

OUR COASTAL CITY

Summary of Sea Level Rise Adaptation in the City of Nanaimo

September 2026



PREPARED FOR:



City of Nanaimo

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Acknowledgements

The City of Nanaimo is located on the Traditional Territory of the Snuneymuxw First Nation.

This project is led by the City of Nanaimo, working with Snuneymuxw First Nation, as part of the *Nanaimo Sea Level Rise Management Plan* initiative. Technical work led by Northwest Hydraulic Consultants Ltd. (NHC) with engagement and planning support from Lanarc 2015 Consultants Ltd. (Lanarc). We would like to extend our gratitude to all parties and people who have provided time, knowledge, and information to assist in this work.

Disclaimer

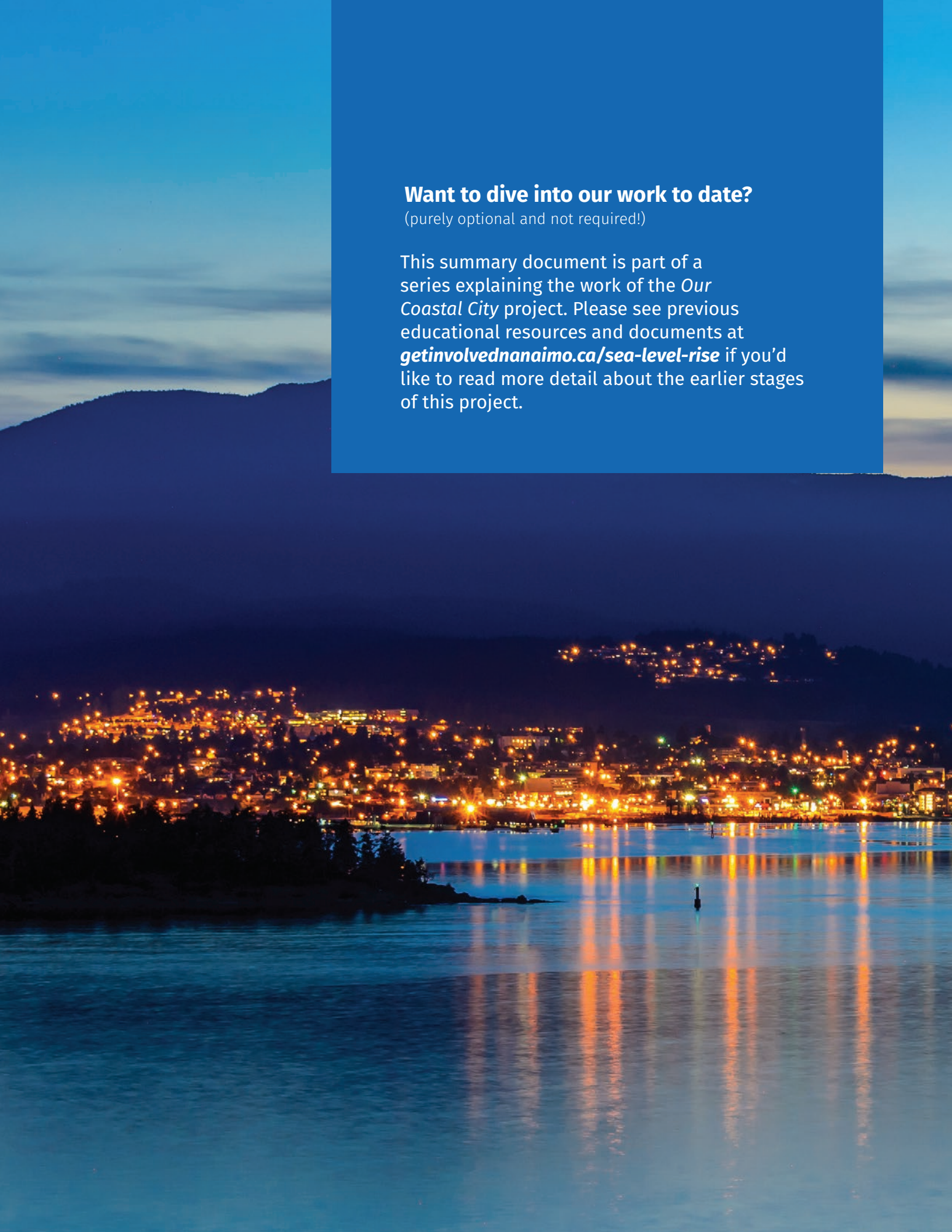
This summary provides a brief overview of the *Nanaimo Sea Level Rise Management Plan* document prepared for the City of Nanaimo. It has been assembled to summarize key information from the broader technical report and is provided for convenience only. Refer to the full report (Northwest Hydraulic Consultants Ltd. 2026. *Nanaimo Sea Level Rise Management Plan*) for full discussion of methods, results, and limitations.

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Want to dive into our work to date?

(purely optional and not required!)

This summary document is part of a series explaining the work of the *Our Coastal City* project. Please see previous educational resources and documents at **getinvolvednanaimo.ca/sea-level-rise** if you'd like to read more detail about the earlier stages of this project.



What's inside?

Lots of information! Skip to Section 3 for the recommendations developed in the project.

SECTION 1: Project Overview

Explore the *Our Coastal City* project. Find out what is at risk and what is being done to address the challenges of sea level rise.

SECTION 2: Project Process

Learn about what *Our Coastal City* studied and the feedback shared through engagement..

SECTION 3: Recommendations & Strategies

Take a look at the outcomes of the study and recommendations for each of the areas at risk.

SECTION 4: What Comes Next?

Find out about ongoing work as we continue to prepare for the challenges of sea level rise.

SECTION 1

Project Overview

There is over 30 km of coastline within the City of Nanaimo. As climate change causes sea levels to rise, we will need to develop resilient strategies to protect what's important to us along Nanaimo's shore. **Our Coastal City is about starting conversations, planning ahead, and taking action** to prepare our City's coast.

What do rising seas mean for coastal communities?

Coastal impacts are already happening today. During high tides or storm surges, flooding and shoreline erosion can be seen in some areas. As sea levels continue to rise, these events are expected to become more frequent, more severe, and affect larger areas.



