



BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

AGENDA DATE: July 14, 2026

TO: Board of Supervisors

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REVIEWED BY: Josh Swedberg, Assistant County Executive, Office of the County Executive

SUBJECT: Update on County's Sea Level Rise initiatives and final report and related materials from AECOM study

RECOMMENDATION: Receive update on County's Sea Level Rise initiatives and accept final report from AECOM on Countywide Sea Level Rise Adaptation Organizational Structure and Decision-making Process and related materials

SUMMARY: In March 2024, your Board [approved a \\$519,000 contract with AECOM](#) to evaluate options for a countywide governance and decision-making framework to support sea level rise resilience planning and project delivery. Sea level rise is one of the most significant climate challenges facing Marin: with more than 110 miles of coastal and bay shoreline, Marin's communities, transportation corridors, public infrastructure, natural resources, and economic assets face significant risks from coastal flooding, king tides, and storm surge. These impacts cross jurisdictional boundaries, affecting eight incorporated cities/towns, numerous special districts and utilities, federal and state assets, and involves navigating complex regulatory agencies.

The AECOM study was intended to identify opportunities for multi-jurisdictional collaboration, assess governance models across Marin's bayside and coastal communities, and provide recommendations regarding how local agencies can work together to address the scale and complexity of future sea level rise impacts.

AECOM's findings indicate that Marin has a strong foundation of sea level rise planning, technical expertise, and regional partnerships, but that implementation can be

constrained by fragmented coordination, limited staffing capacity at local agencies, complex regulatory requirements, and competition for limited funding resources. The study found broad support among stakeholders for increased countywide coordination focused on shared grant strategy, technical assistance, regulatory coordination, community engagement, and implementation support. However, the report concludes that creation of a new formal governance entity would be premature and recommends an initial voluntary approach centered on building trust and demonstrating the value of collaboration through pilot projects. The full details of this study are found in the attached **AECOM Findings Report** and **AECOM Memo**.

Since the AECOM study's engagement work concluded in spring 2025, the County has significantly expanded its Climate leadership capacity with the Office of the County Executive (OCE) reorganization: establishing a Chief Climate Officer role and new Sea Level Rise adaptation-focused staffing unit. Another key update since the conclusion of AECOM's engagement work has been the County's engagement with Marin Community Foundation (MCF) and Coastal Quest as a part of MCF's [*Building Resilient Communities*](#) initiative.

Together, the AECOM report findings and the County's subsequent engagement with MCF and Coastal Quest provide a strong foundation for establishing priorities for the County's new Climate Office and sea level rise work. Staff recommend that your Board receive this update on the County's sea level rise initiatives, accept the final AECOM report, and provide direction regarding priorities for the County's new Climate Office.

DISCUSSION / BACKGROUND: The County has been engaged in sea level rise planning and climate adaptation efforts for more than a decade. Key past initiatives have included:

- Collaborative Sea Level Rise Marin Adaptation Response Team (C-SMART) in West Marin
- Marin Shoreline Sea Level Rise Vulnerability Assessment (2018), identified risks and impacts along the entire bay shoreline in collaboration with shoreline cities and towns
- BayWAVE (Bay Waterfront Adaptation Vulnerability Evaluation) along the bay shoreline, a monthly multijurisdictional group that came from the 2017 Vulnerability Assessment and continues to convene to share updates
- Resilient by Design Bay Area Challenge, exploring innovative, multi-benefit resilience concepts
- Transportation Authority of Marin's Countywide Transportation Plan 2050, which included a countywide assessment of transportation infrastructure vulnerabilities and adaptation needs associated with sea level rise

In 2024, the [Marin County Civil Grand Jury recommended](#) that the County evaluate options for a countywide approach to sea level rise adaptation and governance. At the same time, new state requirements, including Senate Bill 272, established a framework for Regional Shoreline Adaptation Plans (RSAPs) – further highlighted the need for coordinated planning across jurisdictions. These developments, combined with increasing frequency of shoreline flooding events and growing concerns regarding long-

term adaptation costs, prompted the County to initiate the comprehensive AECOM study.

