

The Watershed Project



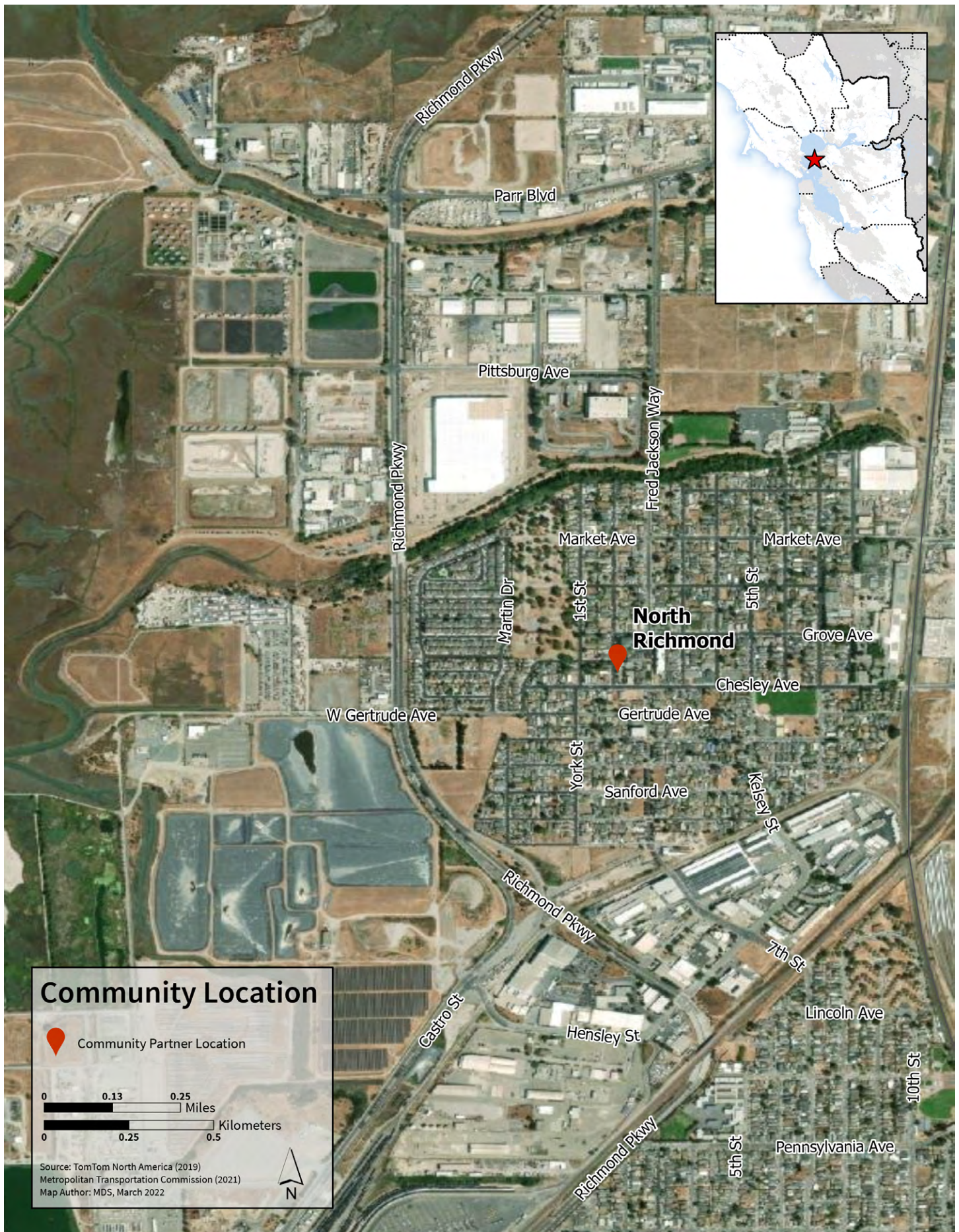
Photo courtesy of The Watershed Project



The Watershed Project's mission is to inspire Bay Area communities to understand, appreciate, and protect their local watersheds. Founded in Richmond, CA in 1997, they work to restore and preserve the unique ecosystems that make up the San Francisco Bay.

They bring a watershed perspective to the urban environment, promoting green design and supporting natural cycles. Through their award-winning community stewardship programs, they give youth and adults the information, skills, and support they need to understand how watersheds work and how their individual and collective actions translate into healthier, stronger local communities. They undertake large green infrastructure projects and green schoolyard installations to demonstrate the power and possibility they offer in solving problems like stormwater management, water pollution, and equitable access to green, healthy environments.

Since its inception, The Watershed Project (TWP) has been committed to working together with their communities to build resilience, awareness, and environmental justice in the Bay Area. The Watershed Project envisions a water management system that is sustainable, equitable, and responsive to the needs of both their communities and natural places in Contra Costa County. To achieve this goal, The Watershed Project involves community stakeholders in every step of their projects, in developing priorities and plans, and in implementing and ensuring their success.



