

# San Francisco Bay Conservation and Development Commission 2023 - 2025 Strategic Plan





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# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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## LETTER FROM THE CHAIR

### “The more things change...”

There is not a decade in BCDC’s history that has required it to examine its strategy and operations more fully than the last. BCDC approved the Nation’s first rising sea level adaptation requirements in

2011. Since then, climate change has accelerated and rising sea levels pose an even greater threat. To meet this challenge, BCDC fundamentally shifted its attitude toward placing fill in the Bay by approving a Bay Plan amendment to allow larger amounts of fill destined for habitat restoration. BCDC’s planners developed and implemented the groundbreaking “Adapting to Rising Tides” program and the “Bay Adapt Joint Platform” to analyze future rising sea level scenarios and seek willing partners to protect people and their communities, habitat and its benefits, and development in the Bay and along the shoreline. Our permitting staff have met this challenge by developing creative methods to ensure that complex development proposals are resilient to rising sea level through mid century and beyond while providing maximum feasible public access to the Bay. The Commission also approved its first policies on environmental justice and social equity.

Thankfully, BCDC’s two previous strategic plans created viable and successful strategic approaches to making policy decisions that anticipated these and other challenges. Those plans have succeeded on several fronts, including:

- Driving BCDC **coordination, collaboration, and partnerships with existing and new partners**, including the Bay Area’s regional government agencies, to plan and implement the Adapting to Rising Tides Program and the Bay Adapt Joint Platform, which together lead the Bay Area’s planning response to rising sea level;
- **Negotiating with local government and development community representatives** to permit creative ways to gauge how well various adaptation strategies may work through the lives of projects;
- Amending the Bay Plan to include new policies on **environmental justice and social equity** and creating both a new Environmental Justice Manager position and an Environmental Justice Advisors organization to help implement those policies;
- Creating and implementing BCDC’s first **data-driven enforcement strategy** that has resolved scores of cases and spawned a new compliance program to resolve issues before they become enforcement cases;
- Leading the charge with State, NGO, and private partners to create a new federal pilot program that **encourages the beneficial reuse of dredged sediment**, which just received \$19 million to implement in the Bay;

- Successfully advocating for an increase in BCDC’s base funding and some **pay increases, and hiring new and highly-qualified staff** who are more technologically proficient and, in many cases, more demanding of change than ever before; and
- Creating a culture in which Commissioners and staff continue to work actively and transparently – with the public – to **analyze and resolve major public policy issues.**

While both previous plans have been relatively successful, we need to use this new plan more actively as the pace of change continues to accelerate. Therefore, it includes a far easier-to-use workplan and senior staff will ensure that its progress will be reported regularly to the Commission.

The Bay Area public sees the Bay as their front yard, which is marvelous. But, the changing nature of the Bay and its shoreline is testing the historic flexibility of BCDC’s planning and regulatory frameworks. Continuing and growing concerns about whether the Bay Area can govern itself under existing law in light of these and other challenges has the potential to impede our progress to make the Bay and its shoreline more resilient. Therefore, BCDC must adapt its laws and policies to the Bay Area’s changing circumstances if it intends to fulfill its statutory responsibilities. In addition, while the previous two plans increased communication and trust among Commissioners and staff members, we see now that BCDC must become far more publicly accessible to the communities along the shoreline – many of which are historically underserved and victims of environmental injustice.

BCDC has started to work more successfully with shoreline communities and their members who are affected by changes to the Bay shoreline but who have not been engaged within BCDC’s processes, as well as the broader public throughout the Bay Area. To accomplish these goals, BCDC must grow; BCDC cannot lead the Bay Area’s response to rising sea level within its current level of resources and existing technologies. We are thankful that the Ocean Protection Council and the State Coastal Conservancy have provided significant funding on the planning and regulatory sides of the house to move forward with a Regional Shoreline Adaptation Plan; we now need to increase the permitting capacity of the regulatory program.

We will use this strategic plan to chart our course to meet the Bay’s challenges head-on and successfully resolve them. Doing so will require intense regional cooperation, continuing support from the State of California, and the strength to overcome hurdles posed by unresolved historic inequities and the Bay Area’s complex governance structures. We can and will work daily to demonstrate that BCDC is the nation’s premier coastal zone management agency and can lead the Bay Area’s efforts to increase our resilience in the face of rising sea level in both the planning and regulatory spheres.

