

Province provides \$1.6 million for flood-protecting dikes

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MLAs Naomi Yamamoto and Ralph Sultan were up the creek with North Vancouver Mayor Darrell Mussatto for a funding announcement Monday. The province pledged \$1.6 million to install more than one kilometre of dikes along Mackay Creek, photo Mike Wakefield, North Shore News

If ocean levels won't go down, North Vancouver is making sure levees go up.

The City and District of North Vancouver are teaming with the province to build a \$2.4-million, 1,200-metre-long dike on both sides of Mackay Creek between Marine Drive and First Street to ward off flooding.

The waterway has flooded three times in the past 32 years but the increased frequency of extreme weather associated with climate change could send more water spilling over Mackay's banks on its path from Grouse Mountain to Burrard Inlet, according to district public safety manager Fiona Dercole.

"We're protecting against future floods," she said.

A massive flood could be triggered by a storm surging while the tide is high and the river is up, according to Dercole. Mackay Creek's flood risk could also be exacerbated by more intense and more frequent bursts of rain during winter.

With snowpacks slimming due to reduced snowfall, the winter rain could stream down the mountainside unobstructed and overwhelm the river, she said.

"The runoff of those really intense events can be quite damaging."

With Capilano Mall as well as light industrial businesses in the path of a flood, the river poses more of an economic risk than a life-safety risk, Dercole explained.

Her comments were echoed by West Vancouver-Capilano MLA Ralph Sultan.

"The province's investment will help protect over \$300 million of commercial properties and major transportation corridors from a major flooding event," he stated in a press release.

Colloquially known as “baby dikes,” the 1- to 1.5-metre-tall embankments are meant to protect the river from everybody and their dogs, according to Dercole.

Part of the project involves moving unofficial trails in the river corridor to the top of the dike, in part to keep dog poop out of the river.

The project also includes adding woody debris and rock features that tend to make the streams hospitable for fish, noted City of North Vancouver Mayor Darrell Mussatto.

“We are pleased that the dikes will support environmental sustainability by reducing erosion of Mackay Creek to ensure improved creek and fish habitat over the long term,” stated Mussatto in a press release.

Any work on the stream needs to be planned with the watershed in mind, advised North Shore Streamkeepers chairwoman Karen Munro.

“Keeping trees and soil on the land and restricting how much land gets paved and built on will go a long way to managing stormwater and flood flows,” she stated in an email.

The province is paying for two-thirds of the project, or \$1.6 million. The District of North Vancouver is slated to chip in \$474,461, leaving the City of North Vancouver to pay \$334,666.

Construction is scheduled to start in the summer of 2017.