The Watershed Project's staff are acknowledged as local experts in water quality monitoring and trash assessments, and they involve the community, neighbors, and partners in all aspects of water management in their Contra Costa creeks and waterways. They train interns, volunteers, and smaller community groups to do the monitoring in their own neighborhoods. By empowering members of the community with technical training as community scientists, The Watershed Project magnifies its impact and benefit from local knowledge of waterways. Its current data collection and monitoring approach includes:

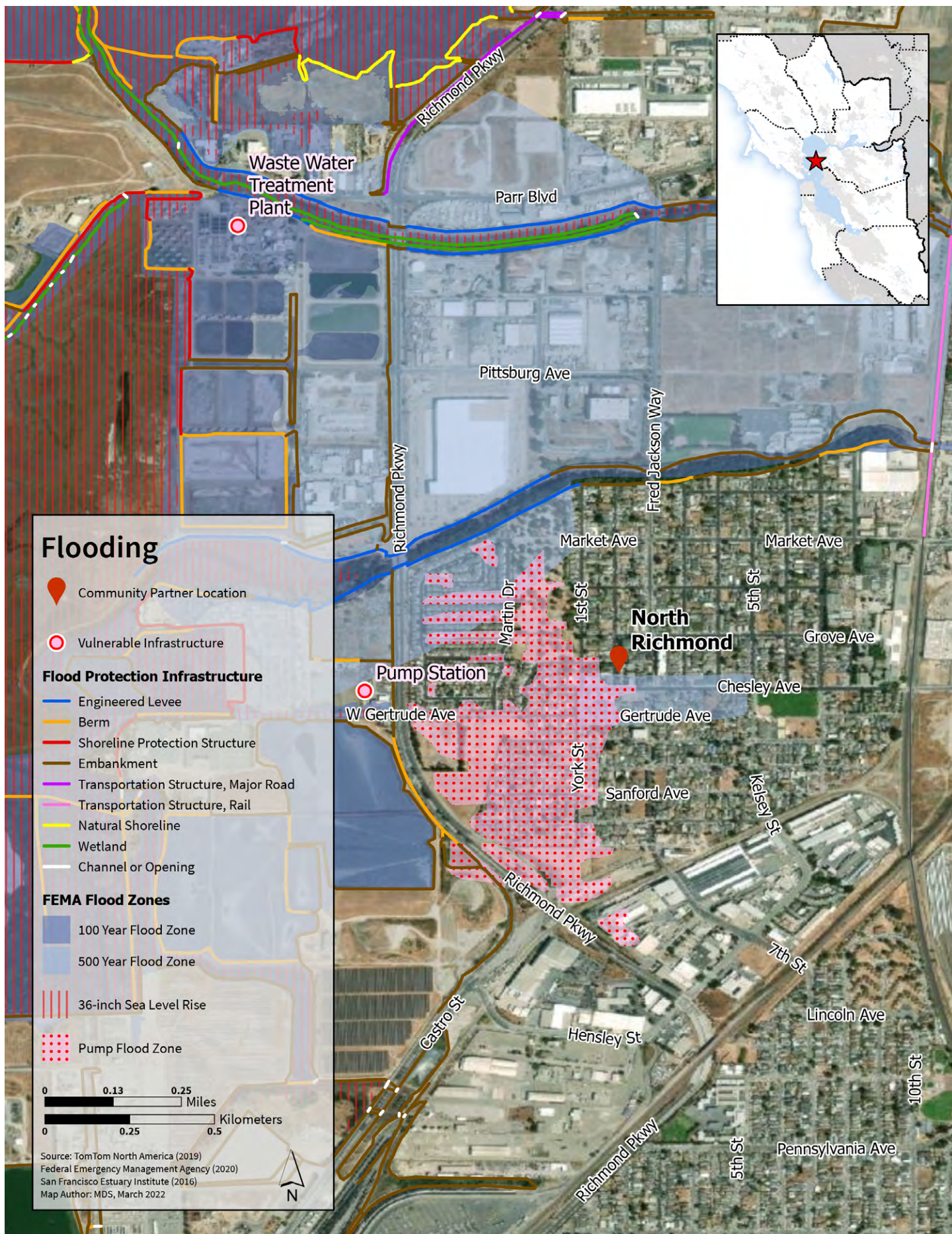
- Water quality monitoring of five creeks in Contra Costa County, with sharing of this data as a public resource to community groups and local municipalities
- Ten trash assessments along creeks, shorelines, and other waterways, conducted in collaboration with Contra Costa County



Aerial view of North Richmond, facing east. Photo courtesy of The Watershed Project

Project Description

West Contra Costa County is highly urbanized but has high potential for water quality and habitat improvements. Community interest for these improvements has been expressed and willing partners have been identified as reflected in the minutes of the local watershed council. This area also offers the potential for successful community stewardship opportunities, improving coordination among agencies and other organizations, and increasing drought resiliency and climate adaptation. The Watershed Project worked with disadvantaged communities within the San Pablo, Wildcat, Garrity, Rheem, and Cerrito Creek watersheds to identify and prioritize water-related improvements with the greatest potential for improving quality of life and climate resiliency.



Demographics

North Richmond has a total population of 5,739, which is 74.2% Hispanic, 10.5% African American, 9.1% Asian American, 4.7% white, and 1.3% other. North Richmond falls into the 96th percentile overall in CalEnviroScreen 4.0, compared with the rest of California communities. The area is in the 87th percentile for pollution burden and 95th for population characteristics. Residents have particularly high exposures to lead from housing (81st percentile), toxic releases (77th percentile), cleanup sites (99th percentile), hazardous waste (100th percentile), groundwater threats (86th percentile), solid waste (94th percentile) and impaired waste (90th percentile). The population is in the 99th percentile for asthma, 88th for low birth weight, and 73rd for cardiovascular disease. Residents fall in the 94th percentile for education, 95th for linguistic isolation, 77th for poverty, 45th for unemployment, and 87th for housing burden (CalEnviroScreen 4.0).

