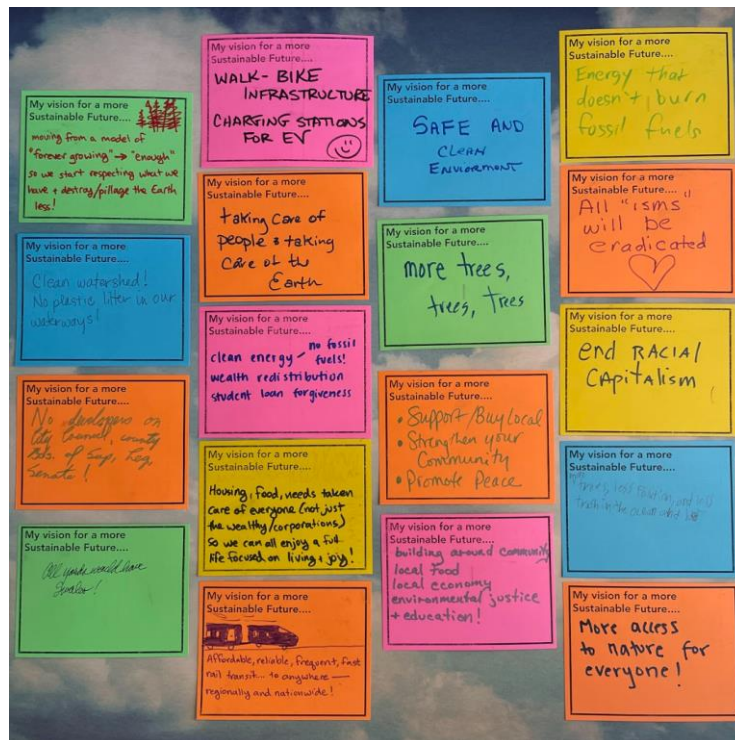
*(Former Program Manager, Jonathan Erwin, leading a Flood Walk)*

During our flood walks, Sustainable Solano staff and later interns lead groups of curious Suisun residents on a tour of flood-vulnerable areas near the Suisun Marina and downtown. During the tour, participants would learn about how flooding will manifest in their city and potential solutions they could decide between as a community. In total, we have taken Suisun residents on more than a dozen flood walks, with averages of 3-4 folks attending each. Two of our flood walks, in particular, were of note. On Sept. 11, 2021, then Vice Mayor Alma Hernandez co-led a bilingual flood walk with us. On Nov. 19, 2022, we partnered with Adopt a Neighborhood Suisun and Solano County Supervisor Wanda Williams to host a flood walk. These walks both helped to expand our community engagement efforts while strengthening our relationships with political leaders, the city, and partner organizations.



*(A few vendors during the October 2021 Environmental Festival)*

The Climate & Environmental Festival was organized in partnership with Suisun City. We brought other local environmentally focused organizations to share their work and help build a network of resilience in Suisun; invited expert speakers, including those from the Bay Conservation and Development Commission to help with our education efforts; and collected community feedback regarding public perceptions of flooding in Suisun. Through our planning and facilitation, we have started a new tradition in Suisun, where the city plans to continue fostering an 'environmental day' in October for the foreseeable future. In 2022, rather than a festival, this event took the form of a community roundtable.



(Residents envisioning what an environmentally just and fulfilling future looks like during the festival)

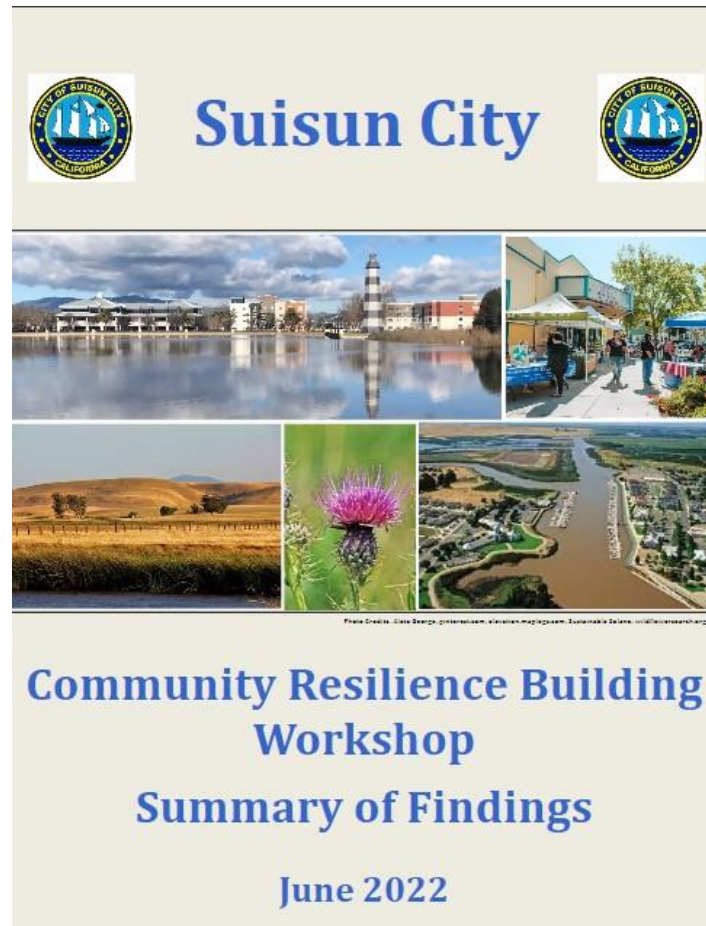
We capped off 2021 with the installation of a flood-resilient food forest in Suisun. The garden, [El Bosquecito](#), was planted in a neighborhood that will be among the first to deal with the projected flooding. The garden was planted over the course of three days, with over 20 community members registering to volunteer for each shift. When a 13-inch rainfall event hit in early November 2022, the homeowners shared pictures from their garden [over social media](#) that showed their neighbor's yard flooded with rain, while they were able to easily walk around in their flood-resilient garden. The homeowners have opened their garden to their community as an educational resource and shining example of how communities can band together to promote flooding resilience.