**We welcome your participation in this endeavor.**

# 01 Background



# HISTORY OF BCDC

To save San Francisco Bay, the State of California enacted the McAteer-Petris Act in 1965 that established the San Francisco Bay Conservation Development Commission (BCDC) – a state agency with jurisdiction and authority over the Bay and its shoreline within the nine counties and 46 cities that touch the Bay. BCDC was created to stop the indiscriminate filling of the Bay that threatened to reduce it to a small river ending at Palo Alto. **Its purpose – to permit only the minimum amount of Bay fill appropriate for approved development projects and provide the public with maximum feasible access to the Bay.**

For almost sixty years BCDC has conserved Bay resources, permitted and otherwise regulated the wide variety of development within its jurisdiction, and assisted local governments as they plan for development. BCDC was created a decade before either the California Coastal Commission or the passage of the federal Coastal Zone Management Act. As the Nation’s oldest coastal zone

management agency, BCDC works in partnership with government agencies at all levels, and its actions and plans are reviewed every five years by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration as required by federal law.

BCDC is responsible for ensuring that appropriate and environmentally sound development provides valuable and functional public benefits and economic development for the entire region. It is important to note that BCDC was not created to obviate the authority of cities, counties, and special districts. Instead, BCDC is designed to work with them so that the Bay is viewed as an entire system. To implement such a holistic and inclusive charter, the Commission includes 27 members who represent counties, cities, gubernatorial administrations, and a wide variety of state and federal public agencies. Since its inception, BCDC has learned that its most notable successes are produced by coordinating, collaborating, and partnering with governments at all levels and with a wide variety of stakeholders.



**THE BAY IS FOR EVERYONE.**







## PURPOSE & NEED

The Newsom and Brown Administrations have stated publicly that rising sea levels and other manifestations of climate change are “existential threats” to California and the Bay Area. Responding to the threats to people, habitat, and infrastructure in and around the Bay, our regulatory programs must continue to find the best ways to mandate shoreline resilience and our planners must work creatively with stakeholders throughout the region.

As BCDC enters this era of uncertainty due to climate change, our Commissioners, staff, and stakeholders need to pause and “reset” every few years to ensure that the organization’s trajectory is clear and on a reasonable target.

The purpose of this Strategic Plan, and the work that has gone into its creation, is to describe how the Commission will perform its expanding responsibilities in the midst of an uncertain future.



**THE BAY IS BEING IMPACTED TODAY.**

Staff & Commissioner Survey

In terms of regulatory activities, what should BCDC focus its efforts over the next three years?

1

Improving permitting processes and staff workflows

2

Seek increased regulatory authority in response to rising sea levels

3

Focus on external relations & communication with local gov, applicants, and communities

*Excerpt from Stakeholder Survey Results*

## ENGAGEMENT EFFORTS

There were three major phases of the Strategic Planning process between May and December 2022: Setting the Context, Defining Goals & Objectives, and Establishing a Path Forward. The Strategic Plan was developed over months of stakeholder engagement and coordination with agency staff. There were two advisory groups that helped shape the Plan and provided guidance throughout the project. The first was the Coordination Team, consisting of the Executive Director, Commission Chair, and six key staff members. This group worked closely with project leads to help inform, direct, and review the development of the Strategic Plan. The second advisory group, the Strategic Plan Working Group (SPWG), consisted of members of the Coordination Team and five BCDC Commissioners.

### Setting the Context

This phase focused on developing a clear understanding of need, opportunities, and challenges, and engaging with key stakeholders. This stage consisted of a strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats activity with all BCDC staff; engaging 68 staff, Commissioners, and partners in a survey; holding a preliminary SPWG and Coordination Team meeting; and holding small group meeting with BCDC's Engineering Review Board and Design Criteria Review Board.

### Defining Goals and Objectives

After identifying the major challenges and opportunities for the organization, a draft framework was created. This framework consisted of a new mission statement, vision statement, core values, and goal areas. This framework was then refined by the SPWG, Coordination Team, and BCDC's Environmental Justice Advisors. Staff teams were tasked to refine each goal, and develop anticipated outcomes, strategic objectives, and strategies that would help achieve that goal. This expanded framework was then brought to a Public Workshop where Commissioners and members of the public were able to provide feedback before the framework was finalized.