History of Environmental Injustice and Inequity in the North Richmond Community

Residents in North Richmond, an unincorporated area in the east San Francisco Bay Area, have faced historic marginalization, geographic isolation, and disproportionate environmental impacts. A historically Black community, North Richmond was one of the few areas where African Americans could purchase homes, and today, the population is predominantly Latino and African American.

North Richmond lies in the floodplain of two creeks and historically was subject to regular flooding. Like most urban communities, North Richmond has a high proportion of impervious (paved) surfaces, preventing natural absorption of rain during storms. Because urban creeks have been channelized and restricted, they often cannot accommodate the volume of water that enters during a storm. As a low-income community with insufficient stormwater infrastructure or green spaces to provide drainage for stormwater runoff, North Richmond is disproportionately impacted by flooding, and sea level rise is projected to exacerbate the issue for this low-lying coastal community. The community is now protected from flooding by levees and a pump station, but without this protection, homeowners would be required to purchase costly flood insurance.

North Richmond is surrounded by railroad tracks, a diesel truck route, a landfill, a wastewater treatment plant, and a Chevron refinery. A history of chemical testing and manufacturing in the area has also left a legacy of contaminated soil and groundwater. The neighborhood has also received fewer services, such as adequate garbage collection and sewage control (Healthy Richmond, 2019), than surrounding neighborhoods.

Community-Identified Strengths and Assets

Despite facing many challenges and discriminatory policies and practices, North Richmond is a close-knit, proud and resilient community with a history of activism, advocacy, organizing, and community leadership. In 1971, the North Richmond Model Cities Plan was developed with intensive community input, and featured Wildcat and San Pablo creeks and the San Francisco Bay shoreline as recreational, educational, and economic assets for the community. When, in 1982, the Contra Costa County Public Works Department and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers presented their preferred plan to turn Wildcat Creek into a concrete, straightened, flood control channel with dangerous fast-moving water, community leaders including Ivy Lewis, Laura Hunter, and Lillie Mae Jones organized community members and stakeholders to uphold the Model Cities Plan. They formed the Wildcat-San Pablo Creeks Watershed Council, which required collaboration among all agencies and elected officials to produce a consensus-based plan to address the flood risk and environmental protection for Wildcat Creek. In just one year, this planning process overcame a 29-year stalemate and produced a consensus-based plan for the creek that honored the Model Cities Plan. The Wildcat-San Pablo Creeks Watershed Council is the first known watershed council located in urban California and remains active today, more than three decades later. The Wildcat Creek Restoration Project, which began construction in 1986 and was guided by the community's preference to protect the environment along Wildcat Creek as an educational and recreational asset, was the first flood control project of its kind. It eventually became recognized by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers as a national environmental engineering model. (Riley, 1989; Riley, 2016).

Similarly, the Dotson family and their Parchester Village neighbors spent decades advocating for the preservation of open space along the shoreline. In the early 1970s, Rev. Daniel Dotson helped secure the East Bay Regional Park District's purchase of Point Pinole Regional Shoreline, a former gunpowder and dynamite manufacturing site. A generation later, Ethel and Whitney Dotson organized with their neighbors to prevent the development of then-called Breuner Marsh, slated for several developments including an airport, housing, or industrial use. In the same year that Whitney Dotson was elected to the East Bay Regional Park District Board of Directors (2008), the Park District acquired the marsh after three years of legal battles. Thanks to the hard work of the Parchester Village community advocates, the now-renamed Dotson Family Marsh is preserved as a public park and habitat restoration site. (Alvarez & Pfuehler, 2017; Seltenreich, 2012).

These are just a few examples of North Richmond's rich history of activism and environmental protection, which continues today. Within the last few years alone, residents have led community planning efforts including the North Richmond Shoreline Community Vision (2017), the Home Team's North Richmond planning process for the Resilient By Design Challenge (2018), Healthy Richmond's North Richmond Quality of Life Plan (2019), and Urban Tilth's Wildcat Creek Visioning Project, among others.

Summary of Outreach and Education Efforts

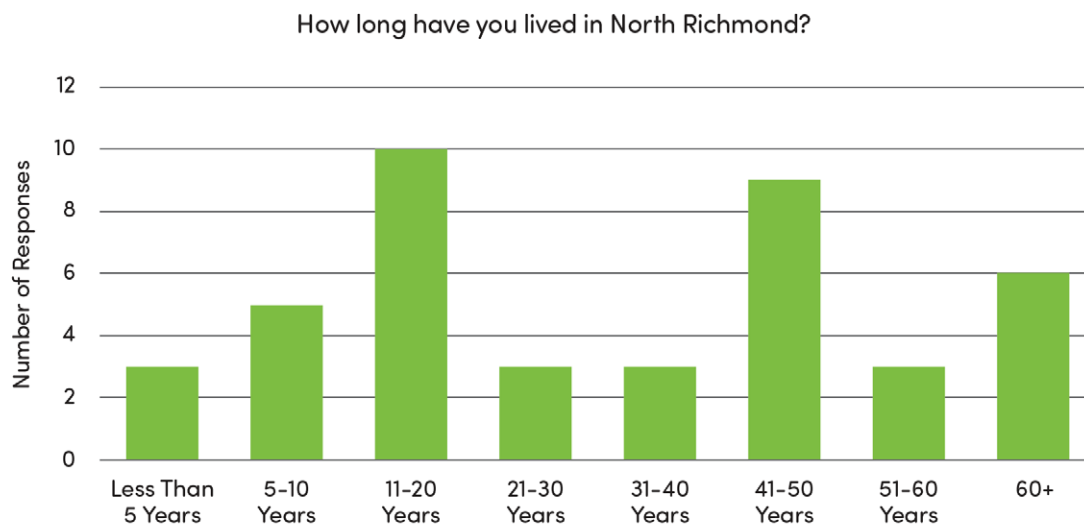
The Watershed Project leveraged their work on other West Contra Costa County assessments, including:

- North Richmond Shoreline Community Visioning in 2017
- The Home Team’s North Richmond planning process for the Resilient By Design Challenge in 2018
- Healthy Richmond’s 2019 Quality of Life Plan
- Urban Tilth’s Wildcat Creek Visioning Project

The goal for this engagement and needs assessment process was to gain insight into which types of water-related improvements are of greatest priority to the community. The process evaluated community concerns in four topic areas:

1. Sea level rise and stormwater
2. Habitat protection and access to recreation
3. Water supply (drinking water)
4. Wastewater and recycled water

In Spring 2019, The Watershed Project recruited 54 North Richmond residents to participate in a focus group, leveraging existing networks such as their Block Ambassadors Program, Healthy Richmond’s resident leaders, and the Senior Center. This resulted in a broad range of participants, from those who moved to North Richmond more recently (less than five years ago) to those who have been part of the community for over 60 years. All focus group participants were offered a gift card stipend for participating in an interview and a workshop, as described below.





Residents rank their level of concern with each of the four areas of need at the North Richmond Earth Day Celebration.
Photos: Anne Bremer

Each focus group participant gave an approximately 20-minute individual interview (pre-survey) with TWP over the phone or in person in which they ranked their level of concern with each of the four areas on a four-point scale: not at all concerned, not very concerned, somewhat concerned, or very concerned. They also answered several open-ended questions in which they were prompted to describe their personal experiences with water in North Richmond. For example:

- Have they experienced problems with flooding or sewer backup?
- Do they use the Wildcat Creek path or North Richmond shoreline for recreation? Why or why not?
- How do they use tap water? Have they experienced problems with it?

To ensure that the concerns of the 54 focus group participants aligned with the concerns of the larger North Richmond community, TWP gained additional input from approximately 200 residents at the North Richmond Earth Day Celebration. These residents also ranked their level of concern with each of the four areas on the same four-point scale, and results were similar to those from the focus group participants.

The Watershed Project was interested in assessing whether the community's concerns might change if they had access to additional information about the four areas of need. After their initial interview, each focus group participant was invited to participate in an educational workshop. The Watershed Project hosted two identical workshops at two different times (one on a weekday evening and one on a Saturday morning) and locations (a housing complex and an elementary school), to allow participants to attend the one that would work best for them.

During the workshop, participants rotated around four stations, one for each topic area, and worked to answer a set of guiding questions at each station. They examined hands-on materials such as posters, videos, maps, and models with a facilitator to learn about:

- Existing water-related infrastructure
- Anticipated future challenges
- Potential solutions to these challenges

After rotating through all four stations, each participant took a written post-survey where they reassessed their level of concern with each of the four areas on the same four-point scale, from not at all concerned to very concerned. They were also asked for feedback on what they had learned through the following open-ended questions:

- Did you learn any new information about these areas in today's workshop?
- What was the most surprising thing you learned during today's workshop?
- What types of water-related improvements would you like to see in your community?

Needs Assessment Findings

Initial Interview Findings



Sea Level Rise and Stormwater

In the initial interview, stormwater flooding was a topic that resonated with residents, since 73% have personally experienced flooding when it rains. They described being impacted by difficulty walking or driving from place to place, and by damage to infrastructure, such as flooding of homes or potholes in streets. They were also concerned about the amount of trash or other pollutants in floodwaters. However, 45% said the flooding used to be much worse than it is now. Only 15% described their concern about sea level rise, indicating that it may not be a topic that is familiar to many residents.



Habitat Protection and Access to Recreation

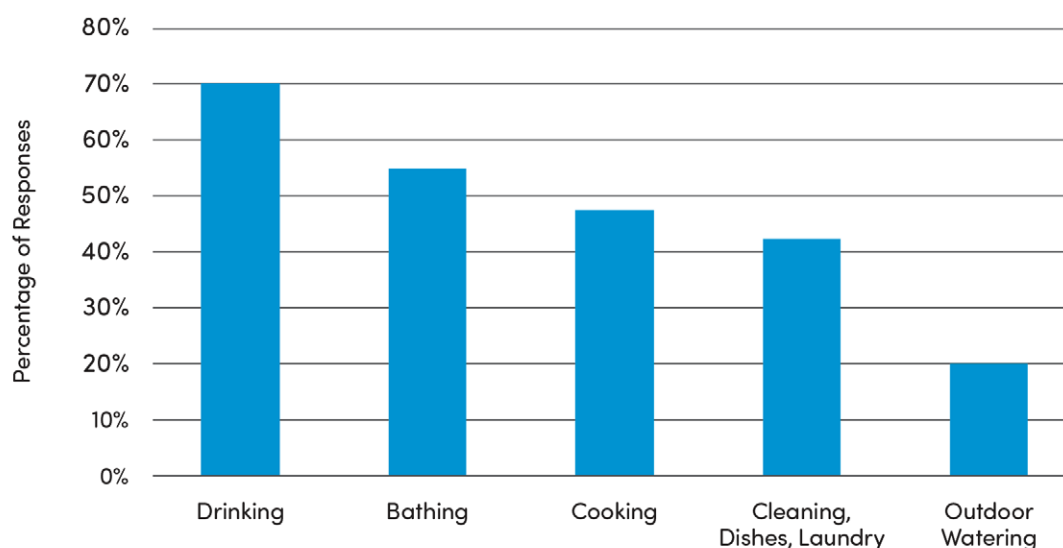
Just over half (55%) of residents use the Wildcat Creek path or North Richmond shoreline for recreation. The vast majority use these spaces for walking, but some also mentioned biking, taking their kids or pets out, or using these spaces for social events. Although some say they don't use the creek or shoreline for recreation simply because they're unaware of it or don't think about it, safety concerns seem to be a big deterrent to using the Wildcat Creek path. 42% of residents said they were concerned about safety on the path—their biggest concerns were flooding and trash/pollution/cleanliness, followed by crime/drugs/needles, homeless encampments, insufficient lighting, and overgrown vegetation.