Impacts Today

- Some damage to critical infrastructure like roads, bridges, sewer, water, and communications
- Temporary loss of park usage and shoreline access points
- Some destruction of plant and wildlife habitat
- Erosion and loss of coastal lands
- Temporary flooding of communities
- Waves washing out seawalls, berms, and other shoreline defences
- Some damage to cultural, parks, and recreational assets

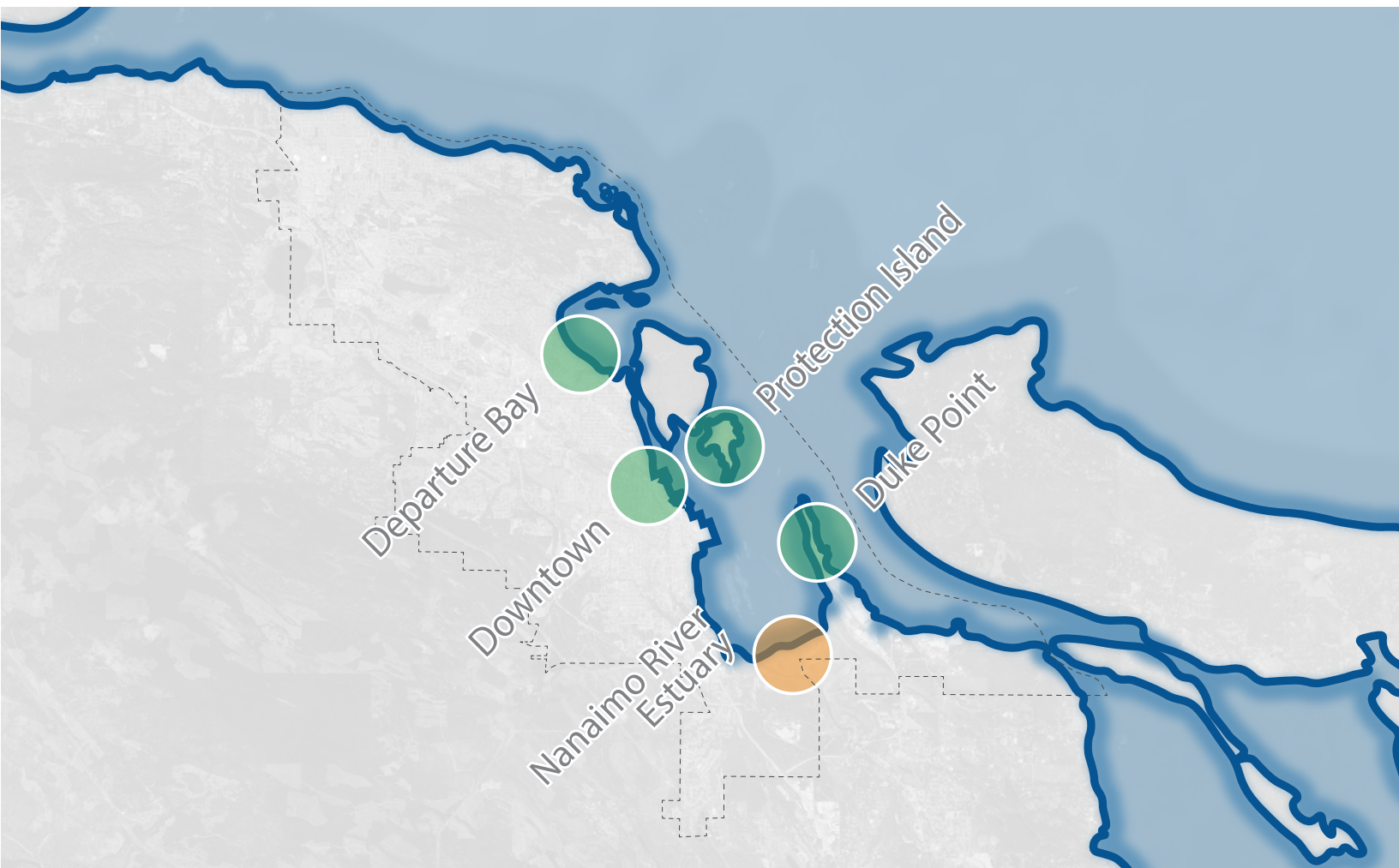


Impacts Tomorrow

- Increased duration and frequency of today's hazards
- Threats to human health and safety
- Increasing insurance costs
- More salt contamination in soils, groundwater, and surface water resources
- Longer periods of flooding and recovery
- Loss of intertidal zone habitats
- Interruptions to business and economic loss

Areas with Rising Risks

The City completed an initial *Sea Level Rise Study* in 2018. **It identified — at a high level — areas along the City's shoreline that may be more vulnerable to flooding as sea levels rise.** The *Our Coastal City* project focuses on these areas: building our technical knowledge and exploring plausible approaches to prepare for rising seas.



LEGEND



Areas identified in the 2018 *Sea Level Rise Study* with higher vulnerability to coastal flooding.



Additional area of special interest (future study)

Building Our Resilience

The City is proactively addressing the challenge of sea level rise. Many efforts are already complete or underway that will contribute to building Nanaimo's resilience in the face of rising sea levels and the broader impacts of climate change. Below is a selection of studies that *Our Coastal City* is built upon.

Highlights of Work Led by the City



Sea Level Rise Study (2018)

The Sea Level Rise Study was conducted to better understand potential coastal flooding vulnerabilities along the City's shorelines. It identified several low-lying areas along the coastline which are likely to be impacted by sea level rise.

Climate Change Resilience Strategy (2020)

The Climate Change Resilience Strategy built on the Sea Level Rise Study to identify a wider range of climate-related vulnerabilities within the City and suggest best practice actions to address or avoid climate-related risks.

