Policy

Coastal Flood Management Policy

Approved by Council April 14, 2026

CITY OF VANCOUVER

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1 BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Vancouver is exposed to coastal flooding from surrounding tidally influenced waterbodies, including the Fraser River and the Salish Sea (English Bay, False Creek, Burrard Inlet). Flood risk is highest along the Fraser River and the Jericho to Kitsilano shorelines of English Bay. Over the long-term, climate change, including sea level rise, is expected to expose additional areas to coastal flooding, most notably along English Bay, False Creek and into the False Creek Flats.

This policy has been established to guide the City of Vancouver (the "City") in making consistent decisions related to implementing coastal flood management measures, recognizing the fiscal and other resource, jurisdictional and regulatory constraints facing the City as well as the need for support from other levels of government. This policy focuses on coastal flood management and does not cover matters such as erosion control or coastal habitat restoration, unless they are specifically related to or integrated with coastal flood management.

The City is authorized by provincial legislation[1] to do the following related to coastal flood management:

- Identify and regulate flood hazards in land use planning and development,
- Conduct community-wide hazard, risk, and vulnerability assessments,
- Undertake structural and non-structural flood management measures, and
- Conduct emergency management, which includes mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery.

The City is not a diking authority under the provincial *Dike Maintenance Act*. The City derives authority from the *Vancouver Charter* to undertake certain coastal flood management actions, including *Vancouver Charter* section 302(o) which provides the authority to regulate, build, and maintain dikes. This policy divides these coastal flood management actions into two categories: Non-Structural Flood Management Measures (e.g. land use planning, regulation of building design) and Structural Flood Management Measures (e.g. dikes, flood walls).

This policy supports a blended approach of non-structural and structural approaches to build long-term flood resilience.

The following Departments will work collaboratively as needed when undertaking coastal flood management actions: Engineering Services; Planning, Urban Design & Sustainability; Development, Buildings & Licensing; Real Estate, Environment and Facilities Management; and Park Board.

[1]The *Vancouver Charter* (including ss. 302(0), 306(1)(cc)), the *Land Title Act* and the Bare Land Strata Regulations under the *Strata Property Act*.

Structural Flood Management Measures in the Coastal Floodplain will be owned and maintained by the City where land tenure, including rights-of-way, allows except for Structural Flood Management Measures owned/operated by a diking authority and/or First Nation.

The City acknowledges that coastal flood management involves many actors and will work with the Province, the federal government, major asset owners and operators, and First Nations to advance coastal resilience.

1.1 Terms Referenced in Policy

Table 1: Terms Referenced in Policy

Term	Definition
City Engineer	City Engineer appointed under section 288 of the *Vancouver Charter* or their designate.
Coastal Floodplains	Those lands consisting of the Burrard Inlet, English Bay, False Creek, and Fraser River floodplains within the City's designated floodplain as described in the Vancouver Building By-law. Coastal Floodplains are the entirety of the designated floodplain excepting the Still Creek floodplain.
Core City Services	City-provided transportation, water, sewer, drainage, solid waste removal, and emergency management services.
Emergency	The same meaning as defined in the *Emergency and Disaster Management Act*, as may be amended or replaced from time to time.
Flood	A flood stemming from tidally influenced water bodies only and excludes pluvial and riverine flood hazards.
Neighbouring Jurisdictions	The authorities having jurisdiction over flood management within and adjacent to Vancouver, as applicable, and includes neighbouring municipalities, First Nations, and diking authorities, the Province and University Endowment Lands administration, Canada and the Vancouver Fraser Port Authority.
Non-Structural Flood Management Measures	City coastal flood management measures that are not Structural Flood Management Measures and may include flood mapping and risk assessment, land use planning, land use regulations, building by-law regulations, or other by-laws and regulations to: • manage development in floodplain areas, • promote flood-resilient construction, or • promote the introduction, reestablishment, or retention of natural features to manage water to mitigate coastal flood impacts.

Term	Definition
Structural Flood Management Measures	The building of physical structures to mitigate flood risks and protect physically vulnerable areas and may include dikes, flood walls, tide gates, and berms which aim to control the flow of water and reduce flood damage from coastal storm surges. The definition includes nature-based components of these physical structures. The definition excludes the following: • sandbagging, • shoreline erosion protection works which are intended only for the purpose of protecting the erosion of land by currents and waves, unless the erosion protection works are part of a dike, flood wall, or other type of Structural Flood Management Measure, and • structural fill used in achieving the Flood Construction Level elevation requirements for new buildings specified in the Vancouver Building By-law.

2 INTENT

The intent of this policy is to articulate the City's role in coastal flood management and to support planning and implementation of Structural and Non-Structural Flood Management Measures.

