

East Palo Alto

24 out of 48

East Palo Alto is an [MTC Equity Priority Community](#). It faces heightened flood risk and vulnerability, as many residential [cost-burdened neighborhoods](#) are in low-lying, flood-prone areas. The city [already experiences flooding](#) due to high tides, rain flow in the San Francisquito Creek, and a limited storm drain system. Additionally, East Palo Alto [will be impacted by groundwater rise](#) even before it's impacted by sea level rise.

Compounding this hazard are the many contaminated sites along the shoreline that are at risk of inundation from groundwater rise and sea level rise. Many of these [sites are concentrated](#) in the Ravenswood Transit-Oriented Development Specific Plan Area. [Local communities](#) are concerned about the health risks these sites pose to surrounding communities and future developments.

One project the city has undertaken to prepare for sea level rise is the [SAFER Bay Project](#). The regional project is designed to protect East Palo Alto and Menlo Park against 3.5 feet of sea level rise and includes wetland restoration, floodwalls, horizontal levees, and improved shoreline access.

Peninsula Resilience Project

The Peninsula Resilience Project (PrepSMC) will update the Safety Element of eight cities, including East Palo Alto. The Safety Element is a planning document that assesses safety hazards (including climate hazards) and outlines goals and policies for addressing the hazards. This is a key opportunity to adopt our recommended local sea level rise and flood resilience policies in city planning.

Key Policy & Planning Opportunities

We recommend that East Palo Alto focus on these key opportunities to advance flood resilience:

- 1. Overlay Zones:** Create sea level rise and groundwater rise overlay zones that establish retrofit and building standards to ensure critical infrastructure (including underground infrastructure) and new developments are resilient to future flood risk. This aligns with the policy recommendations in [SPUR's case study](#) on groundwater rise impact in East Palo Alto.
- 2. Address contaminated sites vulnerable to groundwater rise:** Work with CBOs and frontline communities to advocate for contaminated sites to be remediated at a level that protects community health under current and future flood conditions, prioritizing sites posing the highest and most immediate risk to communities. Require any developments built on contaminated sites to create a vulnerability assessment, adaptation plan, and groundwater monitoring plan to account for impacts of rising shallow groundwater on contaminant mobilization.

How Scoring Works: We identified 48 policies that local governments should implement for sea level rise, groundwater rise, and flood resilience. The scores represent how many policies in each category the city has implemented. Partial points may be awarded if a city has implemented a component of a policy but not the full policy.

General Flood Resilience Score		6.5 out of 9
Highlights	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Participates in regional sea level rise planning through participating in countywide OneShoreline planning and the SAFER Bay Project.	
Next Steps	<p>LOW HANGING FRUIT</p> <input type="checkbox"/> Update conditions of approval to require disclosure of flood risk on sale of real estate. <p>LARGER LIFT</p> <input type="checkbox"/> Seek funding for a shoreline resilience plan to fulfill SB 272 requirements.	
Groundwater Rise Resilience Score		0.5 out of 3
Next Steps	<input type="checkbox"/> Use existing groundwater rise data to establish a Shallow Groundwater Rise Overlay District that includes specific design and retrofit requirements for underground infrastructure, roadways, and new development in high-hazard areas. <input type="checkbox"/> Require all new developments and city infrastructure to assess the risks of groundwater rise and associated risks like liquefaction, corrosion, and compounded flooding.	
Sea Level Rise Resilience Score		2 out of 4
Next Steps	<input type="checkbox"/> Use existing sea level rise data to establish a Sea Level Rise Overlay District and related policies to protect against sea level rise flooding.	
Sea Level Rise & Groundwater Rise Multi-hazard Resilience Score		6.5 out of 16
Highlights	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Through participation in the San Mateo County Sea Level Rise Assessment, has identified built assets at risk of sea level rise or groundwater rise flooding.	
Next Steps	<p>LOW HANGING FRUIT</p> <input type="checkbox"/> Build upon the San Mateo County Sea Level Rise Vulnerability Assessment's list of open contaminated sites at risk of flooding by adding a list of closed sites vulnerable to sea level and shallow groundwater rise. <p>LARGER LIFT</p> <input type="checkbox"/> In partnership with frontline communities, advocate for contaminated site cleanup plans that protect community health under current and future flood conditions. Consider the health hazard posed by contaminated sites when designing the Ravenswood Business District redevelopment project. <input type="checkbox"/> Pursue a variety of innovative funding mechanisms to support groundwater rise research, adaptation planning, and implementation projects.	
Green Infrastructure & Stormwater Resilience		6.5 out of 10
Highlights	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Prioritizes GSI projects that are multi-beneficial, close to affordable housing sites, are aligned with storm drain upgrade needs, and are aligned with other programs like Safe Routes to School.	
Next Steps	<p>LOW HANGING FRUIT</p> <input type="checkbox"/> Update Conditions of Approval for major development/redevelopment to require building and maintaining green stormwater infrastructure in the frontage area to treat runoff from the adjacent right of way where feasible. <p>LARGER LIFT</p> <input type="checkbox"/> Identify areas at risk of flooding under future precipitation conditions, and update the storm drain master plan to address these future flood risks.	
Accountability & Transparency		2 out of 6
Highlights	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> The LHMP assigns each mitigation action a lead department and funding source.	
Next Steps	<input type="checkbox"/> Add a section to all staff reports that reviews impact on sustainability, resilience, and equity.	