Water Supply and Water Quality

Most residents (70%) drink tap water, although a significant number (38%) mentioned buying bottled water as well. However, nearly half of residents didn't trust their tap water, even if they drink it, since they are not sure where it comes from and how to tell whether it's actually safe. About 48% of residents have experienced problems with their tap water, including discolored water, bad taste, particles or residue, and drying of hair or skin when washing with it. Drinking was listed as the number one use for tap water, but residents also mentioned using it for bathing, cooking, cleaning/laundry, and watering plants.

Top Uses of Tap Water





Wastewater and Recycled Water

In the initial interview, the sewer system was the topic of least concern for residents. Many residents (58%) have experienced problems with sewage backups in their home, but it varied widely how often it happens and how severe the problem is. A few have seen sewer backups in the street, but not often enough to create the impression that there is any problem with the functionality of the system.

Some residents also mentioned being concerned about water conservation and the cost of water, although TWP didn't ask about these topics specifically.

Areas of Need Identified

- Clean drinking water improvements
- Urban greening, green infrastructure, or parks
- Solutions to sea level rise and flooding
- Sewer system improvement and protection
- Water conservation and use of recycled water

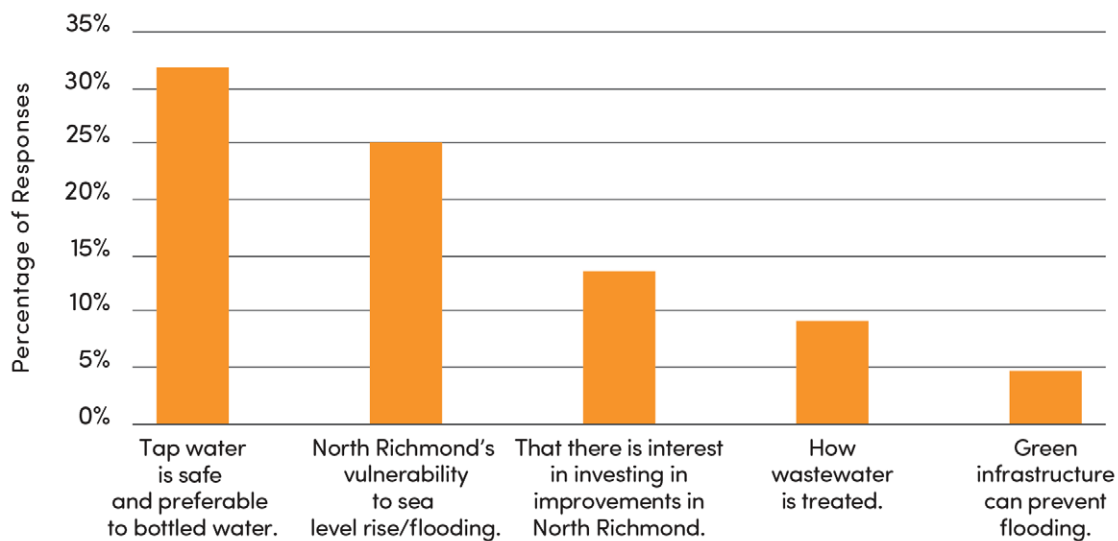
Overview of what The Watershed Project heard from the community

- Some streets flood when it rains, and community members would like to see improvements to reduce the flooding.
- Community members feel there are not enough safe, accessible outdoor places for recreation in North Richmond and would like to see more parks, green space, and amenities such as lighting and drinking fountains on existing trails.
- North Richmond's drinking water, which comes from the Sierra Nevada mountains, is some of the best in the country. Despite this, most residents don't trust the safety of their tap water, and some have experienced problems with it. Community members would like to be able to find out for certain whether the water in their home is safe to drink, and whether old pipes in buildings are causing any problems with the water quality.
- Community members would like to see more water conservation measures and use of recycled water (treated wastewater which can be used for irrigation or construction).
- Climate change or global warming is causing polar ice caps to melt, sending more water into the ocean and causing sea levels to rise. This means areas closer to the shoreline (such as Parchester Village and North Richmond) will be more likely to flood during large storms. The landfill and wastewater treatment plant are also at risk of flooding, which could cause severe pollution problems. Community members

hope to see protections from sea level rise along the shoreline.