This policy applies to Vancouver's Coastal Floodplains.

This policy may be supplemented by administrative and operational policies and manuals established by: City Council; the General Manager of Planning, Urban Design & Sustainability; the General Manager of Engineering Services; the Chief Building Official (CBO); or the Director of the Vancouver Emergency Management Agency.

2.1 Principles

The following principles were considered in the development of this policy and should be considered in its application. Principles of Equity, Reconciliation, and Resilience reflect the principles of the Vancouver Official Development Plan.

2.1.1 Equity: advance an equity-based approach to coastal flood management informed by the City's Equity Framework and consideration of who pays for and who benefits from coastal flood protection measures.

2.1.2 Financial Sustainability: adhere to the City's corporate financial guiding principles of fiscal prudence; affordability and cost effectiveness; and asset management.

2.1.3 Reconciliation: continue to strengthen relationships of mutual respect and understanding with xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam Indian Band), Sḵwx̱wú7mesh Úxwumixw (Squamish Nation), and səlilwətaɬ (Tsleil-Waututh Nation) who steward the lands and waters within their traditional territories. Coastal flooding has the potential to reduce the already limited land base available to the local Nations.

Reconciliation in this work may include integrating Indigenous rights, perspectives, and knowledge in City coastal flood management planning and decision-making processes, collaborating on coastal flood management in the designated floodplain generally and particularly at the interface of City lands and the local Nations' reserve lands, and with respect to cultural heritage and/or archeological sites in the floodplain.

2.1.4 Resilience: support the proactive planning for an uncertain future so we can withstand, adapt, recover, and thrive in the face of coastal flooding and commit to building resilience through safe and adaptive buildings and infrastructure, as well as supporting social connections and healthy ecosystems.

3 POLICIES

3.1 This policy clarifies that the City's role in coastal flood management is limited to:

(a) Coastal flood management planning and coordination, which may include coordination with Neighbouring Jurisdictions as well as collaborating with xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam Indian Band), Sḵwx̱wú7mesh Úxwumixw (Squamish Nation), and səlilwətaɬ (Tsleil-Waututh Nation);

(b) Land use planning and building and development regulation;

(c) Protecting City facilities and infrastructure;

(d) Preserving and continuing to provide Core City Services; and

(e) Constructing, securing construction of, and operating City-owned Structural Flood Management Measures in specified circumstances only.

3.2 The City will prioritize managing coastal flood risk through adaptive, Non-Structural Flood Management Measures and, where feasible and practical, through the use of natural features to manage water.

3.3 The City may construct or secure construction of Structural Flood Management Measures in the circumstances listed below:

(a) when determined by the City Engineer to be necessary to:

(i) preserve City-owned infrastructure and facilities,

(ii) continue providing Core City Services, or

(iii) support connections to Structural Flood Management Measures of Neighbouring Jurisdictions

and where City resources, including the availability of personnel and funding, allow.

(b) where successfully petitioned by property owners for a Local Improvement pursuant to Part XXIV of the *Vancouver Charter* and the Local Improvement Procedure By-law No. 3614 and the City has sufficient financial capacity and personnel.

3.4 This policy clarifies that the City's role is not to construct or secure construction of Structural Flood Management Measures for the sole purpose of protecting property that is not City-owned except in the circumstances described in sections 3.3(b) of this policy.

3.5 As part of the City's development approval process for projects within the Coastal Floodplain, the City may require additional studies or information to determine suitability for development and to identify potential flood risk mitigation measures.

3.6 The City may require landowners to construct and deliver, or provide land for, Structural Flood Management Measures as a condition of development.

3.7 The City will require unencumbered land tenure in its favour over all new Structural Flood Management Measures and will own and be responsible for the maintenance and associated costs of the infrastructure following implementation under the oversight of the City Engineer. This excludes Structural Flood Management Measures owned/operated by a diking authority or First Nation.

3.8 Where the City does not have land tenure in its favour for existing Structural Flood Management Measures not owned or operated by a diking authority or First Nation, the City will take steps to establish land tenure or to have the structures decommissioned.

3.9 City infrastructure renewal projects should, where feasible and practical, take advantage of opportunities to integrate appropriate Structural and/or Non-Structural Flood Management Measures.

3.10 The City may create flood management plans using a strategic, risk-based approach that incorporates the principles in section 2.1 of this policy.

3.11 Updates to this policy will consider observed sea level rise, flood events, and evolving provincial and federal guidance on sea level rise projections.

4 LIMITATIONS AND DEPARTURES

4.1 The City acknowledges that circumstances may warrant a departure from this policy. As such, the City Engineer and Director of Planning retain the discretion to deviate from this policy.

4.2 Nothing in this policy restricts or fetters the discretion of Council.