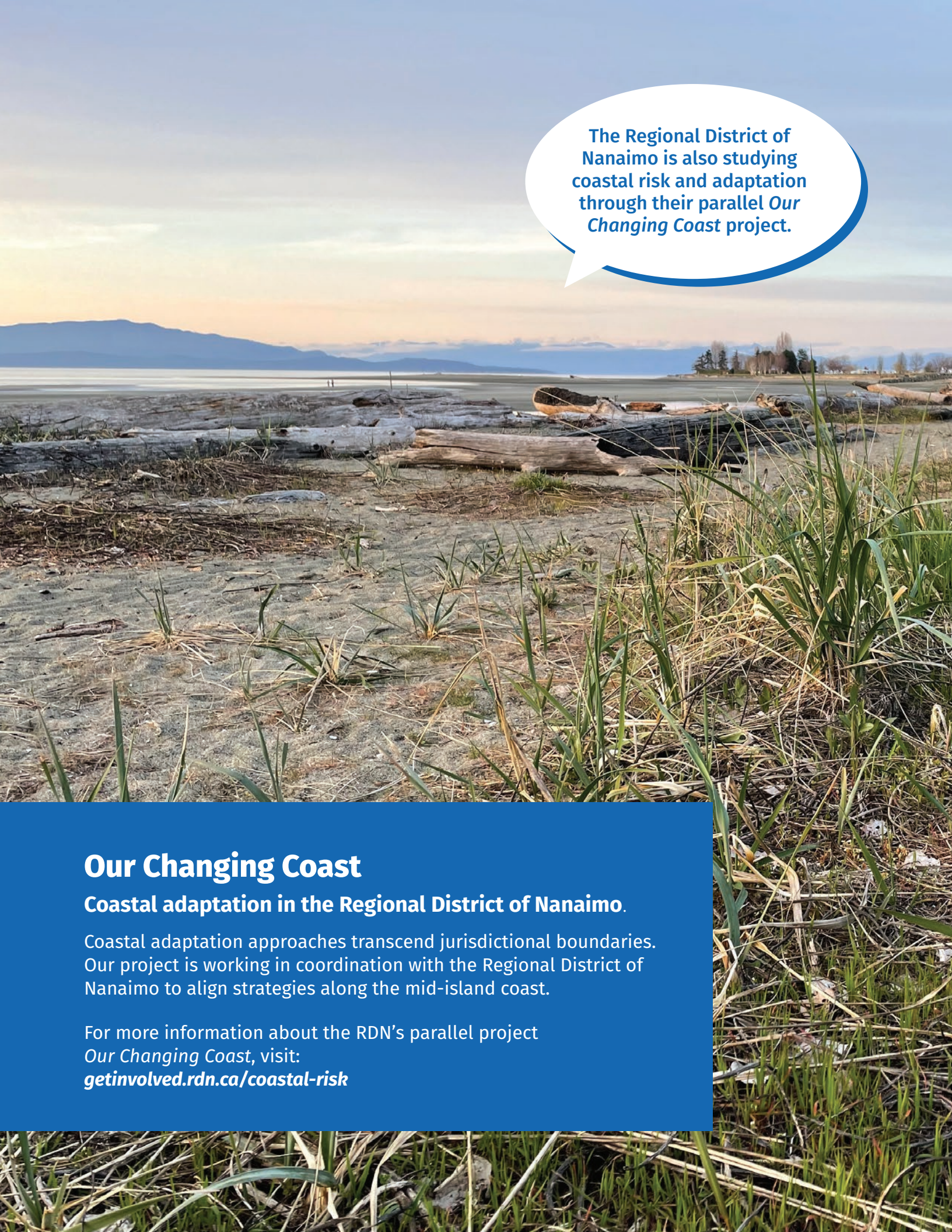
Our Coastal City (CURRENT)

Working with Snuneymuxw First Nation, the City is exploring practical short- and long-term actions to reduce risk in key areas. The team is also conducting further modelling to refine likely impacts of sea level rise, as well as an economic risk assessment of impacts.

Implementation, Monitoring & Further Work (FUTURE)

Climate change impacts cannot be solved in a single plan or project. The City's work will be ongoing and adaptive, requiring collaboration across communities, governments, and interest holders. By building a strong knowledge base and decision-making structures now, we lay the foundation for long-term success in addressing sea level rise and coastal change.

Explore the work: getinvolvednanaimo.ca/sea-level-rise



The Regional District of Nanaimo is also studying coastal risk and adaptation through their parallel *Our Changing Coast* project.

Our Changing Coast

Coastal adaptation in the Regional District of Nanaimo.

Coastal adaptation approaches transcend jurisdictional boundaries. Our project is working in coordination with the Regional District of Nanaimo to align strategies along the mid-island coast.

For more information about the RDN's parallel project *Our Changing Coast*, visit:
getinvolved.rdn.ca/coastal-risk

SECTION 2

Project Process

How did we add to our understanding of what's at risk?

The work of developing a *Sea Level Rise Management Plan* is based on technical studies and real-world factors. It is also based on **a community's priorities and values**. The first stage of the project involved increasing our understanding of impacts to the areas with rising risks. These efforts laid the groundwork for subsequent work where we investigated potential strategies to support the resilience of each area.

Floodplain Mapping

The team developed floodplain maps to identify how far water will travel inland from the coastline. These maps help us to understand what is at risk as sea levels incrementally rise. Technical analysis, including a **Joint Probability Analysis** (to combine the effects of associated water levels and waves), **Regional Modelling**, and **Nearshore Modelling**, was conducted. Together, these were combined to create **Floodplain Maps** for the study areas.

Updated Flood Construction Levels

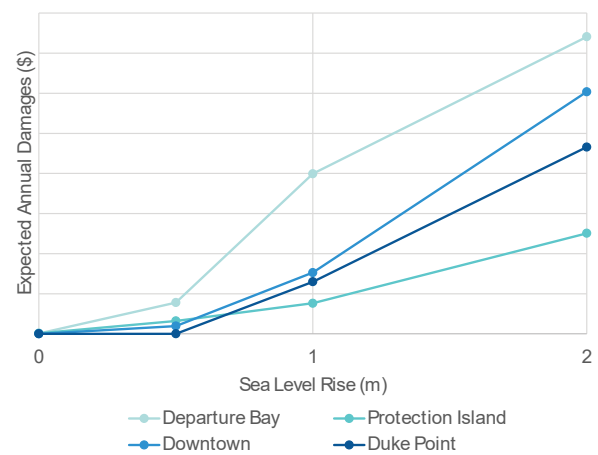
Using the results from the Floodplain Mapping, **updated Flood Construction Levels (FCLs) were generated**. FCLs dictate the minimum elevation for the building of new habitable spaces in order to limit flood impacts. These were refined from the initial, conservative FCLs generated in 2018, and in many cases were lowered.

Economic Risk Analysis

By overlaying the inundation extents with an inventory of building, roads, and infrastructure, **an Economic Risk Analysis was completed**. The analysis estimates "Expected Annual Damages" in dollars for a variety of future scenarios: at 0.5 m, 1.0 m, and 2.0 m of sea level rise.