### Establishing a Path Forward

The last phase was finalizing the framework, developing the final strategic plan, and creating an implementation tool to ensure the vision and goals can be achieved.



# Strategic Areas of Interest

Through engagement with internal and external stakeholders, the strengths and weaknesses of the organization were considered. These strategic areas were the basis of the Plan development.

## Continue to Limit Fill

Before 1965 when BCDC was created, an average of about 2,300 acres of the Bay were filled annually. Now only a few acres are filled annually and even small losses of open water are mitigated. The Bay is larger now than in 1965. While BCDC continues to limit fill to its most appropriate amount, the Commission encourages large-scale fill for habitat restoration purposes. Some fill will be necessary to adapt to rising sea levels.

## Ensure Public Access

In 1965 only four miles of the Bay shoreline were open to the public. Projects approved by BCDC in and around the Bay will always provide “maximum feasible public access, consistent with the project.” BCDC has opened up vistas and open spaces and will continue to spur the Bay Trail’s successes.

## Align Regulatory and Planning Scales

BCDC’s planning programs operate at much larger scales than its parcel-by-parcel/development-by-development regulatory programs. The Commission should consider reforming its regulatory programs so that they work with local governments and other stakeholders at larger scales to provide them with more flexibility and certainty while protecting shoreline communities, habitat, and infrastructure.

## Embed Equity into BCDC

The Commission’s 2019 Environmental Justice and Social Equity Bay Plan amendments are being used to ensure that communities that have faced inequitable treatment in the past are now part of local and regional policy discussions and debates. Concurrently, BCDC staff are developing an internal Racial Equity Action Plan whose recommendations will be embedded into BCDC’s operations to advance equity and diversity.



## Review Jurisdiction and Authority

As rising sea levels accelerate, regional land use solutions to this existential threat are crucial. Parcel-by-parcel resilience leads directly to a “tragedy of the commons” as flood waters will be reflected into neighbors and beyond. As the only public body with Bay-wide land use authority, the Commission will need to determine whether and how it should request greater jurisdiction and authority to protect the public, habitat, and infrastructure along and inland from the shoreline.

## Expand Capacity

Continually increasing development pressures on the Bay and its shoreline has stretched the Commission’s permitting staff beyond any reasonable workload. Therefore, BCDC is requesting the Department of Finance to approve a Mission Based Review of our permitting processes, as suggested by the Department’s own MBR staff as part of its successful enforcement review. The workload is exacerbated by the State’s farcically low pay scales compared to local and regional governments in the Bay Area, which severely hampers BCDC’s ability to hire and retain experienced staff. Therefore, BCDC will continue to press for more equitable pay scales for State employees.



# Bay Adapt: BCDC's Regional Strategy for a Rising Bay

## The Bay is Rising. The time to come together to act is now.

Sea level rise is no longer a distant threat and the San Francisco Bay Area stands to be one of the hardest hit in North America. It's past time for us to get ready.

## What is Bay Adapt?

BCDC's Bay Adapt initiative establishes regional agreement on the actions necessary to protect the Bay Area's people and natural and built environments from sea level rise.

In 2020 and 2021, hundreds of people from across the Bay came together to achieve a regional, consensus-driven strategy on a path forward, called the "Joint Platform." Rather than calling for individual projects, the Joint Platform lays out guiding principles, actions and tasks to help the Bay Area achieve faster, better, and more equitable adaptation to a rising Bay.

Together, these actions will lead to:

- Reduced flood risk for communities, businesses, infrastructure, and habitats.
- Protection of natural areas and wildlife.
- Robust integration of adaptation into community-focused local plans.
- Recognition and equitable support for low income communities.

- Accelerated permitting and project construction.
- Technical assistance for local governments.
- More funding for adaptation.

