



DATE: September 18, 2017

TO: Mayor and Members of the City Council

VIA: Kevin M. Miller, City Manager

FROM: Jeff Moneda, Public Works Director/District Engineer  
Doris L. Palmer, Communications Director/City Clerk

SUBJECT: GENERAL OBLIGATION BOND MEASURE POLLING RESULTS  
SUMMARY FOR LEVEE IMPROVEMENTS

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### RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the City Council receive the report on independent public opinion research conducted by EMC Research relating to the Levee Protection Planning and Improvements Project (Attachment 1).

It is also recommended that the City continue working with TBWB Strategies to prepare a general obligation bond measure for the June 5, 2018 ballot and to develop and implement a public engagement and outreach plan to educate the public regarding the Levee Protection Planning and Improvements Project and related general obligation bond election to fund levee improvements.

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Voter approval from two-thirds of those voters casting ballots is required to pass a general obligation bond measure to fund the Levee Protection Planning and Improvements Project. To gauge the potential feasibility of such a measure, the City engaged an independent public opinion research firm to conduct a statistically-reliable survey of local voters. The results of this recently completed survey suggest that a general obligation bond measure to fund levee improvements is feasible and that the following three components are high priorities for the Foster City community:

- Protecting essential City services during storms, like fire, police, water,

electricity, sewer, and transportation infrastructure

- Making improvements to the levee that protect Foster City homes, schools, businesses, and roads from flooding
- Preventing Foster City from being designated by FEMA as a flood hazard area and avoiding expensive, mandatory flood insurance requirements for local residents and businesses

The poll results also indicate that if the ballot measure was put forth before the community today, without any additional information being given, 72% are likely to vote yes and 23% are likely to vote no. The survey also presented the type of discussion and debate that would occur during a bond election to fund levee improvements. While support fluctuated moderately with the introduction of this information, support remained clustered around the two-thirds approval threshold, suggesting the bond measure is feasible with the appropriate voter outreach and engagement strategies to ensure community awareness of key issues related to the measure.

## BACKGROUND

On May 8, 2017, the City Council directed staff to proceed with the “2050 Sea Level Rise Plus Adaptability” Scenario for the Levee Protection Planning & Improvements Project, to further develop and analyze a future offshore adaptation strategy, and proceed with a general obligation bond financing alternative over a 30-year period.

With the possibility of a general obligation bond measure going before the voters for the June 5, 2018 election, staff researched and received presentations and proposals from consulting and research firms. Following an analysis of those presentations and proposals, it was determined that EMC Research was the most qualified firm to conduct a public opinion poll for Foster City.

On July 17, 2017, the City of Foster City commissioned a survey of local residents to measure opinions related to potential improvements to the levee. EMC Research conducted a mixed-mode/hybrid survey from August 14, 2017 through August 24, 2017. Using proven survey methodology to ensure accuracy of the results, information was collected from 452 survey participants. The survey was conducted among a randomly selected sample of registered voters in the City, so not all residents received the survey; the final data is demographically and geographically representative of Foster City voters likely to participate in a June 2018 election based on analysis of each voter’s past voting history. It is important to note that the survey was completed prior to the onset of Hurricane Harvey and related news coverage of the flooding in Texas and Louisiana. Accordingly, these survey results were not skewed in any way as a result of these events that occurred after the completion of the interviewing.

## ANALYSIS

The poll results show that Foster City voters recognize the importance of taking action to protect the City from flooding, safety and infrastructure hazards, and expensive mandatory flood insurance requirements. At this time, a general obligation bond measure for levee improvements does appear feasible for the June 2018 ballot. Initial uninformed support for the measure starts at approximately 72% and increases to 74% as specific components of the measure and potential community benefits are explained in detail. With the introduction/testing of negative information about the measure, support dips just below the two-thirds threshold required for voter approval of a general obligation bond measure. It is important to note that some of the negative statements tested are factually inaccurate, but do represent the kind of misinformation that is often part of the discussion during an election. Staff and the City's expert consultants recommend proceeding to prepare a general obligation bond measure for the June 5, 2018 ballot. The deadline for the City Council to adopt a resolution calling for a June 5, 2018 bond election is March 9, 2018. Staff will collaborate with TBWB Strategies and legal counsel to prepare the general obligation bond measure documents for review and approval by the Council prior to this deadline. In addition, Staff and the City's consultants recommend developing and implementing a thorough informational outreach effort to raise awareness of the issues related to the levee project and the potential impacts on Foster City residents to ensure an informed debate about the proposed measure. Representatives from EMC Research and TBWB Strategies will be present at the meeting to discuss the survey findings, recommendations, and the process and timeline for executing the next steps for a general obligation bond measure to fund levee improvements.

## FISCAL IMPACT

There is no fiscal impact associated with this update.

Attachment:

- Attachment 1 - Survey Results Summary