

City of Albany



TO: ALBANY PLANNING & ZONING COMMISSION
FROM: ANNE HERSCH, PLANNING MANAGER AND BARRY MILLER, CONSULTANT
SUBJECT: GENERAL PLAN UPDATE
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REQUEST

This is the second in a series of Planning and Zoning Commission Study Sessions on the Albany 2035 General Plan Update. This Study Session will cover population and employment projections for Albany, and the City's Regional Housing Needs Allocation (RHNA). It will also cover the General Plan land use categories and Land Use Map. The Commission will be convening Study Sessions on the Plan through Summer 2014, with the goal of producing an updated General Plan and Environmental Impact Report by that time. Each meeting will include an opportunity for public comment.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

This item is a study session and no Commission action is required.

SITE LOCATION

The General Plan applies to all property in the City of Albany.

BACKGROUND

Historic Growth In Albany

Albany grew rapidly after its incorporation, with population increasing from 808 residents in 1910 to 8,659 residents in 1930. The City's growth has been more gradual since that time. By 1960, the population was 14,804.

The table below shows population growth between 1960 and 2010. It is notable that population declined (due to falling household size) between 1960 and 1970, increased very slowly between 1970 and 2000, and increased fairly significantly (12.7%) between 2000 and 2010.

The Census indicates that Albany gained 2,095 residents between 2000 and 2010. This is partially a function of increasing average household sizes (2.34 in 2000 and 2.49 in 2010), and partially because of new construction (641 units added between 2000 and 2010 according to the Census, which much of that gain associated with UC Village).

Albany's Population, 1960-2010						
Year	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010
Population	14,804	14,674	15,130	16,327	16,444	18,539
10-year Change		-130	+456	+1,197	+117	+2,095

Source: US Census, 1960-2010

In 2010, the Census counted 7,889 housing units in the City. As noted above, this represented an increase of 641 units over 2000. By contrast, the Census indicated the number of units in Albany declined between 1990 (7,468 units) and 2000 (7,248 units). The 2010 Census indicated the City's housing stock included:

- 4,295 single family homes (55%)
- 897 units in 2-4 unit buildings (11%)
- 2,619 units in buildings with 5+ units (33%)
- 22 "other" units (<1%)

The Census counted 7,401 households in Albany in 2010, an increase of 390 households over 2000 (7,011). The vacancy rate was 6.2%, with 488 vacant units. This was a significant increase from the vacancy rate in 2000, when only 237 units were vacant (3.3%).

There are varying estimates of the number of jobs in the City. The Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG) does periodic forecasts of population, households, and employment. Their forecasts indicate Albany had 3,962 jobs in 1980, 4,680 jobs in 1990, and 5,190 jobs in 2000. For 2010, there are discrepancies in the jobs estimates between Projections 2009 and the projections being used for ABAG's new regional plan (Plan Bay Area). Projections 2009 (approved by ABAG in 2009) indicates Albany was expected to have 5,030 jobs in 2010. The Plan Bay Area forecasts (May 2012) indicated the City had 4,210 jobs in 2010.

Forecasts

ABAG's current forecasts were prepared to provide a foundation for "Plan Bay Area", a new regional planning document intended to comply with state mandates set by SB 375. SB 375 requires California's metropolitan areas to prepare regional plans which help the state meet its greenhouse gas reduction targets by promoting more compact, sustainable development patterns. Because Plan Bay Area has not yet been officially adopted, the forecasts are still considered preliminary. The "official" forecast continues to be Projections 2009, adopted in August 2009.

Forecasts for Albany from Projections 2009 and Plan Bay Area are shown below. The forecasts include a 2010 start date (e.g., "baseline"). A 2035 horizon year was used for Projections 2009, and a 2040 horizon year was used for the Plan Bay Area forecasts. The Projections 2009 forecasts cover population, households, and employment. The Plan Bay Area forecasts cover housing units, households, and employment, but not population.