Floodplain Mapping: An excerpt from the Departure Bay map showing future inundation extents in the long-term.



Economic Risk Analysis: Expected annual damages rise in every area as sea level rises.

Round 1 Engagement Results

Technical studies help us understand the physical risks of sea level rise; however, to decide how to proceed we must also understand the community's values for these areas. **The first round of engagement with interest holders and the public invited participants to learn about sea level rise and talk about their values through outreach, focus groups, public meetings, and an online survey.**

FEEDBACK HIGHLIGHTS

Most respondents (94%) have at least a basic knowledge of sea level rise (SLR).

30% of respondents live on or own property that they think is at risk of being impacted by sea level rise.



COMMUNITY PRIORITIES FOR ADAPTING TO SLR

- » Preserve shorelines and natural areas
- » Plan with consideration for future generations
- » Protect homes and infrastructure
- » Maintain safe public access to the shoreline

93% of respondents prioritize solutions that mimic the natural coast.



ACCESS TO THE COAST

Top ways respondents access the coast are:

- » Visiting public spaces (parks, beaches, etc.)
- » Enjoying scenic views (from home or public locations)

AREAS WITH NOTABLE IMPACTS



- » Departure Bay
- » Protection Island
- » Downtown
- » Duke Point

RESPONDENT CONCERNS



- » Loss of beaches, shoreline habitat, and public access
- » Too much short-term focus and not enough planning for the future
- » Public cost and taxes to fund adaptation projects

HOMEOWNER FEEDBACK



HOMEOWNER CONCERNS ABOUT SLR

- » Loss of the shoreline and beaches
- » Impacts to homes and property
- » Too much short-term focus and not enough planning for the future

HOMEOWNER PRIORITIES FOR ADAPTING TO SLR

- » Preserve the shoreline
- » Protect homes and property
- » Include long term planning for future generations

Read the full engagement results: getinvolvednanaimo.ca/sea-level-rise

Risks & Objectives

What could work where?

The second stage of the project used the technical findings and community values to identify **anticipated risks and initial objectives for each area**. These were discussed with interest holders and the public to determine priorities and understand trade-offs in potential approaches. Possible adaptation strategies were then developed for each area based on technical requirements, City priorities, and the feedback on objectives.

Categorizing Risks

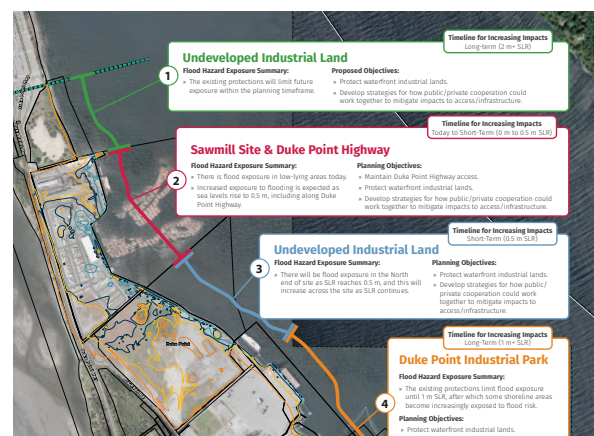
The technical analysis illustrated anticipated future flood water levels. Risks were identified and summarized based on how these future flood levels interact with existing roads, buildings, infrastructure, public spaces, and other elements in each area of focus. **Risks were grouped into the short-, medium-, and long-terms** to help structure which actions are needed when.

Setting Objectives

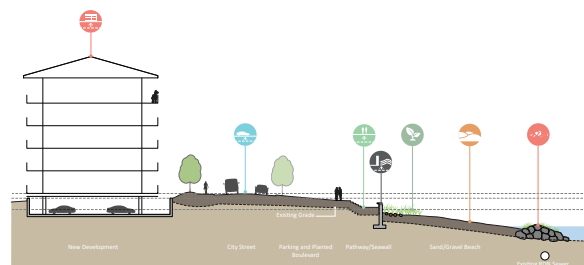
Following risk identification, **a set of initial objectives were created for each area**. The objectives were informed by community values from the Round One engagement, along with input from City staff, interest holders, and technical partners. The objectives were shared in the Round Two engagement to discuss feedback, priorities, and trade-offs.

Putting the Pieces Together

The team assembled candidate adaptation approaches and used technical analysis to confirm what approaches may be viable where. Using technical data and feedback on objectives, **a package of adaptation strategies were developed for each area of study**.



Summarizing Risks and Objectives: Risks and objectives were presented for each area and feedback was solicited on priorities.



- Habitat floor of new development to be above FCL. Parking to be above 200 Year Flood design or wet floodproofed.
- Naturalized area (dune/grass complex).
- Raise road to be above water running on time of reconstruction.
- Shoulder reef break water.
- Raise waterfront trail as sea level rises.
- Beach nourishment, beach retained as a community amenity.
- Raise seawall at time of reconstruction.

Example Adaptations for Waterfront Development

Assembling Strategies: Viable methods were identified and summarized for protecting at risk areas.

Round 2 Engagement Results

In the second round of engagement, risks were described and initial objectives were discussed with interest holders and community members. Explorations considered both general strategies and area-specific strategies for Departure Bay, Downtown, Protection Island, and Duke Point. Feedback was collected about priorities for each area, and what we might do to preserve what we value. The results helped to inform the strategies recommended in the final report.

FEEDBACK HIGHLIGHTS



TOP ADAPTATION STRATEGIES

REQUESTED TO BE PRIORITIZED

1. Where possible, start by **avoiding** future development in areas most at risk.
2. Where critical elements are at risk, **protect** through either “soft” or “hard” measures.
3. For other elements, **accommodate** future flooding by adapting uses or construction.



Many comments indicated that **“do nothing” is no longer an option.** People want proactive approaches that avoid higher costs or impacts later.

24% of respondents to the Round 2 survey live on or own property that is at risk of being impacted by SLR.



TOP AREAS OF CONCERN

- » Downtown
- » Departure Bay

Some comments expressed **apprehension over potential costs** of future solutions.



POPULAR OBJECTIVES

ACROSS THE STUDY AREAS

- » Maintain public waterfront access
- » Support collaborative solutions
- » Improve foreshore habitat
- » Preserve access to transportation uses

Discussions identified a range of **anticipated future projects** that will need to integrate SLR planning.



