

East Palo Alto

26 out of 52

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, bank overtopping along the San Francisquito Creek, and a limited storm drain system. Additionally, East Palo Alto [is being 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.

Alignment with the Regional Shoreline Adaptation Plan

Cities are required to create Regional Shoreline Adaptation Plans (RSAP) by 2035 following BCDC's RSAP guidelines. This report card reflects our recommendations for creating strong shoreline plans that meet or exceed the RSAP requirements. The RSAP Guidelines require jurisdictions to include seven "elements", which include key planning steps that are integrated with "strategy standards", or outcomes, that must be achieved within the planning steps. Our policy recommendations align with both RSAP "element" requirements and "strategy standard" recommendations.

Key Policy & Planning Opportunities

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

- 1. Development Design Standards:** Establish design standards, such as minimum base floor elevation, to ensure new developments and infrastructure are resilient to future flood risk. For new private development, implement standards by creating sea level rise and groundwater rise overlay zones. For public infrastructure, create flood-resilience design guidelines. 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, frontline communities, and regulatory agencies 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. Pursue a range of funding sources to support groundwater rise research and contaminated site remediation. Require new 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 52 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		15 out of 29
Highlights	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Participates in regional sea level rise planning through participating in countywide OneShoreline planning and the SAFER Bay Project <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Participates in FEMA's Community Rating System to reduce residents' flood insurance rates. <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	<input type="checkbox"/> Update the zoning code to require disclosure of flood risk on sale of real estate. <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. <input type="checkbox"/> Mitigate the health hazard posed by contaminated sites when designing the Ravenswood Business District redevelopment project.	RSAP Alignment <p>The first bullet helps achieve RSAP Adaptation Strategy Standard 6 - "Minimize flood risk in areas with existing and planned development".</p> <p>The second is a best practice to include in RSAP Element B3-f – a vulnerability assessment of shoreline contamination conditions.</p> <p>The third is a short-term opportunity that can precede creation of an RSAP.</p>
Groundwater Rise Resilience Score		0.5 out of 3
Next Steps	<input type="checkbox"/> Require new developments and redevelopment to account for the risks of groundwater rise and the associated risks of liquefaction, corrosion, and compounded flooding in project design by establishing a Shallow Groundwater Rise Overlay District. <input type="checkbox"/> Implement flood-resilient design standards to ensure new city infrastructure is built to be resilient to groundwater rise and associated risks like liquefaction, corrosion, and compounded flooding.	RSAP Alignment <p>These are best practices to include in RSAP Element E.1 - "Describe proposed land use and policy changes necessary to enact the adaptation strategies and pathways".</p>
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.	RSAP Alignment <p>This is a best practice to include in RSAP Element E.1 - "Describe proposed land use and policy changes necessary to enact the adaptation strategies and pathways"</p>
Green Infrastructure & Stormwater Resilience Score		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	<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 public right of way where feasible. <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. Data from the OneWatershed Framework can be used for this.	RSAP Alignment <p>These policies help the city go beyond what's required by Adaptation Strategy 19 (Integrating coastal flood protection with stormwater and riverine flood management) by addressing inland flooding as well as shoreline flooding.</p>
Accountability & Transparency Score		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.	