Following a competitive Request for Proposals process, the County [selected AECOM in March 2024](#). The study was structured in two phases:

- **Phase I** focused on understanding the existing landscape of sea level rise planning, governance, funding, and implementation activities across Marin. This work included extensive stakeholder engagement, review of local and regional adaptation plans, analysis of regulatory and funding frameworks, and assessment of governance models used in other regions.
- **Phase II** was intended to build upon these findings and develop recommendations regarding governance structures, decision-making processes, and implementation strategies.

By early 2025, AECOM had completed the substantial majority of Phase I work and delivered draft findings to County staff. During this period, the County was simultaneously undertaking a significant organizational restructuring that consolidated sustainability, climate adaptation, and sea level rise functions under the Office of the County Executive in a new Climate Division. Because the future Climate Office would ultimately be responsible for implementing the study's recommendations, staff determined it was appropriate to pause finalization of the report until a permanent Chief Climate Officer was hired and able to participate in shaping the County's future direction. In [December 2025](#), your Board approved an extension of the AECOM contract to allow the work to be finalized following filling that leadership position.

The County also began engagement with Marin Community Foundation (MCF) and the climate-focused consulting group Coastal Quest in early 2026, through MCF's *Building Resilient Communities* initiative. Coastal Quest conducted a parallel assessment for MCF focused on opportunities for broader countywide climate collaboration and resilience planning for a multi-hazard approach. The full details of this assessment can be found in the attached **Coastal Quest Memo**. The findings closely align with the themes identified through the AECOM study. County staff have been working collaboratively with Coastal Quest to compare findings, identify common recommendations, and evaluate opportunities to leverage both efforts in setting the priorities for the County's work going forward. Please see the **County Staff Memo** and the **County Staff presentation** for more details on the shared findings and recommendations from the AECOM and Coastal Quest assessments.

The County is entering a critical phase for sea level rise adaptation planning. Marin jurisdictions are currently undertaking or preparing for Regional Shoreline Adaptation Plans pursuant to SB 272. The County is actively leading a multi-jurisdictional SB 1 Regional Shoreline Adaptation Planning grant application and views this effort as an early demonstration project for the countywide collaboration in the AECOM report. The County will be submitting a separate application for the unincorporated coastal side.

Sea level planning efforts underway at Marin jurisdictions:

| Jurisdiction | Status of SLR adaptation planning efforts |
|---|--|
| Belvedere | Produced Coastal Flood Barrier plans and designs (2022) and plans to participate in County-led multijurisdictional SB1 planning proposal. |
| Corte Madera | Completed their Climate Adaptation Assessment in 2021 and plans to participate in County-led multijurisdictional SB1 planning proposal |
| Larkspur | Participated in the BayWAVE vulnerability assessment (2017) and plans to participate in County-led multijurisdictional SB1 planning proposal |
| Mill Valley | Received \$965K in SB1 funding for the Coastal Flooding Adaptation Plan for Richardson Bay, Mill Valley in March 2025. Expected date of completion for RSAP planning is March 2027 |
| Novato | Recently completed Safety Element Update: Vulnerability Assessment Summary (2025) assessing climate risk and implementation goals and plans to participate in County-led multijurisdictional SB1 planning proposal. |
| San Rafael | Recently completed their Sea Level Rise Feasibility Study in 2025 and plans to participate in County-led multijurisdictional SB1 planning proposal |
| Sausalito | Received \$250K in SB1 funding for the Sausalito Facility Vulnerability Assessment in October 2024. Expected date of completion for RSAP planning is October 2026. |
| Tiburon | Received \$593,877 in SB1 funding for the Adaptation Plan and Vulnerability Assessment for Town of Tiburon in November 2025. Expected date of completion for RSAP planning is June 2028 |
| Unincorporated Marin (including West Marin) | Unincorporated bayside Marin will be included in the multijurisdictional Bayside SB1 proposal. The County plans to prepare a separate SB1 proposal that will include coastal Unincorporated Marin. Many SLR plans have been produced on the Outer Coast including Stinson Beach ARC (2025) and the Tomales Bay Living Shorelines study (2022). |
| Ross | Participation in RSAP planning process is not mandated by BCDC |
| Fairfax | |
| San Anselmo | |

Note: the Stinson Beach County Water District and Bolinas Community Public Utility received \$1.5M in SB 1 funding to develop a regional wastewater SLR adaptation plan in April 2025. The project is expected to be completed by March 2027

Key Takeaways:

The AECOM study and the Coastal Quest assessment were commissioned by different entities, examined different scopes, and employed different methodologies, yet they arrive at consistent conclusions.