## What's next?

Implementing the 9 actions and 21 tasks requires collective action, leadership and resources. BCDC is grateful for funding from the Ocean Protection Council and State Coastal Conservancy to support implementation in the following key areas:

Increase **Community Capacity**

Regional **Shoreline Adaptation Plan**

Regulatory **Improvements**

Serve as **"Backbone Agency"**

Learn more and view the Bay Adapt endorsements at [www.bayadapt.org](http://www.bayadapt.org).

# 02 The Strategic Plan



# Mission

The San Francisco Bay Conservation and Development Commission protects and enhances San Francisco Bay and advances the Bay's responsible, productive, and equitable uses for this and future generations as we face a changing climate and rising sea levels.

## Core Values

### Equitable & Inclusive

BCDC's actions and activities are shaped by its environmental justice and social equity principles and its Racial Equity Action Plan.

### Collaborative & Service-Oriented

BCDC works successfully with a broad range of stakeholders whose experiences, needs, and desires BCDC always seeks to understand and respect.

### Science-Based & Data-Driven

BCDC uses the most reliable, relevant, and accurate information available to make decisions.

### Trusted & Accountable

BCDC strives to be transparent, consistent, fair, and responsive, which leads to greater public trust and confidence in its processes and decisions.

### Agile & Proactive

BCDC adapts its organization, knowledge, and processes to anticipate future conditions and circumstances that are complex and dynamic.





# Vision

**BCDC will be a proactive and responsive, equitable, and collaborative organization that successfully addresses the regulatory and planning challenges facing the Bay, its shoreline, and the communities that it serves.**

## Goals

- 1** Lead regional planning efforts that result in successful and equitable adaptation, restoration, development, and public access projects for the Bay Area in light of rising sea levels.
- 2** Improve BCDC's regulatory and planning functions to create a more unified and consistent regional-scale approach to managing the Bay and its shoreline in light of the uncertain future caused by rising sea levels.
- 3** Implement equity initiatives and practices throughout BCDC's policies, programs, and processes.
- 4** Communicate more successfully externally with stakeholders and internally among divisions.
- 5** Build and maintain an adequately resourced, responsive, and diverse organization that can meet its growing challenges more effectively and sustainably.

## Anticipated Outcomes

- Through BCDC's bold leadership and collaboration, the Bay Area is prepared to adapt faster, better, and more equitably to rising sea levels, protect and restore its natural habitats, and increase access to the Bay.
- Enlarge the focus of BCDC's regulatory program to permit larger-scale and more complex subregional projects that are aligned with the Regional Shoreline Adaptation Plan.
- By advancing equity practices internally and externally BCDC will seek to eliminate past historic disparities and achieve tangible equitable results for its stakeholders and the communities it serves moving forward.
- BCDC will be more transparent and accessible to all, and Commissioners, staff, and stakeholders will have a shared knowledge of the agency's priorities and objectives and have meaningful opportunities to shape policies.
- BCDC will better fulfill its mission by increasing its capacity, and attracting and retaining a more diverse staff and Commission who are responsive to the variety of diverse communities around the Bay.

# Goal 1

**Lead regional planning efforts that result in successful and equitable adaptation, restoration, development, and public access projects for the Bay Area in light of rising sea levels.**

## Anticipated Outcome

Through BCDC's bold leadership and collaboration, the Bay Area is prepared to adapt faster, better, and more equitably to rising sea levels, protect and restore its natural habitats, and increase access to the Bay.

## Strategies

- 1.1 Successfully lead the Bay Adapt Program that will result in more aware, collaborative, and stronger frontline communities with access to resources to adapt to rising sea levels.
- 1.2 Develop an equitable and measurable Regional Shoreline Adaptation Plan in collaboration with government agencies, frontline communities, and a wide variety of stakeholders.
- 1.3 Continue to support efforts to restore and enhance the Bay's natural resources and increase public access to the Bay.
- 1.4 Improve regional sediment management and increase the beneficial reuse of sediment to enhance, restore, and adapt ecosystems, particularly in light of rising sea levels.
- 1.5 Proactively and regularly update the Bay Plan to reflect changing policy needs.

## Goal 2

**Improve BCDC's regulatory and planning functions to create a more unified and consistent regional-scale approach to managing the Bay and its shoreline in light of the uncertain future caused by rising sea levels.**

### Anticipated Outcome

Enlarge the focus of BCDC's regulatory program to permit larger-scale and more complex subregional projects that are aligned with the Regional Shoreline Adaptation Plan.