Most Surprising Takeaways for Residents



Top Takeaways from the Workshop

Top three most surprising things residents learned in the workshop:

1. North Richmond's tap water is safe to drink (32%)
2. North Richmond's vulnerability to sea level rise (25%)
3. There is interest in investing in water-related improvements in North Richmond (13.5%)

Other things people learned about included: living shorelines, the North Richmond pump station, and the proposed bridge overpass.

North Richmond's tap water is safe to drink

After the educational workshop, many residents (32%) said the most surprising thing they learned was that North Richmond's tap water is safe to drink. Access to clean, safe drinking water seems to be a high priority for residents, and they left the workshop feeling less concerned about their source water but more concerned about potential contamination in pipes. They were excited about the possibility of self-testing their tap water, to learn whether there is an issue with their internal plumbing. When asked about the types of water-related improvements they would like to see in North Richmond, 34% of residents said they want to see clean drinking water in North Richmond, and 16% specifically mentioned pipe inspections or upgrades.

Wastewater and North Richmond's vulnerability to sea level rise

After the workshop, levels of concern rose about each of the four areas of need, but only the difference in the wastewater and recycled water area was statistically significant (98% of residents were "somewhat concerned" or "very concerned" on the post-survey, compared to 60% on the pre-survey). As mentioned earlier, residents were not as concerned about the sewer system in their initial interview, but their concern rose after learning that the wastewater treatment plant is highly vulnerable to sea level rise. 88% of residents said they learned something new about sea level rise and flooding during the workshop, and 25% said that North Richmond's vulnerability to sea level rise was the most surprising thing they learned.



There is interest in investing in water-related improvements in North Richmond

The third most surprising thing that residents learned during the workshop was that there is interest in investing in water-related improvements in North Richmond. Residents have the sense that authorities and other residents do not care about their community as much as other places (23% of residents mentioned something to this effect in their initial interview, without prompting), so many said it was hopeful and refreshing to see such positive energy from residents and community partners during the workshops.



Residents discuss their experiences, opinions, and preferences regarding water in their community at a workshop
Photo: Anne Bremer

What do residents want to see in their community?

On their post-surveys, 23% of residents wrote that they hope to see more urban greening, green infrastructure, or parks, and others wrote that they would like to see solutions to sea level rise and flooding (living shorelines or horizontal levees), an improved sewer system, more water conservation measures, and using some of the recycled water that currently goes to Chevron for irrigation in the community. Overall, residents were supportive of any of the improvements TWP proposed during the workshop, but there was concern about possible resulting gentrification. Future projects should be mindful of these concerns and include protective measures against gentrification along with local job creation. Finally, from an educational standpoint, TWP noticed that residents could much more easily connect with tangible issues such as drinking water, stormwater flooding, and trash rather than concepts they may not have direct experience with, such as sea level rise, living shorelines, or horizontal levees. There was also a fair amount of confusion as to the difference between the stormwater system, sewer system, and drinking water supply—residents are not always clear on where their water comes from and where it goes. Therefore, future projects will need to include an appropriate level of community education, to allow residents to understand and engage with the project.



Aerial view courtesy of The Watershed Project - Community Needs and Opportunities document. Photo: Brian Houx

Project Development and Prioritization

Project Development

After the surveys and workshops, TWP presented their findings to a variety of stakeholders in the North Richmond community (including the City of Richmond, Contra Costa County Flood Control and Public Works Departments, East Bay Municipal Utility District, the Wildcat-San Pablo Creeks Watershed Council, and the East Bay Regional Park District) and worked with them to brainstorm and identify any possible projects that might align with the community's needs and priorities. Involving these stakeholders was an important step in identifying feasible projects and getting buy-in from the agencies that will likely be the primary applicants for funding and implementing the projects.

Community Needs & Opportunities

Localized Flooding

Some streets flood when it rains, and community members would like to see improvements to reduce the flooding.

- 1. North Richmond Pump Station Upgrade
- 2. Wildcat Creek Improvements (Fish Ladder and Sediment Basin)
- 3. Flood Risk Reduction in the Rheem Creek Watershed (Rollingwood)
- 4. Citizen Science Creek Monitoring

Limited Shoreline Access & Recreational Opportunities

Community members feel there are not enough safe, accessible outdoor places for recreation in North Richmond and would like to see more parks, green space, and amenities such as lighting and drinking fountains on existing trails.

- 5. Wildcat Creek Trail Improvements
- 6. North Richmond Green Street Corridor
- 7. North Richmond Green Benefit District
- 8. Goodrick Avenue Bay Trail Connector
- 9. Interpretive Center at the West County Wastewater District

Safe Drinking Water

North Richmond's drinking water, which comes from the Sierra Nevada mountains, is some of the best in the country. Despite this, most residents don't trust the safety of their tap water, and some have experienced problems with it. Community members want to know whether the water in their home is safe to drink, and that old pipes in buildings are not causing any health problems.

- Tap Water Testing, Education & Outreach*
- Community Water Resource Guide*

Water Conservation

Community members would like to see more water conservation measures and use of recycled water-treated wastewater which can be used for irrigation or construction.

- EBMUD Water Conservation Programs*

Sea Level Rise

Climate change (global warming) is causing polar ice caps to melt, sending more water into the ocean and causing sea levels to rise. This means areas closer to the shoreline will be more likely to flood during large storms. The landfill and wastewater treatment plant are also at risk of flooding, which could cause severe pollution problems. Community members hope to see protections from sea level rise along the shoreline.