1. **Need for Coordination:** Both studies found that Marin's climate resilience efforts are driven by jurisdictions acting in isolation and this fragmentation produces uneven progress, siloed planning, and missed opportunities for economies of scale. Both studies conclude that the County of Marin, given its countywide reach and convening authority, is best positioned to serve as the coordinating backbone organization.
2. **Barriers to Action:** Both studies independently identified limited staff capacity as a persistent barrier to effective action. Most municipalities and special districts lack the resources to pursue competitive grants, navigate complex regulatory requirements, or maintain sea level rise as a consistent priority alongside competing demands. Shared technical assistance and coordinated grant strategy are identified by both as the highest near-term value a backbone organization can deliver.
3. **Funding and Financing:** Both studies are clear that no jurisdiction can address Marin's estimated \$17 billion in adaptation needs alone. AECOM emphasizes that governance and financing must be designed together and that early project delivery is a prerequisite for building the public support that future revenue measures will require.
4. **Prioritize voluntary collaborations:** Neither study recommends moving immediately to a formal governance authority. Both affirm that the opportunity now is to build momentum through delivering visible early wins, establishing trust across jurisdictions, and demonstrating the value of working together, before any formal entity is established.

Next Steps:

The findings of the AECOM study and the Coastal Quest assessment provide a strong, independently validated foundation for the Climate Office's near-term set of priorities. The County's new Climate Office will:

1. Establish itself as the countywide backbone organization for sea level rise adaptation and climate resilience coordination, serving as the connective tissue across Marin's county departments, jurisdictions, special districts, and regional partners. The office will convene stakeholders, align strategies, and fill gaps in technical and administrative capacity that individual agencies cannot address alone.
2. Lead the multijurisdictional bayside RSAP and the Outer Coast planning effort to ensure compliance with SB 272 but also as an exercise through which countywide collaboration takes shape, building from the success of Bay WAVE. The process of developing a joint proposal and pursuing a multijurisdictional bayside and a unified coastal planning process will provide the opportunity to

align on scope and priorities, build relationships and foster trust between partners to pursue a more formal governing authority in the future.

3. Develop a coordinated funding and financing strategy that matches available grants and emerging opportunities to competitive, well-scoped projects across Marin's jurisdictions. This strategy will include, among others
 - a. Inventorying projects across jurisdictions to create a pipeline that can be matched to funding opportunities as they arise; and
 - b. Exploring the full range of public and private financing mechanisms available to fund sea level rise adaptation, including state and federal grants, municipal bonds, assessment districts, philanthropic capital, foundation partnerships, and blended finance structures that layer multiple sources to unlock projects that no single funding stream could support alone.

We will return to the Board at a later date to review and provide input on a proposed strategy and prioritization

POLICY FRAMEWORK: *Reducing Emissions and Building Climate-Resilient Communities* is one of the Board of Supervisors' six Countywide priorities, as reflected throughout the approved [FY 2026-28 Proposed Budget](#).

Over the past several years, the Board has invested significant one-time and ongoing resources into building climate resilience leadership capacity. This includes the establishment of the Climate Office and ongoing staff to support sea level rise planning work, in addition to strategically setting aside one-time funding (including ARPA State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds) to support getting County adaptation projects shovel-ready and competitive for state and federal grants.

The AECOM Study was commissioned to support these policy objectives and provide implementable recommendations regarding how local partners can most effectively coordinate planning, funding, and implementation activities necessary to address long-term sea level rise risks.

EQUITY IMPACT SUMMARY: Lower-income households, renters, older adults, individuals with disabilities, and communities that have historically experienced underinvestment in infrastructure have fewer resources available to prepare for, respond to, and recover from climate-related impacts. Rising sea levels threaten critical transportation corridors, utilities, and public infrastructure relied upon by all residents – and disproportionately impacts workers and transit-dependent populations.

