



# Foster City Levee Improvements Project Proactive Communication Plan

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Submitted by Ryder Todd Smith  
Jen Nentwig



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## Overview

Foster City is currently implementing a \$90 million project to make necessary improvements to the Foster City Levee System (Levee). The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) first notified the City in 2014 of the need for improvements, and in 2018 Foster City residents voted to approve a \$90 million bond measure funding the project with nearly 81% support. Following the development and certification of an Environmental Impact Report on the project, the City was granted a permit from the Bay Conservation and Development Commission (BCDC) on December 19, 2019.

With the BCDC permit secured, the City published a call for bids from construction companies interested in taking on the project. On July 20, 2020, the City Council awarded a construction contract to Shimmick Construction Company, Inc. to complete the project. As the beginning of construction neared, Shimmick Construction Company detailed its plan to close the trail through three phases to complete the project within the target budget and timeline while providing as much trail access as possible.

During and after a November 16, 2020 City Council meeting where the phased closing of the Bay Trail was discussed, community members shared questions and concerns regarding the project. In particular, members of the community sought additional explanation of the project timeline and exactly how construction activities may impact access to sections of the trail.

Additionally, during this time period, misinformation was spreading rapidly regarding the nature of the trail closure and the duration of the closure. A Change.org petition claimed a 36-month closure of the trail though in reality the projected closure was for 19 months. This petition garnered more than 2,500 backers and raised concerns among the staff and city council for various reasons.

With that background in mind, the City engaged Tripepi Smith to work with City Staff and other members of the Levee Improvements Project team to facilitate a robust Proactive Communication Plan. This Plan details new, additional communication strategies and tactics that will supplement ongoing communication efforts, such as City-issued press releases and mandatory noticing, signage, etc. (Those efforts will continue as planned by other Levee Improvements Project team members.) This Proactive Communication Plan will serve as both a resource and as a commitment to effective communication and meaningful engagement opportunities for this community project.

Effective communication and informed community members are key to success in any City project. By improving communication processes, toolsets and tactics, Foster City can communicate early and often in order to build trust, dialogue, engagement, understanding,

and relationships within the community. This Plan outlines the objectives, tools and tactics to achieve these outcomes. Effective communication and public engagement means:

1. Improving public access to timely, accurate, consistent, and easy-to-digest information about the Levee Improvements Project;
2. Providing multiple easy, meaningful and successful ways to engage with the City and other project stakeholders;
3. Ensuring accurate and timely information is widely disseminated and absorbed by interested parties to ensure the community is operating with the same facts when discussing or evaluating the project; and
4. Promoting transparency regarding the Project, including the phased trail closure timeline and any variables that may impact the timeline over the course of construction.

As a result of broader communication and engagement efforts, Foster City hopes to raise awareness and understanding of this \$90 million investment in the community's critical infrastructure. It is also notable that this is that largest public works project in the history of the City. It is affecting a large areas of residential neighborhoods, the trail and other logistical impacts throughout the community. Major improvements require inconvenience and temporary negative impacts, but the long-term benefits should (and in this case do) far outweigh the negatives.

### Goals of the Proactive Communication Plan

1. Define Communities of Interest
2. Identify Strategies
3. Introduce Initial Key Messages
4. Establish Tactics/Timeline
5. Outline How to Measure Success

### Foundational Points

There are certain realities that pre-date this project or are related to this project that should be recognized as core to how the City and related consultants plan and proceed.