- 13. Horizontal Levee at West County Wastewater District

Environmental Education & Restoration

Provide educational programs including field trips to local creeks and shoreline parks, to give students the opportunity to learn, play and explore outside in nature.

- 14. K-12 Environmental Education with Field Trips
- 15. Rheem Creek Realignment through Dotson Family Marsh

**Note: These programs are not tied to a specific geographic location.*



These meetings resulted in a list of 15 possible projects to take back to the community for feedback:

1. **North Richmond Pump Station Upgrade** The North Richmond Pump Station, constructed in 1974 and nearing the end of its expected life cycle, is an important part of protecting North Richmond from flooding. Without the pump station, homes may flood and homeowners in flood zones would need to pay for flood insurance, which is costly. This upgrade would allow the pump station to continue operating.
2. **Wildcat Creek Improvements (Fish Ladder and Sediment Basin)** The Wildcat Creek fish ladder, which passes under the railroad tracks near Verde Elementary, is intended to provide a way for rainbow trout to migrate along the creek, but is prone to frequent clogging with sediment and trash. This project would retrofit the fish ladder to become functional again, and would alleviate flooding near Rumrill Boulevard.
3. **Flood Risk Reduction in the Rheem Creek Watershed (Rollingwood)** During the rainy season each year, Rheem Creek overflows and the streets and homes in the Rollingwood neighborhood flood severely, preventing community members from getting to school or work, causing expensive damage to homes and cars. This project is a joint effort by neighbors and organizations to find a solution and resolve the flooding issue.
4. **Citizen Science Creek Monitoring** Community members, trained by a community organization, volunteer to collect measurements of pollution and trash in local creeks. The information they collect is used to develop projects and policies to help improve the health of the creeks and community.
5. **Wildcat Creek Trail Improvements** Design and construct park amenities along the Wildcat Creek Trail to make it more inviting, possibly including lighting, emergency phones, trash cans, benches, water fountains, a playground, picnic/BBQ areas, outdoor fitness areas, and informational or educational signage.

6. **North Richmond Green Street Corridor** Conversion of two street segments (Parr Boulevard and Market Avenue) to “Green Streets” with bicycle and pedestrian improvements and plantings which may help reduce localized flooding. These street segments would connect to Fred Jackson Way, which is already planned to become a Green Street in the near future.
7. **North Richmond Green Benefit District** When organizations receive grants to plant trees or gardens in the community, there is often not enough funding to continue to water and care for these trees and gardens over time. A Green Benefit District would create a pool of funds to be used for this purpose, with the goal of hiring community members to care for community green spaces.
8. **Goodrick Avenue Bay Trail Connector** Bicycle and pedestrian improvements along Goodrick Avenue, connecting the existing path that parallels the Richmond Parkway to the Bay Trail that begins at Dotson Family Marsh, next to the Richmond Rod and Gun Club. This would allow community members to more safely walk or bike to Point Pinole Regional Shoreline.
9. **Interpretive Center at the West County Wastewater District** An environmental education center at the wastewater treatment plant would provide educational and recreational programs, exhibits about the North Richmond shoreline, and amenities such as drinking fountains, concessions, and a garden. It would be a destination that people could walk or bike to using the Bay Trail or Wildcat Creek Trail.
10. **Tap Water Testing, Education and Outreach** Information about the source and quality of the tap water in North Richmond, along with a way for residents to have their tap water tested, verify whether it is safe to drink, and address any concerns they might have.
11. **Community Water Resource Guide** A document containing information about North Richmond’s rainwater, creeks and other bodies of water, tap water, and wastewater. The guide (available in English and Spanish) would also include answers to frequently asked questions about water in North Richmond, and which agencies residents can contact for information if they need assistance or are experiencing any problems.
12. **Water Conservation Programs** Information about programs to promote responsible water use to help residents, landlords, and businesses save water, including the possibility of providing recycled water (treated wastewater) for irrigation or construction use in the community.
13. **Horizontal Levee at the West County Wastewater District** If the wastewater treatment plant is flooded by rising sea levels, wastewater could back up drains into toilets, sinks and showers. A horizontal levee is a constructed marsh habitat that would act like a giant sponge, protecting the wastewater treatment plant from flooding, providing habitat for wildlife and a beautiful shoreline trail for residents to enjoy.
14. **K-12 Environmental Education with Field Trips** Classroom lessons in which students learn about their local environment, including the ways in which people and wildlife use water and how to keep it clean and available for all to enjoy. Educational programs would include free field trips to local creek and shoreline parks, to give students the opportunity to learn, play, and explore outside in nature.
15. **Rheem Creek Realignment through Dotson Family Marsh** The part of Rheem Creek that flows into the Bay could be converted from a straight, narrow channel to a more natural creek that would flow into Dotson Family Marsh. This would improve water quality and habitat for local wildlife and help protect the shoreline from rising sea levels.

Community Project Prioritization

Under COVID-19 shelter-in-place restrictions in Spring 2020, The Watershed Project staff utilized a combination of digital outreach and “snail mail” to solicit community feedback on the projects. They printed handouts that included contextual information about the needs assessment and initial findings, a map and information about the 15 projects, and a survey and a pre-paid return envelope. Leveraging existing community contacts, they sent these mailers to 62 community members in English or Spanish depending on their preference.

The Watershed Project also created a landing web page (available in English or Spanish) with more detailed information, images, and maps of each of the 15 projects and a Google Form version of the survey. The link to this web page was printed on the mailer sent to community members and also emailed to 15 existing contacts. The Watershed Project also shared Instagram and Facebook posts with their 1,512 followers, directing North Richmond residents to the online survey. They provided individual phone support to residents who experienced any technical difficulties with the survey and mailed a gift card stipend to each community member who completed the survey.