Some of the Marin communities identified as priorities in regional and local adaptation planning efforts and that face elevated vulnerability to flooding and sea level rise impacts include Marin City, the Canal, Santa Venetia, floating homes and liveboard marinas in Sausalito, and shoreline neighborhoods in Larkspur.

The AECOM study included engagement with community organizations, residents, and stakeholders representing these vulnerable communities, and its findings emphasize the importance of ensuring that future adaptation planning, funding decisions, and

project implementation efforts incorporate equity considerations and meaningful community participation from the outset.

COMMUNICATIONS & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT: A central objective of the AECOM study was community engagement. Between 2024 and 2025, AECOM conducted an extensive countywide engagement process that included:

- Review of more than 10 prior countywide and regional sea level rise planning efforts, governance discussions, adaptation studies, and stakeholder engagement activities.
- Formation and facilitation of a 12-member multijurisdictional Steering Committee consisting of representatives from Marin bayside jurisdictions and coastal representatives, partner agencies, tribal representatives, regional organizations, and County leadership to provide strategic guidance throughout the study.
- One-on-one interviews with local government staff, special districts, regional agencies, non-profit organizations, technical experts, and other stakeholders to better understand existing adaptation efforts, governance challenges, funding needs, and opportunities for collaboration.
- Facilitation of 14 focus groups involving local government associations, special districts, transportation agencies, planning professionals, climate organizations, and West Marin stakeholders to identify regional priorities, implementation challenges, and opportunities for future collaboration.
- Surveys distributed to participating agencies and stakeholders regarding governance preferences, staffing capacity, funding barriers, implementation challenges, and opportunities for future collaboration.
- Participation in 10 BayWAVE meetings to gather input from jurisdictions and agencies actively engaged in shoreline adaptation planning and implementation efforts.
- Presentations and engagement at public meetings and community forums throughout Marin County, including the San Rafael Sea Level Rise Collaborative, San Rafael Community Assembly on Sea Level Rise, Marin City Stormwater Committee, Bolinas Community Public Utility District, Point San Pedro Road Coalition, BCDC Elected Officials Task Force, and other stakeholder venues.

Going forward, the County will continue engagement with local jurisdictions, special districts, community organizations, funding partners, regulatory agencies, and residents as sea level rise adaptation efforts move from planning toward implementation. Updates on the County's initiatives are posted to the County's [Sea Level Rise webpage](#).

The July 14, 2026 Board meeting also represents an important opportunity to present the findings of these efforts and receive policy direction regarding future priorities for the County's Climate Division and countywide adaptation initiatives.

PERFORMANCE MEASURES: N/A

CONTRACT RENEWALS / PERFORMANCE OUTCOMES: N/A

CONTRACT RISKS: N/A

CEQA ANALYSIS: N/A

FISCAL, FACILITY & STAFFING ANALYSIS: The AECOM Countywide Sea Level Rise study was funded through a previously approved professional services agreement in the amount of \$519,000. The contract has been completed, all work has been delivered, and the contract funding has been fully expended. Acceptance of the report and receipt of this informational update will not result in any additional fiscal impacts.

Implementation of future policy direction provided by the Board will be supported through the County's Climate Division within the Office of the County Executive. The Climate Division currently includes a Chief Climate Officer, two Sea Level Rise Planners, and an Administrative Analyst dedicated to supporting sea level rise initiatives. These positions were previously authorized and funded by the Board as part of the County's investment in climate adaptation capacity and organizational restructuring.

ALTERNATIVES: Instead of accepting the final report in its current form, the Board could direct staff to revise the final report and accompanying materials and return at a later date to accept the report. However, revision of the final report would be completed by County staff, as the AECOM contract terminated on June 30, 2026.

ESTIMATED TIME (in minutes): 30

ATTACHMENTS:

1. **County Staff Memo:** Summary of AECOM and Coastal Quest initiatives
2. **County Staff presentation** to Board of Supervisors
3. **AECOM Findings Report:** Countywide Sea Level Rise Adaptation Organizational Structure and Decision-making Process
4. **AECOM Memo:** Collaborative Governance Research Findings
5. **Coastal Quest Memo:** Multi-hazard collaborative approach