### Strategies

- 2.1 Determine whether and how BCDC's regulatory and planning authority and jurisdiction should be expanded to foster larger scale adaptation efforts.
- 2.2 Update existing regulatory and planning operations to implement laws and policies more consistently, transparently, and efficiently.
- 2.3 Increase the capacity of the Regulatory Division to execute its core functions more effectively.
- 2.4 Integrate BCDC's new Compliance function seamlessly into the regulatory and planning programs.

## Goal 3

**Implement equity initiatives and practices throughout BCDC's policies, programs, and processes.**

### Anticipated Outcome

By advancing equity practices internally and externally BCDC will seek to eliminate past historic disparities and achieve tangible equitable results for its stakeholders and the communities it serves moving forward.

### Strategies

- 3.1 Prioritize BCDC's Environmental Justice Program by identifying BCDC's specific policies, programs, and practices that have led, or currently lead, to inequitable outcomes, and work to resolve them.
- 3.2 Complete, adopt, and implement BCDC's Racial Equity Action Plan.
- 3.3 Formalize and strengthen Commissioner and staff equity-based awareness and education in transparent and measurable ways.
- 3.4 Collaborate with other California state government organizations to improve statewide policies and practices that will result in outcomes that are more equitable.
- 3.5 Develop long-term relationships and partnerships between and among BCDC and the Bay Area Tribal Communities to increase authentic and lasting engagement.

## Goal 4

**Communicate more successfully externally with stakeholders and internally among divisions.**

### Anticipated Outcome

BCDC will be more transparent and accessible to all, and Commissioners, staff, and stakeholders will have a shared knowledge of the agency's priorities and objectives and have meaningful opportunities to shape policies.

### Strategies

- 4.1 Listen to, communicate with, and engage stakeholders in ways that are more accessible to all, increase awareness of BCDC and its roles and processes, and foster successful community dialogues.
- 4.2 Hire a Public Information Officer to develop more effective internal and external communications.
- 4.3 Establish a systematic and comprehensive learning and training program for Commissioners, staff, and Advisory Board members to share knowledge, improve collaboration, and retain institutional history.

## Goal 5

**Build and maintain an adequately resourced, responsive, and diverse organization that can meet its growing challenges more effectively and sustainably.**

### Anticipated Outcome

BCDC will better fulfill its mission by increasing its capacity, and attracting and retaining a more diverse staff and Commission who are responsive to the variety of diverse communities around the Bay.

### Strategies

- |     |  |     |   |
|-----|--|-----|---|
| 5.1 | Increase organizational capacity to adequately meet the demands for BCDC's services, both externally and internally. | 5.3 | Work within the Administration and the collective bargaining system to level-up staff base salaries with those in local and regional governments. |
| 5.2 | Actively recruit, hire, and retain staff that reflect the Bay Area's diverse population.                             | 5.4 | Prioritize and implement necessary technological upgrades to improve work processes.  |

# 03 Implementation





## THE NEXT 3 YEARS

A strategic plan sets and aligns an organization’s mission, vision, and goals so their integration fuels success. Rarely does an organization complete its draft plan within its proposed time frame, but successfully drafting the plan is probably just as important as actually successfully completing it. That work signals intent, the plan’s implementation defines purpose, and staff coming together to work in an organized and focused fashion creates a positive attitude, acceptance, and willingness to make difficult choices and take on difficult tasks.

A public sector organization’s statutory language should not be mistaken for developing a strategic approach to fulfilling that authority. For example, BCDC’s strategic plan concentrates on the changing circumstances we face while we ensure that approved development projects use the appropriate amount of fill and provide maximum feasible public access, consistent with the project. While readers will not find those exact words in the plan, they can be assured that they underlie the plan’s goals and objectives. Just as important, Commissioners and staff share those expectations, and the policies on which those expectations are based are discussed publicly at Commission meetings.

This Strategic Plan will be a working document. Each Senior Staff member will be responsible for some portion of the plan’s implementation, and the Executive Director will report on the plan’s progress three times annually. BCDC staff are working now – in January 2023 – to finalize an easy-to-measure Action Plan that will be publically reviewed three time per year.