1. Nearly 81% of residents voted to tax themselves to build the needed levee enhancements. This was based upon trust that the project would be completed in an efficient manner and would deliver the flood zone mitigation goals that would reduce the cost of flood insurance to property owners throughout the City. That is a high number and reflects the fact that a huge majority of the public recognize this is a critical improvement for the City to complete.
2. Major construction projects like this levee are inherently complicated, loud, dirty, inconvenient and have temporary negative effects on neighborhoods and property adjacent to the construction work. Just like you cannot remodel a kitchen in a house without making a mess, so too can you not take on a project of this magnitude without the related temporary negative impacts. But, hopefully, we all welcome the final result and decades of benefit it will deliver.
3. Complex infrastructure projects have timelines that fluctuate based upon a full range of factors beyond the controls of the City or its general contractors, including weather, environmental matters, legal hurdles, pandemics, supply chain constraints or human error. Good planning anticipates the uncontrollable and tries to mitigate for those factors. But there is likely no single person or organization that knows exactly how long the project will take to complete in the end. The City's obligation is to share the best available information once it has become available and to hold its general contractor to the terms of the engagement.
4. Foster City has a history of active partnership with the community and places a priority on transparency. Given the complexity of the project and nature of the effort, there will be a need for community feedback that helps improve the overall project and gives the community a chance to be partners in its success. Everyone has a shared interest in the timely completion of the project.
5. Keeping the levee trail open during the project is not an option under the current agreement. Staying on budget with the taxpayer-approved bond measure and per the terms of the project plan, closure of the levee trail is required. Options may exist to rotate areas of closure or to speed up the overall project to reduce the number of expected trail closure months from the 19 that are currently planned. Pursuit of such options will add costs to the total project.

## Communities of Interest

While it is certainly necessary for Foster City to communicate with the community as a whole, there are also more defined audiences to consider when it comes to proactive communication regarding the Levee Improvements Project. The following is a list of different audiences that could be engaged as part of this Proactive Communication Plan:

- 33,900 Foster City residents
  - Registered voters
  - Seniors (65+)
  - Adults (18-64)
  - Youth (under age 18)
  - English-as-second-language speakers (ESL)
- Cyclists/cycling groups
- Running/walking groups
- Residents neighboring construction area
- Homeowner Associations (HOAs)
- Online community groups
- Local faith groups
- Local cultural/ethnic communities
- Local business owners/employers (present and future)
- Chamber of Commerce
- Local business employees (present and future)
- Real Estate Agents and Agencies



## Strategies

This section of the Plan outlines the additional communication strategies Foster City can leverage to increase public awareness and understanding of the Levee Improvements Project. This Plan includes a later section detailing the specific tactics involved in implementing these strategies.

### **Increased Stakeholder Engagement**

Tripepi Smith will work with the City to further define key stakeholders/stakeholder groups related to the Levee Improvements Project. Through this analysis, Tripepi Smith will help the City proactively consider affected community members and better understand their potential concerns. Once key stakeholders are clearly identified, the City will have the ability to better target expanded communications and potentially liaise with community members to ensure effective, two-way communications.

### **Social Media Monitoring and Support**

Tripepi Smith will help the City listen to and manage social media to ensure misinformation about the Levee Improvements Project does not spread online without the communication team's knowledge. Tripepi Smith will leverage its expertise with social media tools such as Hootsuite to provide 7-day-a-week monitoring of accounts tied to the City (such as the City of Foster City and the Foster City Police Department). In addition, Tripepi Smith will listen to public social media posts and track mentions of Foster City and related key terms. This work will include implementation of the Zen City solution. Should misinformation be identified, Tripepi Smith will pre-arrange response strategy or advise the City on how to best address the concerns.

### **Strategic Messaging**

Tripepi Smith will assist the City with strategic messaging for the Levee Improvements Project by developing and continually updating key messages and talking points. Synchronizing internal communications is essential to the ability to effectively communicate externally, and our strategic messaging will ensure Foster City leadership and staff speak with a unified voice regarding key issues and timelines.

### **Internet Strategy & Website**

Tripepi Smith recommends creating a dedicated project website and related URL (FCLevee.com for example) to be the primary source of all levee project information. This

platform, once developed, would be the official source of all information, be search engine optimized, and have traffic driven to it by social media, general media and other assets either controlled by the City or used by the community. To ensure this site and its information is easily discovered, we urge consideration of a digital ad campaign, targeted at anyone within the city limits of Foster City, to ensure they have ample opportunity to discover the facts related to levee project. Finally, we foresee this platform becoming the go-to source of information, whether it is excerpted staff presentation from the latest Council Meeting to animated explainer videos that Tripepi Smith produces to bring clarity to the public about the project. We also foresee content such as a timeline, blog posts, new stories, video updates, frequently asked questions and a platform for community feedback or questions.

