

BCDC Chair Zack Wasserman
May 19, 2016
Agenda Item 9

As we begin our workshop, I want to set the context for our discussion. I think there are four critical – and accurate – assumptions that both underlie and come out of our three previous workshops:

1. The level of San Francisco Bay will rise over the next 50 to 100 years – how high and how soon we cannot be sure, but we know it will rise to a level much higher than we are prepared for today;
2. There are many institutions working on pieces of the challenge that is adapting to rising sea level as a region, but there is no clear central leadership addressing how we will save our natural and built environments;
3. The methods to protect our shoreline will differ – hardscape in some places, softscape in others, and, in a few places, possibly no solutions – and solutions for any one place must be evaluated in terms of costs and benefits and their effects on other places; and,
4. We must address this challenge at the local and regional levels and include state and federal perspectives, issues, and initiatives.

Some may ask why BCDC is taking the lead in promoting Bay Area resilience to rising sea level. In one sense, the answer is easy; to paraphrase Rabbi Hillel, “If not us, who? If not now, when?” More than any other public agency, BCDC includes local, regional, state, and federal representatives who analyze, decide, and resolve in one place Bay-related regulatory and planning challenges. BCDC’s jurisdiction and authority is unlike any other agency’s, BCDC is leading the development of a chapter on resilience in the upcoming 2017 Plan Bay Area, our planning and regulatory divisions have gained unparalleled experience in analyzing and responding to the threat of rising tides, and – of course – no other agency has stepped up to this challenge in as comprehensive a manner as BCDC.

With that justification, I think that there are at least four situations that have led the Commission to our discussion today:

First, we know more about rising sea level now than the Commission knew when it approved the Bay Plan Climate Change Amendments in 2011, and new information about both rising sea level and its ramifications arrives daily. While there is still uncertainty, we know that the seas will rise more quickly than we thought five years ago. While BCDC will not use new unofficial projections about the rate of rising sea level – which show possibly nine feet by 2100 – to guide our deliberations, we must recognize that the scientifically conservative projections we use that are based upon guidance from the State of California may soon be out of date. We need to speed up our responses to rising tides now, integrate into them as much new scientifically correct

information as possible, and ensure that the data that we and others use is transparent and accessible. In short, we need to quicken our pace. The recommendations before us begin to address that challenge.

Second, BCDC's implementation of the Bay Plan amendments has neither caused the world to end for local governments, development interests, or environmental advocates, nor has it resolved many of the issues that we currently face. During our public workshops and during Commission meetings, we have learned both about our regulations' shortcomings and successes, and possible ways to make them more effective. The recommendations we consider today begin to address the challenges we have identified.

Third, I am proud that our Commissioners continue to take their responsibilities very seriously and that our staff continues to lead the Bay Area in working collaboratively with public, private, and community-based organizations to further the cause of Bay Area resilience. Analogy intended – we have instituted several waves of focus for our work. Our two Commissioner working groups (Rising Sea Level and Bay Fill Policies), our formal and informal discussions, and the conversations you have held with each other and your constituents, families, friends, and neighbors are too numerous to list. Projects that have come before the Commission for consideration have spurred serious deliberations about how we should interpret our laws and policies. These dialogues have been furthered by the three public workshops we held earlier this year that drew scores of stakeholders and other members of the public. Yet, while there are a large number of efforts to study how rising sea level will affect our communities and how we should plan for the future, there is no central leadership within the Bay Area to coalesce all these efforts into a comprehensive and appropriate structure to advance relevant laws and policies. In addition, we must continue to inspire stronger relationships among and between local and regional planners, and convince state and federal policymakers to take on more active roles in the adaptation space – roles that are as active as those undertaken in the fight to reduce greenhouse gases. The recommendations address these challenges.

The fourth circumstance that should inform our discussion is that the public sector will take the lead in promoting and providing resilience for the Bay Area, and we shall have to bring along the private sector. Too few private sector interests accepted our invitations to participate in the workshops. Perhaps we can expect them to come forward with their ideas about resilience only when they see public bodies debating possible solutions that will affect their business models; that is how I became involved with BCDC seven years ago. I hope that the recommendations inspire the private sector to take on a more active role.

I do want to let you know that I and several other commissioners and their staffs, including Commissioners Pine, Zwissler, and Gioia, helped BCDC staff develop the actions to be discussed today. BCDC staff distributed them over a week ago to all

Commissioners and Alternates, the various staff and members of the public who receive regular correspondence about the Commission's meetings, and to the workshop participants. On Monday, I convened a group of leading individuals from the public and nonprofit sectors who care deeply about resilience – including representatives from SPUR, SFEI, MTC, ABAG, and BARC, among others – to learn of their thoughts about the recommendations. Their comments were overwhelmingly positive.

Let me finish by saying that I am looking forward to hearing your thoughts and recommendations about the staff report – and I mean that. Be prepared, as I may call on you! At the end of our meeting, I will entertain a motion for the Commission to move the recommendations and actions forward, with any changes to which we agree, and ask staff to return with plans to implement them as quickly as possible. I want to make clear that should the Commission agree to such a motion, nothing we do today will change BCDC's laws, regulations, or policies; any formal changes to our authority that arise from the recommendations would be presented to the Commission for its consideration in due course and in accordance with our regular order.

So, now, I would invite Lindy Lowe to give a short report on the staff recommendation.