In the survey, TWP asked community members to rank seven different types of water-related improvements: solutions to flooding during the rainy season; more green spaces, parks, and opportunities for walking and biking; improvements related to drinking water quality; more water conservation measures; protections against rising sea levels; creating or restoring habitat for wildlife such as fish and birds; and education or access to information about North Richmond’s water on a five-point scale: not needed at all, not urgently needed, somewhat needed, definitely needed, or most urgently needed. Community members rated all seven of these types of improvements as being needed, but when asked to prioritize them, the following three emerged as top priorities:

1. Solutions to flooding during the rainy season
2. More green spaces, parks, and opportunities for walking and biking
3. Improvements to drinking water quality

Similarly, on average, community members rated all 15 of the possible projects as being at least somewhat needed, but when asked to prioritize them, the following seven projects emerged as top priorities:

Tier 1 (highest priorities)

- North Richmond Pump Station Upgrade
- Tap Water Testing, Education and Outreach

Tier 2

- Flood Risk Reduction in the Rheem Creek Watershed (Rollingwood)
- Wildcat Creek Trail Improvements

Tier 3

- K-12 Environmental Education with Field Trips
- Green Benefit District
- Green Street Corridor

Understandably, community members indicated that they are interested in addressing immediate health, safety, and quality of life issues first, specifically drinking water safety and flood prevention. “Flood prevention” in this case encompasses both stormwater flooding and flooding as a result of sea level rise, because the distinction between these causes of flooding is still somewhat unclear to many community members. After addressing these immediate issues, community members prioritized projects that would create more access to parks and green space. Residents appreciated these projects both for their recreational benefit to North Richmond community members and for the opportunity to restore habitat and provide benefits to wildlife.

Community members also reiterated the importance of community education, which emerged as a priority during the interviews and workshops in Spring 2019. Residents expressed that they valued programs that would introduce children to new experiences and knowledge, and stressed the importance of education, transparency, and following plans through with implementation as ways to build trust between agencies and the community. One community member shared,

“In the area where I live, there are a lot of very important projects being proposed but not carried out...I hope some of these projects are completed to see changes in North Richmond.”

Despite the physical, emotional, and financial challenges experienced by many as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, community members shared that they were grateful for the opportunity to continue their involvement in planning for community improvements:

“I am just very happy that we able to work on much needed community improvement. Thank you.”

“This was very informational.”



Photo: Anne Bremer

Next Steps

Next, working from the list of possible projects identified with the North Richmond community, TWP will engage with stakeholders and partners to finalize project proposals and seek funding for implementation. The Watershed Project will work with stakeholders to identify and engage the primary project applicant, and provide grant-writing, design, or other support. They will share updates and obtain feedback at meetings with stakeholders and community members.

The Watershed Project will also participate in and implement the DACTI Program Tap Water Quality Testing program in West Contra Costa County. They will work with East Bay Municipal Utility District (EBMUD), other government agencies, and other DACTI Program outreach partners in the EBMUD service area to identify existing testing resources and barriers to their use. TWP will adapt the pilot tap water quality testing program from East Palo Alto to align with the circumstances and communities of West Contra Costa County.

References

Alvarez, A.M. & Pfuehler, E., (2017, February). *Preserving a Marsh for People and Wildlife: The Dotson Family Marsh*. National Recreation and Park Association. <https://www.nrpa.org/parks-recreation-magazine/2017/february/preserving-a-marsh-for-people-and-wildlife-the-dotson-family-marsh/>

California Environmental Protection Agency and Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment. (2021). *CalEnviroScreen 4.0*. [Map] <https://oehha.ca.gov/calenviroscreen/report/calenviroscreen-40>

Gonzalez, J., Brown, J., and Woodfill, L., Gibbons, S., Strickland, J., Guardian, S., (2017 October). *North Richmond Community Visioning: Outreach and Survey Findings. The Watershed Project*. San Francisco Estuary Partnership. <https://thewatershedproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/TWP-Final-Report.pdf>

Healthy Richmond. (2019). *North Richmond Quality of Life Plan*. <https://healthyrichmond.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/QoL-digital-english.pdf>

Mithun. (2018 May). *North Richmond: A Priority Resilience Area*. Resilient By Design. https://thewatershedproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/RbD_HomeTeam_FinalReport-May2018.pdf

Riley, A., (2016, September 20). *In Loving Memory of Lillie Jones*. Never Gone. <http://www.never-gone.com/memorials/Candles.aspx?m=d07/KFRqbP58ZUWIQ0WEOg%3D%3D>

Riley, A. L., (1989) *The Wildcat-San Pablo Creek Flood Control Project and Its Implications for the Design of Environmentally Sensitive Flood Management Plans*. (Rep. PSW-110). USDA Forest Service Gen. Tech. https://www.fs.fed.us/psw/publications/documents/psw_gtr110/psw_gtr110_j_riley2.pdf

Seltenrich, N. (2012, April 5). Reclaiming the Richmond Shoreline. *Bay Nature*. <https://baynature.org/article/reclaiming-the-richmond-shoreline/>

Urban Tilth. (n.d.). *Wildcat Creek Trail Visioning Project*. Retrieved February 2, 2022 from <https://www.urbantilth.org/earth-care/wildcat-visioning-project/>