(Volunteer helping to dig swales for the food forest)

- 2) With a generally positive response to our outreach, along with decent media coverage of our efforts in Suisun, we transitioned into the second phase in early 2022. This next step was primarily concerned with the development of a community-based action plan to address flooding. We built a core team of concerned Suisun residents and local officials (including the Mayor Pro Tem, City Engineer, and Development Services Director) to aid us in recruiting community members to draft a plan. Additionally, we partnered with Dr. Adam Whelchel of the Nature Conservancy to lead a *Community Resilience Building Workshop*. The Nature Conservancy has conducted these workshops with over 450 different communities, however, Suisun became the first city on the West Coast to participate in a CRB.



(Cover of Action Plan Document)

Building on the connections we made with local residents, city leadership, and partner organizations during the previous Climate & Environmental Festival, we invited people through the core team to participate in a virtual workshop on June 15. The workshop had around 20 participants, and the attendee representation included Suisun residents, government officials, and local experts. Over the course of the meeting, participants engaged in discussions regarding the strengths and weaknesses of Suisun, brainstormed potential solutions, and determined a list of practical priority actions. The totality of this workshop was condensed into a *Summary of Findings* document; which can be referred to by Suisun residents and government officials when determining policies moving forward.

In June, we also brought on three high school interns who would help lead our outreach efforts. Our interns underwent a certification process in which they reviewed materials from *One Planet Living* and *Awakening the Dreamer* to help them develop their own understanding of environmental justice and activism. All three interns helped to create the summary document from June 15 through their note-taking, however, the bulk of their internship focused on continuing our outreach efforts.

Following the workshop, we entered the final phase of our project. With the foundation of a community action plan created, we set out to share the document with the community and collect feedback.

With our interns, we continued the flood walks, presented at the Sept. 6, 2022, City Council meeting, and had informational tables at public events. Our interns became experts in flood resilience, were able to lead flood walks, and were able to effectively communicate the need for flood mitigation action during events.



*(Our interns after leading a flood walk)*

- 3) Our second round of outreach culminated in a climate-focused community forum on Oct. 22, 2022. Partnering with Suisun City for a second time, this event served as an opportunity for Suisun residents to have a direct conversation with the Mayor Pro Tem regarding flooding issues in Suisun. The Environmental Resilience Community Forum began with educational presentations by Sustainable Solano and the Fairfield-Suisun Sewer District, followed by a lunch that was catered by Sustainable Solano. After lunch, the 15 participants engaged in a roundtable discussion. The Mayor Pro Tem was joined by a panel of experts who could help answer questions from residents. At the event's conclusion, participants were engaged and provided the city government with feedback regarding the resiliency strategies they wish to implement. A video recording of the forum has been posted on Sustainable Solano's website for community members and officials who were unable to attend.



*(Environmental Resilience Community Forum)*

To conclude our work with the Resilient Neighborhoods program, we facilitated a second flood-resistant garden on the same street as El Bosquecito. We designed the garden to be both drought- and flood-resistant by implementing swales and a variety of native flora. “Castile Termon,” Gaelic for castle garden, was planted at a private residence that burned down in a wildfire in 2020, with nothing but a lone maple tree surviving the flames. While the installation served as an educational piece for volunteers on how they can protect their own yards and homes, we hope the story behind this garden will inspire hope and action as a pure example of environmental resilience.





(Finished garden after rainy installation days)

Across the scope of our program, we had a bevy of media coverage of our work including:

- 1) [Flood Walks kick off Saturday in Suisun City](#), The Daily Republic, 6/10/21
- 2) [The Week Ahead: Suisun City offers Flood Walk](#), The Daily Republic, 7/12/21
- 3) [Sustainable Solano walk looks at prospect of flooding in Suisun City](#), The Daily Republic, 7/18/21
- 4) [Suisun City to host first environmental festival](#), The Reporter, 9/25/21
- 5) [Suisun City Is No Island](#), KneeDeep Times, 1/19/22
- 6) [Suisun City seeks community input on climate challenges](#), The Reporter, 8/25/22
- 7) [Suisun wants input on climate change challenges](#), The Daily Republic, 8/26/22
- 8) [Suisun residents urge city to take steps to reduce climate change vulnerability](#), The Daily Republic 9/7/22,
- 9) [Suisun City Pumps Up Resiliency](#), KneeDeep Times, 9/21/22
- 10) [Walk participants review possible waterfront flooding sites](#), The Daily Republic, 9/25/22

On behalf of Sustainable Solano, I would like to offer my deepest gratitude to PG&E and the *Better Together Resilient Communities* team for their guidance, patience, and support in our efforts to build environmental resilience in Suisun City. Through our efforts enabled by PG&E's backing, Sustainable Solano has helped Suisun undergo the first steps necessary to create a truly environmentally resilient community. When our program concludes, the city and its residents will have access to the documents, resources, and videos provided by our events, and the impending threat of flooding has started to be taken more seriously by the city as a whole. This marks just the beginning of the process to bolster flood resilience in Suisun and we hope to continue our efforts by being a resource for the city and partnering with the Fairfield-Suisun Sewer District on future resiliency projects moving forward.