There was **ongoing support for nature-based solutions.**

A few comments **showed skepticism** over climate change.

Read the full engagement results: getinvolvednanaimo.ca/sea-level-rise

SECTION 3

Recommendations & Strategies

The outcome of the *Our Coastal City* process is a *Sea Level Rise Management Plan* that identifies overall recommendations, as well as adaptation strategies for each of the areas at risk. These are based on technical considerations, what we learned from the community, and what actions are most likely to be effective over the coming decades. Read the full report at getinvolvednanaimo.ca/sea-level-rise.

Overall Recommendations

As sea levels continue to rise, the City and residents should consider the following actions:

1. Move all City infrastructure within the relative sea level rise (RSLR) area as identified in the 2026 *Nanaimo Sea Level Rise Management Plan* that comes to end of life from this point forward. This may involve laying out plans early for large infrastructure such as pump stations, water, stormwater, and sewer mains. Many stormwater infrastructure points are impacted in our current climate in a large storm with the exposure increasing significantly with RSLR. Both sanitary and sewer infrastructure only have a few impacted sites, but they become more exposed after 1.0 m of RSLR.
2. That the City review their planning policies and regulations and make amendments as needed to address the findings in the 2026 *Nanaimo Sea Level Rise Management Plan*, including:
 - Discouraging rezoning for increased density within the RSLR area(s).
 - Update the Sea Level Rise development permit area mapping and guidelines, to:
 - discourage new development and structures within the RSLR area wherever possible;
 - where development is permitted require all buildings and infrastructure to be raised to meet or exceed the FCL.
3. Conduct feasibility assessments for all short- and medium-term options included in the 2026 *Nanaimo Sea Level Rise Management Plan*. Feasibility studies should be completed as the first step in developing an implementation plan for each strategy. These studies should confirm whether each proposed adaptation strategy can be built or undertaken, and should include:
 - community engagement to confirm support and identify concerns;
 - preliminary cost estimates; or confirmation of project extents;
 - review of technical, environmental, regulatory, and property constraints; and
 - identification of appropriate phasing, where required.

The results of the feasibility studies should be used to refine the preferred options, outline an adaptive management pathway, confirm implementation requirements, and support future decision-making.



Area-Specific Strategies

Based on technical requirements, City priorities, and community feedback, possible adaptation strategies have been developed for each area. These are summarized on the following pages, including different options for suitable strategies along each section of the study area.



Short- and medium-term priorities?

The *Sea Level Rise Management Plan* notes areas where impacts are expected in the coming years. These are areas where action will be required sooner to address the coastal impacts of sea level rise. The City and residents should consider adopting strategies in the short- and medium-term to reduce flood risk.

Short-Term (0 to 5 Years)

1 Randle & Battersea Area

This area is currently vulnerable and will continue to become more exposed with time. It is recommended that a strategy with an adaptive management plan and public consultation be developed for this location.

2 Maffeo Sutton Park

Parts of the park are currently vulnerable and will continue to become more exposed with time, particularly the Swy-a-Lana Lagoon. A park plan should be developed that accommodates future sea level rise and is then implemented in phases as needed.

3 Waterfront Walkway

Portions of the walkway are vulnerable today. The City should start planning for a long-term raising of the walkway as sections of the structures reach the end of their life.

Medium-Term (5 to 25 Years)

1 Departure Bay Beach

The area will become increasingly vulnerable to storm events and flooding. It is recommended that a long-term strategy be developed, with an adaptive management plan and public consultation.

2 Waterfront Walkway

In combination with the short-term actions, a medium-term plan should be developed for the commercial spaces and parking garage to prepare for their end-of-life and potential rebuilding and raising, while maintaining continuous walkway access.

3 Boat Basin (and Front Street)

The section of Front Street directly behind the boat basin is low, and will become exposed to sea level rise in the medium term. It is recommended to raise Front Street to provide protection to Museum Way.

4 Raise Highway 19 (Duke Point Highway)

The highway to Duke Point will be exposed to flood impacts in the medium term. This is a primary freight and ferry access route for Vancouver Island, and it is recommended to raise the low points of the highway as upgrading occurs.

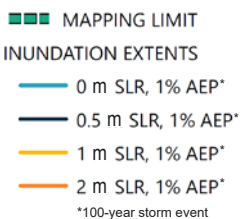
Area-Specific Strategies:

Departure Bay

Strategy		Key Considerations*	
1. Departure Bay Beach			
Strategy A: Raise Seawall		Seawall, Departure Bay Road, and infrastructure raised, new builds to meet FCLs	- Protects existing uses, allows for re-development - Limits future adaptations, increased flood risk - Leads to coastal squeeze, loss of intertidal zone - Can include green features / habitat
Strategy B: Phased Retreat		Long-term process of retreating existing buildings and relocating Departure Bay Road	- Removes people / infrastructure from flood zone - Economic and cultural site impacts - Potential for recreational uses - Public acceptance challenges will exist
2. Randle & Battersea Area			
Strategy A: Raise Buildings & Roads		New builds to meet FCLs, roads raised: Battersea, Randle, Loat, Seaview	- Retains existing residential properties - Cost of on-parcel improvements by property owners, public infrastructure costs by others - May only be a short-term solution
Strategy B: Phased Retreat		Long-term process of retreating existing buildings and infrastructure	- Removes people / infrastructure from flood zone - Allows room for sea level rise adaptation and recreational area expansion - Public acceptance challenges will exist
Strategy C: Seawall Extension		Seawall extended to protect roads/properties, expand public access	- Protects roads, cultural sites, and infrastructure - Supports recreational access - Can include green features / habitat - Requires land acquisition
3. Cilaire Bluffs			
Strategy A: Status Quo, Monitor Erosion		No change in short-term, monitor/mitigate potential future erosion of bluffs	- Area is not currently vulnerable to flooding - Bluffs are vulnerable to erosion, which could worsen with coastal flooding and sea level rise - A variety of options are available in the future
Strategy B: Seawall Extension		Seawall extended to help protect Cilaire Bluffs, expand public access	- Can protect bluffs from ongoing toe erosion - Supports recreational access - Removes the bluffs' function as a coastal sediment supply, impact to foreshore habitat
4. Ferry Terminal & East			
Strategy A: Raise Buildings & Roads		New builds in low areas raised to meet FCLs, roads and infrastructure raised over time	- Low additional cost, each building raised as required when rebuilt - Can be phased slowly over time - Some facilities may require future relocation

● = Primarily Public Lands Adaptations ● = Primarily Private Property Adaptations ● = Mix of Private and Public Adaptations

*Refer to the technical report for the full list of associated considerations.

