



CITY OF SANTA BARBARA
PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSION REPORT

AGENDA DATE: November 19, 2025

TO: Parks and Recreation Commission

FROM: Adaptation & Resilience Division, Sustainability & Resilience Department

SUBJECT: 30-Year Waterfront Adaptation Plan

RECOMMENDATION:

That the Commission receive an update on the 30-Year Waterfront Adaptation Plan.

DISCUSSION:

30-Year Waterfront Adaptation Plan

The purpose of the 30-Year Waterfront Adaptation Plan (Plan) is to create a practical plan that prepares the portion of our Waterfront that spans from Leadbetter Beach to the Andrée Clark Bird Refuge for increased storm surges, erosion, and flooding by providing solutions that preserve and enhance recreation, commerce, beach access, historic and cultural resources, habitat, and critical infrastructure for the near term and future generations.

The waterfront is already at risk of flooding, storm surge, and erosion during coastal storms today. This risk will become exacerbated with even small amounts of sea level rise. The Plan will provide solutions to address these impacts and move the needle from planning to on-the-ground projects that will create a more resilient future for our community. The Plan will also implement a high priority recommendation from the City's 2021 Sea Level Rise Adaptation Plan to develop near-term actions that will enhance our community's resilience to climate change and sea-level rise in this portion of the City.

The 30-Year Waterfront Adaptation Plan focuses on a 30-year time horizon because there is a high level of scientific consensus about the anticipated amount of sea level rise during this period and it reflects a manageable horizon for infrastructure planning. Additionally, 30-years reflects a timeframe during which significant increases in storm damage risks in the Waterfront area are likely, but before largescale alterations of the Waterfront area (such as installation of levees, continuous seawalls, groundwater pumping, or relocation of structures) could be needed to address largescale flooding impacts north of Cabrillo Boulevard from sea level rise.

Key elements of the Plan will include:

- New hazard modeling that reflects the latest State guidance and is calibrated to local conditions.
- A new hazard vulnerability assessment.
- Engaging graphics that support community engagement, including an interactive, bilingual hazards map.
- An analysis of adaptation options for major assets along the waterfront that considers feasibility, effectiveness, costs, the unique characteristics of the area, the City's vision for access and connectivity, and regulatory framework. Particular attention will be paid to the Harbor Commercial Area and Harbor West Parking Lot areas that have experienced frequent flooding and storm surge during the last few winters.
- A design for an enhanced bicycle path connection between the Harbor Commercial Area and Leadbetter Beach that improves safety for all users and supports the adaptation strategy.
- A Harbor breakwater and groins analysis that assesses the feasibility and costs of raising and potential modifications to these existing protective structures.
- State and regulatory agency coordination and consultation.
- Bilingual, interactive, and engaging community outreach.
- Conceptual designs for key recommended adaptation projects.

The work effort is being managed by the Sustainability & Resilience Department, in collaboration with the City Attorney, Community Development, Parks and Recreation, Public Works, Sustainability & Resilience, Water Resources, and Waterfront Departments.

The team within Sustainability & Resilience charged with facilitating this work effort is the Adaptation and Resilience Program. The City's Adaptation & Resilience Program helps our community prepare for climate change impacts such as sea level rise, flooding, and wildfire. Serving as a central hub, the program coordinates adaptation efforts across City departments, partner agencies, and the community while securing funding for key projects. Through a multifaceted approach, the division works to proactively adapt City infrastructure, monitor coastal changes, reduce flood and erosion hazards while restoring habitats, increase building resilience standards, and provide resources to the community. This multi-year work effort was kicked off in September 2024, and an initial outreach campaign took place in February 2025 to spread project awareness and gauge our community's sentiments about the Waterfront. This included information provided across a variety of media and a community survey with approximately 800 responses. The

project team also completed new coastal hazard modeling and analyzed the associated resource vulnerabilities.

Currently, the City is evaluating a spectrum of design options that the community will help shape during the next outreach campaign, which will launch in February 2026. Staff anticipate returning to the Parks and Recreation Commission early in 2026 for review and input. This outreach will also include public workshops, stakeholder meetings, and discussions with other City commissions, committees, and Council.

Following the outreach campaign, the project team will assess the technical performance, costs, and benefits of the recommended options to develop a comprehensive adaptation strategy and design concept, which are planned for public review in fall of 2026 and will include Parks & Recreation Commission review.

BUDGET/FINANCIAL INFORMATION:

The projects described above will be carried out using existing staff and current appropriations and grant funds. However, as projects move from planning to construction, additional funding will be needed, likely from a mix of State, Federal, and local sources. The Sustainability & Resilience Department will work with the Finance Department to develop a long-term funding strategy for the City's adaptation efforts.

PREPARED BY: Timmy Bolton, Senior Climate Adaptation Analyst

SUBMITTED BY: Melissa Hetrick, Resilience Program Manager

APPROVED BY: Jill E. Zachary, Parks and Recreation Director