

# Marin Independent Journal

---

<http://marinindependentjournal.ca.newsmemory.com/?token=RMkzugMKd9f%2fK89Y%2b87o4rMwBQPaAv7J&product=eEditionMIJ>

## MARIN COUNTY CIVIC CENTER

### ‘GAME OF FLOODS’

Planners earn acclaim for creative tool to promote awareness of sea-level risks

**By Stephanie Weldy**

[sweldy@marinij.com](mailto:sweldy@marinij.com) @StephanieWeldy1 on Twitter

A group of county planners and interns huddled around a counter top typically reserved for maps and blueprints.

The game started like most as each player rolled the dice to determine who would play first. But this is no ordinary board game.

Staffers with the county’s public works department and Community Development Agency were recently recognized for their creative approach to engaging residents in a discussion on sea-level rise, earning a public outreach award from the state chapter of the American Planning Association for their creation — the board game the “Game of Floods.”

“I’m just happy to spread the word more,” said planner Alex Westhoff, co-creator of the game. “We want other communities to use this. Sea-level rise is certainly threatening all of California’s coastlines, so we think other places would benefit from it.”

Created with planning manager Jack Liebster, planner Lauren Armstrong and public works employees Roger Leventhal and Chris Choo, the game aims to raise awareness about sea-level rise and to jumpstart talk on how to respond to it.

The game has been played by Marin high school students and community members, and has even been played by Environmental Protection Agency staffers and consulting groups in Michigan and Florida.

The board features an abstract map of Marin. Each player selects a property, then tries to figure out how to protect their assets from damage.

Players are allowed to construct new roads, build levees and make other changes in response to rising sea levels.

“This sort of give us an idea of the things we’ll be facing over five, 10, 20 years,” said Liebster.

**“We want other communities to use this. Sea-level rise is certainly threatening all of California’s coastlines, so we think other places would benefit from it.”**

— Alex Westhoff, co-creator of the game



Marin County planner Jack Liebster, center, plays Game of Floods with his staff and summer interns last week at the Marin County Civic Center. The game challenges players to address the effects of sea-level rise.

PHOTOS BY ROBERT TONG — MARIN INDEPENDENT JOURNAL



Game of Floods players make decisions about levee construction and other tactics to protect assets.

---

Joe Stewart, a science teacher at Redwood High School, watched his students play earlier this year. The game got students thinking about the longterm planning required to tackle the effects of sealevel rise, he said.

“It’s a way to model and think about things that are going on in planning offices around the country, especially in coastal areas, and to give students a chance to think of parameters important to the environment and changes that need to be done socially and economically,” Stewart said.

Liebster said that despite what some believe, sea-level rise is a real threat, especially in Marin.

Marin ranks second among nine Bay Area counties for projected risk of impacts from sea-level rise, according to the county. The county estimates potential losses could hit \$8.5 billion in building and content losses on the bay shoreline.

### **Massive risks**

Liebster said it is imperative the community begin thinking now about what can be done, such as relocating roadways or building levees, sea walls or flood walls and pump stations.

“The year 2100, we’re looking at something like 1,400 properties just along the ocean shoreline of Marin itself being impacted, flooded, hit by storms that have not been hit,” he said. “We’re talking about millions of dollars of potential damage along the way, disruption of people’s lives.”

But because sea-level rise is considered a “slow moving emergency,” residents have time to discuss and choose what they feel are the most appropriate responses, Liebster said.

Inspired by a local mapping tool developed for a Southern Marin sea-level rise study for Supervisor Kate Sears, the game simplifies the problem to facilitate discussion, Sears said.

“The game gets people excited about their role fashioning and exploring solutions,” Sears said in an email.



Marin County planners devised a reference sheet for players of Game of Floods, its award-winning exercise to promote public awareness of sea-level rise.

ROBERT TONG — MARIN INDEPENDENT JOURNAL