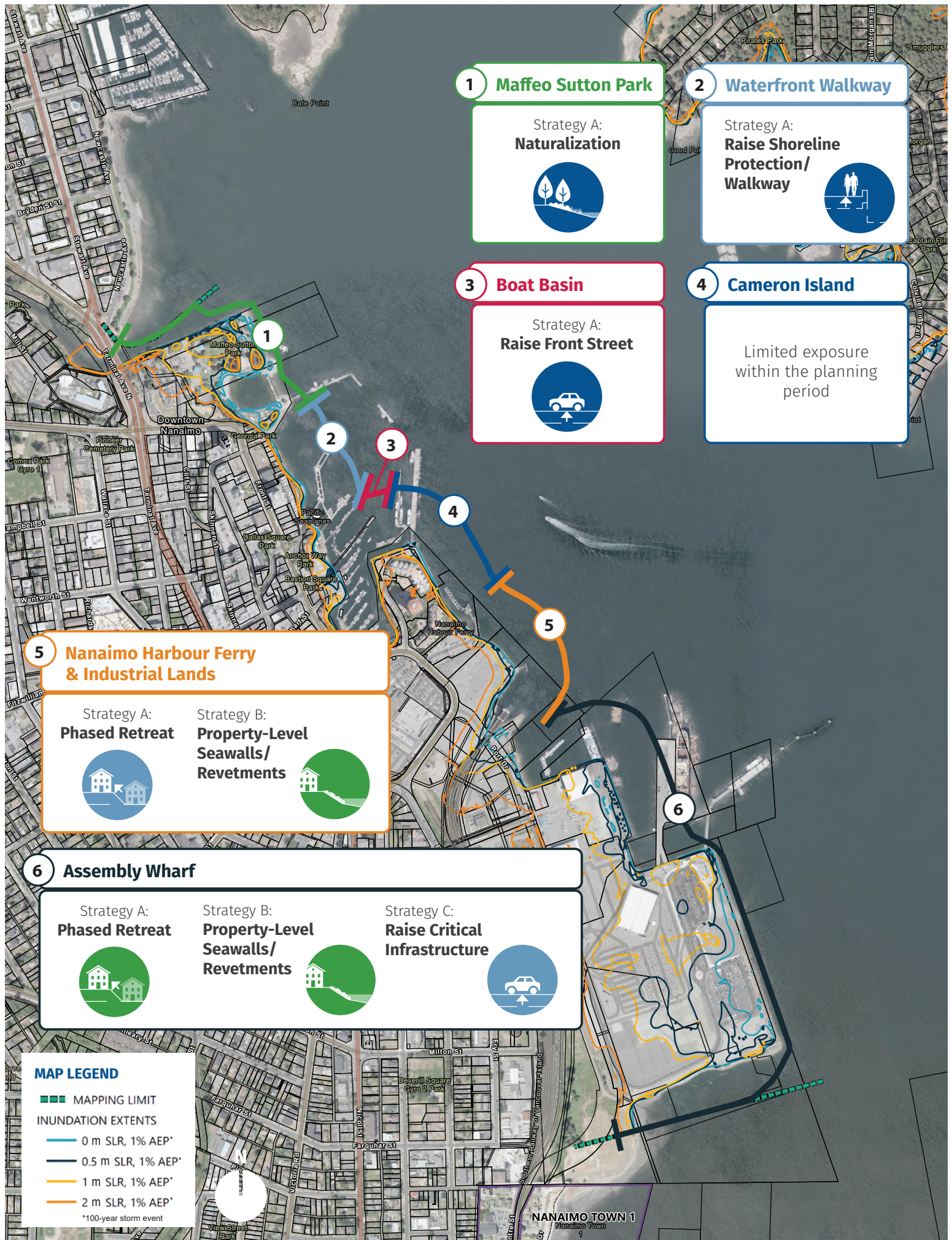


Downtown

Strategy		Key Considerations*	
1. Maffeo Sutton Park			
Strategy A: Naturalization		Hardened shore protection removed, shorelines naturalized, infrastructure relocated or raised	- Increases ecological benefits - Maintains park spaces - Ongoing maintenance will be required - City infrastructure may need added protections
2. Waterfront Walkway			
Strategy A: Raise Shoreline Protection/ Walkway		Raise walkway, low-lying buildings, retain existing parking garage	- Maintains continuous walkway - Supports ongoing commercial activity - Can include green features / habitat - Long-term replacement may not be feasible
3. Boat Basin			
Strategy A: Raise Front Street		Raise Front Street from Promenade Drive to Coast Bastion Hotel	- Maintains continuous walkway - Stops inland flooding - Raising can be phased - Potential for groundwater issues as seas rise
4. Cameron Island			
Limited exposure within the planning period			
5. Nanaimo Harbour Ferry & Industrial Lands			
Strategy A: Phased Retreat		Long-term process of retreating industrial uses through buy-outs or development limits	- Removes people / infrastructure from flood zone - Loss of industrial lands and economic benefits - Potential for ecological and recreational benefits
Strategy B: Property-Level Seawalls/ Revetments		Property-level hard protection for industrial uses	- Protects land from flooding and erosion - May not align with waterfront industrial needs - Low-lying areas may still be prone to flooding - Can include green features / habitat
6. Assembly Wharf			
Strategy A: Phased Retreat		Long-term process of removing or relocating infrastructure out of the floodplain	- Removes people / infrastructure from flood zone - Loss of industrial lands and economic benefits - Potential for ecological and recreational benefits
Strategy B: Property-Level Seawalls/ Revetments		Single or multi-property hard protection for existing properties	- Aligned with existing industrial uses - Can be phased over time - Low-lying areas may still be prone to flooding - Can include green features / habitat
Strategy C: Raise Critical Infrastructure		Raise access roads and buildings/docks within floodplain	- Maintain access to industrial/transportation use - Allows individual property owners to address issues over time as required

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*Refer to the technical report for the full list of associated considerations.



