

# San Francisco's Islais Creek Adaptation Strategy Kicks off to Protect Public and Private Assets

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The City of San Francisco is bounded by water, which has made talks of sea-level rise all the more pertinent as the implications of climate change have become more apparent. Over the last several years, the City of San Francisco, in conjunction with the Port of San Francisco, the Army Corps of Engineers and other public and private entities, has embarked on several efforts to protect the City's waterfront. One San Francisco's most recent efforts, the beginnings of the Islais Creek Adaptation Strategy, kicked off at the end of March and will develop a long-range financing and implementation strategy to protect a portion of the City's southeastern shoreline just north of Evans and Oakdale Avenues.

"This effort is part of a much larger set of responses that the City is engaged in around climate matters," explained Robin Abad Ocubillo, senior planner of urban design for the City of San Francisco. "This type of planning work and conversation is happening city-wide. For Islais, what is great here is that for the first time, the City is going to start getting to a level of detail and specificity as to what we should be doing."

The Islais Creek Adaptation Strategy held its first community meeting in mid-March in an effort to identify valuable public and private assets and the potential that varying levels of sea-level rise will have on the community. The meeting is just the beginning of a planning process meant to garner input from experts and the community about how to invest to increase the waterfront's resilience and establish actionable goals for implementation. By 2100, sea levels are expected to rise between six to 10 feet, and the frequency of climate-related incidents are anticipated to increase.

"Islais Creek is a really critical geography in terms of transportation and equity for San Francisco, the City and the region," explained Abad Ocubillo. "There are a lot of critical facilities located here as well as transportation corridors and facilities. In various scenarios, many of these would be impacted or rendered non-functional for a length of time, which would have a radiating impact on the functionality of the rest of the city."

Islais Creek is home to numerous bus and light rail vehicle yards as well as the 280 Freeway and Illinois Street Bridge. One of the city's major wastewater treatment facilities also calls the neighborhood home, as well as Piers 80-68 and 90-96, which carry regional significance as major shipping destinations. Islais Creek is also home to some of the last remaining wetlands in San Francisco.

"Our approach to facilities on the waterfront are also critical to emergency response," added Lindy Lowe, resilience office for the Port of San Francisco. "The City will rely on that infrastructure in an event where we have to amount a response effort."

With the planning process for the strategy just kicking off, the Port and the City were unable to define the specific plans or outcomes for the Islais Creek area. However, residents and community stakeholders touched upon several themes during March's meeting, including utilities, transportation, use and maintenance of open spaces, access to the water and jobs.

"The future state of employment, what types of industry will be around and what manufacturing will look like came up as important," said Abad Ocubillo.

The planning process around the Islais Creek Adaptation Strategy is anticipated to take two years.

“We don’t want to be radical, but we want to exercise our imagination as to what a long-term future would look like,” said Abad Ocubillo. “We want the [strategy] to be something that we can implement towards and realistically imagine and achieve.”

The strategy and its planning process will evolve simultaneously along multiple other efforts currently underway by the City of San Francisco and others to address sea level rise along the waterfront. The Islais Creek adaptation strategy will build upon San Francisco’s Sea Level Rise Action Plan, released in March 2016, as well as the Resilient by Design Challenge. In September of 2018 the Port of San Francisco also agreed to engage in a U.S. Army Corps of Engineering Study, which will identify challenges and recommend solutions to reduce future flood risk.

“We have a lot of things to draw upon,” said Lowe. “We are starting really far down the way, and we’re going to get so much closer to some real strategies we can deploy. It’s a really great opportunity, and I feel really lucky to be working in such a close team with the other city departments.”

The Islais Creek Adaptation Strategy planning process will wrap in 2020, and from there the City hopes to begin implementing the outline in both short- and long-term initiatives over the next several decades.

“This is not a planning effort that we will go through that will sit on the shelf,” emphasized Abad Ocubillo. “It will really be a blueprint for how to frame future decisions on what to invest in and when; this is the start of the city’s action plan for this geography. We’re trying to look at all of the solutions we can bring to bear in order to achieve multiple benefits over different time horizons.”

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