### **Increased Content Creation**

Tripepi Smith will work with the City to create clear, accurate, easy-to-digest content in a variety of formats, which may include: infographics, animated videos, press releases, news articles, flyers, social media content and graphics, website content, FAQs and more. Tripepi Smith will develop content that could be shared consistently to ensure that residents receive a regular, proactive flow of information regarding the project.

Tripepi Smith will coordinate with the City and other stakeholders to determine key project milestones and develop relevant content that anticipates community members' questions and concerns. All content would be clear and explicit regarding project impacts and associated timelines.

### **Public Engagement Planning and Facilitation**

Tripepi Smith is prepared to plan and facilitate public engagement forums for the City, whether virtual or (eventually) in-person. Tripepi Smith is available to plan the set-up of the event, prepare speakers with anticipated Q&A and talking points, support and help facilitate the technology for the event, and handle communications with residents leading up to and following the event.



## Key Messages

Tripepi Smith and senior staff generated an initial list of three Key Fact Messages to advance the goals of the Proactive Communication Plan:

**Message 1: The Levee Improvements Project protects our community from the potential of future flooding disasters, while alleviating the residents and businesses from having to pay significantly more for flood insurance.**

- Supporting Point 1: According to FEMA, if the height of the Levee is not raised to meet current standards then Foster City will be designated a flood zone.
- Supporting Point 2: If the project is not completed and FEMA designates the City a flood zone, then all property owners in the City with federally-backed mortgages will need to buy flood insurance.
- Supporting Point 3: It is important now to make this investment in critical infrastructure to prevent Foster City community members from a potential flooding disaster in the future, significant increases in homeownership costs and to protect property values.

**Message 2: Foster City is committed to efficiently using the bond funding that was overwhelmingly approved by voters.**

- Supporting Point 1: Foster City residents voted in 2018 to fund the project through a \$90 million bond measure, with a margin of 80.6% approving.
- Supporting Point 2: Foster City's general contractor and construction management team plan to have the project completed within the \$90 million budget, while having the least possible impact to residents.
- Supporting Point 3: Altering the project plans to further minimize trail closures would add additional costs and potentially require an additional public bond measure. Further, the act of changing the plan could itself add to the duration of the project.

**Message 3: Foster City is working to maintain as much public trail access as possible during the project.**

- Supporting Point 1: According to the current plan for phased closures, the Levee Trail is expected to be entirely closed for 19 months (out of the total project duration of 30 months).
- Supporting Point 2: Foster City is committed to transparently sharing information regarding the project timeline, incremental milestone updates, and variables that will likely affect the timeline over the course of the project.

- Supporting Point 3: While the City understands the negative impact of trail closures, closing sections of the trail during construction activities are necessary to ensure the safety of our community members and the efficiency of the construction project.

## Tactics/Timeline

The tactics outlined below will augment existing communications to proactively align messaging and advance public understanding of the Levee Improvements Project. Based upon the strategies outlined earlier in the Plan, these tactics are designed to meet communication needs identified through our initial observations and feedback received from the community, City leaders and staff, and other members of the Levee Improvements Project team.

<u>Tactic</u>	<u>Description</u>	<u>Timeline</u>
Stronger Integration of Communications and Project Management Function	As the new Project Manager settles into the role of being a central point of oversight on the project, the other team members will need to rally behind and coordinate their information sharing efforts so that communication-focused team members can provide timely and helpful updates and notice to the public.	ASAP
New Standalone Website	A new, dedicated website and related URL will be launched as a go-to source for project information. The new website will offer improved functionality and improve ease of access to important information for residents.	Launch in January
Social Media Listening/Reporting/ Responding	Tripepi Smith will coordinate with the City team to regular listen to public social media content and coordinate with City staff regarding notable mentions and trends. This can include use of the recently cemented Zen City demonstration project tool. Additionally, we need to coordinate internal information sharing for speedy responses to public queries.	ASAP/ongoing
“Living” Q&A	Questions will be gathered by Levee Improvements Project team members in a shared Google Doc, and standardized	ASAP/ongoing