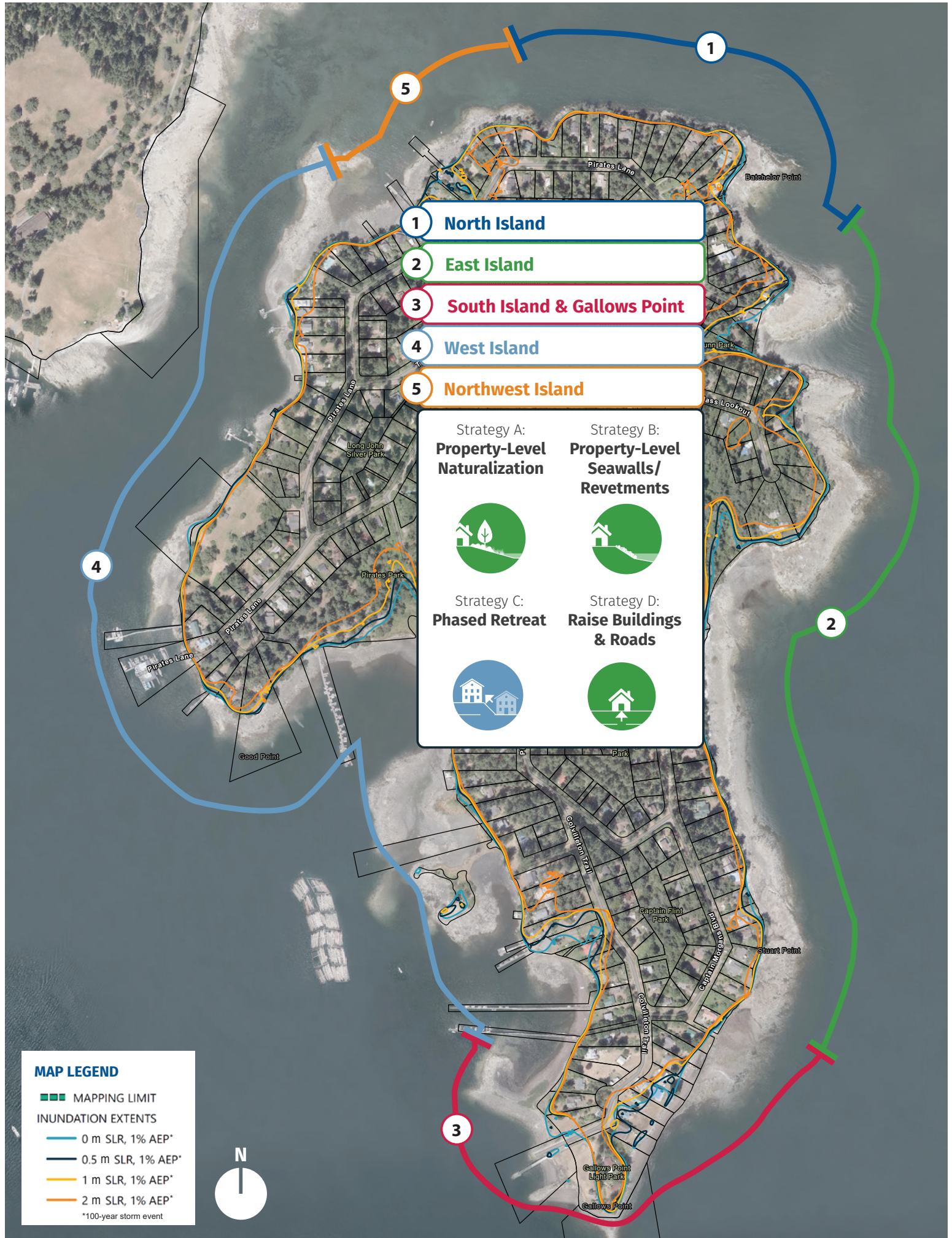
Area-Specific Strategies:

Protection Island

Strategy		Key Considerations*	
1. North Island 2. East Island 3. South Island & Gallows Point 4. West Island 5. Northwest Island			
Strategy A: Property-Level Naturalization		Single or multi-property nature-based solutions to reduce wave energy	• Extends the useable life of the property • Ecological benefits • Requires maintenance • Ongoing adaptation required as sea levels rise
Strategy B: Property-Level Seawalls/ Revetments		Single or multi-property hard protection to reduce waves and protect buildings	• Reduces flooding and erosion at properties • Lower maintenance than natural solutions • Negative impacts to foreshore habitat • Can transfer wave and erosion impacts to neighbouring properties
Strategy C: Phased Retreat		Long-term process of retreating existing buildings through buy-outs or development area limits	• Removes people / infrastructure from flood zone • Loss of residential properties • Allows room for sea level rise adaptation and recreational area expansion • Public acceptance challenges will exist
Strategy D: Raise Buildings & Roads		New builds in low areas raised to meet FCLs, roads and infrastructure raised over time	• Allows residents to stay on existing properties • Can be phased slowly as houses are rebuilt • Does not offer a long-term solution, some properties will be inundated as sea levels rise

● = Primarily Public Lands Adaptations ● = Primarily Private Property Adaptations ● = Mix of Private and Public Adaptations

*Refer to the technical report for the full list of associated considerations.



- 1 North Island
- 2 East Island
- 3 South Island & Gallows Point
- 4 West Island
- 5 Northwest Island

Strategy A: Property-Level Naturalization	Strategy B: Property-Level Seawalls/Revetments
Strategy C: Phased Retreat	Strategy D: Raise Buildings & Roads

MAP LEGEND

■■■■ MAPPING LIMIT

INUNDATION EXTENTS

- 0 m SLR, 1% AEP*
- 0.5 m SLR, 1% AEP*
- 1 m SLR, 1% AEP*
- 2 m SLR, 1% AEP*

*100-year storm event

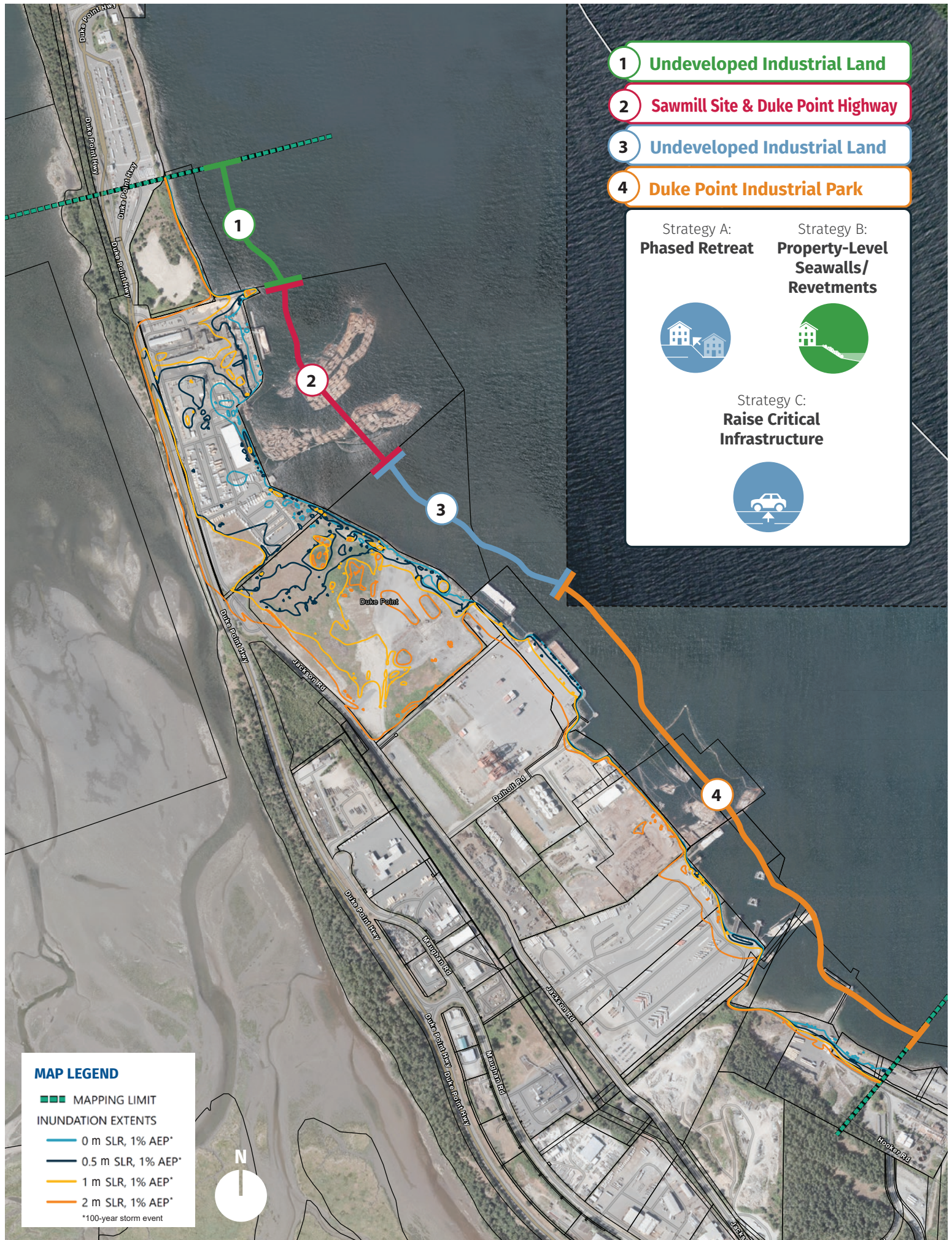


Duke Point

Strategy		Key Considerations*	
1. Undeveloped Industrial Land 2. Sawmill Site & Duke Point Highway 3. Undeveloped Industrial Land 4. Duke Point Industrial Park			
Strategy A: Phased Retreat		Long-term process of retreating existing industrial uses through buy-outs or development area limits	• Removes people / infrastructure from flood zone • Loss of industrial lands and economic benefits • Potential for ecological and recreational benefits
Strategy B: Property-Level Seawalls/Revetments		Property-level hard protection for industrial uses	• Aligned with existing industrial uses • Can be phased over time • Low-lying areas may still be prone to flooding • Can include green features / habitat
Strategy C: Raise Critical Infrastructure		Raise Duke Point Highway and access roads within the floodplain	• Maintains industrial uses and access to the Duke Point Ferry Terminal • Allows individual property owners to address issues over time as required

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*Refer to the technical report for the full list of associated considerations.



- 1 **Undeveloped Industrial Land**
- 2 **Sawmill Site & Duke Point Highway**
- 3 **Undeveloped Industrial Land**
- 4 **Duke Point Industrial Park**

Strategy A:
Phased Retreat



Strategy B:
Property-Level Seawalls/ Revetments



Strategy C:
Raise Critical Infrastructure



MAP LEGEND

-  **MAPPING LIMIT**
- INUNDATION EXTENTS**
-  **0 m SLR, 1% AEP***
-  **0.5 m SLR, 1% AEP***
-  **1 m SLR, 1% AEP***
-  **2 m SLR, 1% AEP***
- *100-year storm event



SECTION 4

What Comes Next?

The findings of the *Sea Level Rise Management Plan* **reveal a range of effective actions** that are possible to adapt to future sea level rise. However, there is more work to do.

Looking Ahead

The strategies discussed in the *Sea Level Rise Management Plan* are a starting point for both short- and long-term planning. **A more thorough review for several locations is recommended** — including further consultation with the community — **to determine the preferred strategy** for each specific area. Looking ahead, next steps can include:

- **Communicate the Results:** The City has funding and approval in place to communicate the outcomes of the current work to a broad audience including property owners, interest holders, and the public.
- **Conduct Feasibility Assessments:** For the short- and medium-term strategies, consultant recommendations are to conduct feasibility assessments that will dig further into details including concept design, cost estimating, and community feedback. The feasibility studies could outline a pathway and confirm implementation requirements for the preferred way forward in each location.
- **Area-Specific Projects:** Once a preferred course is determined, consultant recommendations are for area-specific projects to be undertaken over the short-, medium-, and long-terms.

Visit the *Our Coastal City* webpage to learn more and stay involved in the conversation.



Where Can I Learn More?



Read More Details on the Project's Findings

Access the webpage by visiting:
getinvolvednanaimo.ca/sea-level-rise



Questions?

Please contact the City of Nanaimo:
Email: **sustainability@nanaimo.ca**