	<p>responses will be developed/routed/approved. All Q&amp;A will then be populated to a public, continuously updated FAQ section on the new standalone webpage. Each Q&amp;A will have a date stamp to identify when it was last updated.</p>	
<p>Social Media Posts/Digital Ads</p>	<p>Tripepi Smith will draft 1-2 social media posts per week to provide a regular stream of clear, bite-sized pieces of project information for community members. Tripepi Smith recommends boosting each post to best reach Facebook users residing in Foster City. Preliminary budget should be about \$800 a month for boosted post support to ensure the content is being widely discovered.</p>	<p>1-2 per week</p>
<p>Regular Project Update Videos</p>	<p>Tripepi Smith will work with the project team and City leaders to facilitate regular project update videos. The short videos (approx. 1 minute) can feature the Mayor and/or other City leaders, sharing the latest project news.</p>	<p>Weekly at outset; adjust over time if/as needed</p>
<p>Animated Videos</p>	<p>Tripepi Smith will develop short, animated video(s) to provide visual explanation of the project goal, the projected timeline, impacts over time, etc. These videos will be posted to the standalone webpage and incorporated into social media content.</p>	<p>At least monthly at outset; adjust over time as needed</p>
<p>Infographics</p>	<p>Tripepi Smith will develop infographics to distill important project facts and figures, such as the project timeline, into easy-to-digest visuals. These infographics will be posted to the standalone webpage and incorporated into social media content.</p>	<p>At least monthly at outset; adjust over time as needed</p>
<p>Communication Metric Reporting</p>	<p>Provide a monthly dashboard to all parties updating them on communication activities,</p>	<p>First Report February 5,</p>

	reach of content, engagement levels and other project-related communication data points.	2021 for January 2021
Public Meetings (Virtual or In-Person)	Tripepi Smith will work with the project team to facilitate regular public meetings, whether virtual or (eventually) in-person. These meetings will be publicized, hosted at a consistent time and available via Zoom. They will be recorded and made available as videos on the launched project website and through social media.	Bi-Weekly at outset; adjust over time as needed

## Measuring What Matters

Numbers don't lie, which is why the Proactive Communication Plan requires a firm set of metrics to assess its campaign effectiveness and inform future communication decisions.

Tripepi Smith operates around several core axioms, including:

$$\text{Content} \times \text{Distribution} = \text{IMPACT}$$

Strong engagement looks to both the quality of the content we are generating and the extent to which it is being distributed. To measure the latter, we should ask the following questions:

- Are we reaching peoples within the city limits of Foster City? How often are we reaching them?
- Are people opening our emails or subscribing to our email communications?
- Are people visiting our website assets to learn more about the project? What content are they finding most helpful?
- communicating as much as we should about the project, and in a timely manner?
- Are we communicating the right information—the most important information, the information the public wants, and the information necessary to accomplish our mission?
- Are we using the most effective tools to communicate?
- How can we communicate more consistently in both form (visual presentation) and substance (message)?

Some basic measures of success we will track include:

- **Reach and penetration** (quantitative)

- Website traffic (number of sessions, pageviews, unique visitors, etc.)
- Social media post Reach
- Digital ad impressions
- Public attendance count at events/meetings
- **Level of community engagement** (quantitative & qualitative)
  - Website behavior (pages visited, time spent on site, actions taken, etc.)
  - Public participation at events/meetings
  - Social media comments/replies and direct messages
  - Digital ad activity (clickthroughs)
  - Public inquiries (phone calls, emails, in-person)
- **Media tracking** (quantitative)
  - Mentions in Google Alerts
  - Mentions in social media (whether by individuals or in Groups/Pages)
  - Success rate of local/regional media picking up City messaging/posts

Based on the Plan implementation, we may also conduct “staged measurement”—measuring at various milestones to allow for course-correction if we are not achieving the desired results.

## Communication Asset List

The following is a list of communications assets that we would recommend creating for the project. Some will require ongoing updates, others may be evergreen. Some already exist.

- Project Timeline Graphic
- Project Map with Pinpoint Project Updates
- Project Slick Summarizing the Project
- Photos of Construction Work in Process / New Elements
- Trail Signage
- Door Hangers
- Mailers to Community
- Animated Video Explaining the Project
- Fiscal Summary on Project and Budget Adherence
- Prioritized FAQ Document
- Standardized Community Presentation PowerPoint Deck
- Routine Project Update Video Shorts
- Canva Graphics for SM Postings on Levee Project