Albany's Forecasts, 2010-2040					
	2010	2035	2040	Net Change	% Increase
PROJECTIONS 2009					
Population	16,900	19,300	--	2,400	14.2%
Housing Units	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Households	7,150	8,080	--	930	13.0%
Employment	5,030	5,580	--	550	10.9%
PLAN BAY AREA FORECASTS					
Population	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Housing Units	7,890	--	9,060	1,170	14.8%
Households	7,400	--	8,470	1,070	14.5%
Employment	4,210	--	5,610	1,400	33.2%

Both the Projections 2009 and Plan Bay Area forecasts show Albany growing by roughly 13-15% during the next 25-30 years. Plan Bay Area indicates 1,070 new households (1,170 housing units) and Projections 2009 indicates 930 new households.

There is much more variation in the job forecasts. Projections 2009 shows relatively slow growth, with 550 more jobs added between 2010 and 2035. The new ABAG forecasts show 1,400 new jobs between 2010 and 2040, an increase of about one-third over current employment. Some of the increase in job growth may be associated with the designation of San Pablo-Solano as a "Priority Development Area", a term used by ABAG to identify areas where more concentrated growth is expected over the coming years. The job increase may also be associated with the underlying philosophy of Plan Bay Area, which is to achieve a closer balance between the number of jobs and the number of employed residents in each city (to minimize the need for commuting).

Regional Housing Needs Allocation

The ABAG forecasts are used to generate Regional Housing Needs Allocations (RHNA) for each city in the Bay Area. The RHNA is a state-mandated process intended to ensure that each city in the Bay Area plans for its "fair share" of the region's housing needs. The State determines the number of units that each region needs to provide to meet its housing needs for an eight year

period. ABAG then “assigns” those units to individual cities and counties using a formula that considers land supply, proximity to transit, projected employment growth, and other factors. The “assignment” is further broken down into income categories (very low income, low income, moderate income, and above moderate income). Cities must not only demonstrate that they have sufficient land zoned to meet their RHNA, they must also demonstrate that they have suitable sites available to meet their low and very low income housing assignments.

Cities are not required to actually build the housing units identified through the RHNA process—the test as to whether a city is doing its “fair share” is simply whether it has land available for the private and non-profit sectors to build such housing within its boundaries. Cities demonstrate their compliance with this requirement through the Housing Element of their General Plans. The Housing Element must be submitted to the California Department of Housing and Community Development, where it is reviewed to ensure that it meets State criteria. Communities that are not in compliance run the risk of losing access to state and federal funds, and may be more vulnerable to lawsuits.

Albany’s “assignment” for the 1999-2006, 2007-2014, and 2014-2022 RHNA cycles is shown in the table below. The 2014-2022 numbers are still preliminary, but are unlikely to change before they are adopted.

Regional Housing Needs Allocation for Albany, 1999 through 2022 (housing units)			
	1999-2006	2007-2014	2014-2022
Very Low(*)	64	64	80
Low(*)	33	43	53
Moderate (*)	77	52	57
Above Moderate (*)	103	117	144
TOTAL	277	276	344
<i>Very Low=Less than 50% of Areawide Median; Low=50-80% of Areawide Median; Moderate=80-120% of Areawide Median; Above Moderate=More than 120% of Areawide Median</i>			

The RHNA assignment has implications for the General Plan, since the City must ensure that it has designated sufficient land to accommodate these units. Moreover, Albany did not have a compliant Housing Element during 1999-2006, which means it must “carry forward” the unmet need from this time period into the current cycle. In determining how many units to carry forward, the City may subtract units that were built during the 1999-2006 period.

In most cases, the “very low” and “low” portion of the RHNA is accommodated through multi-family housing. The State has determined that land must be zoned to permit at least 20 units per acre to be counted as suitable for meeting this need.¹ Land does not need to be “vacant” to be counted as meeting the RHNA requirement. However, if developed sites are used, the City must be able to demonstrate that they are “underutilized” and can realistically be redeveloped during the RHNA period.

Albany is presently working to receive certification of its 2007-2014 Element. The City will be submitting a revised Housing Element to the State which shows that it has sufficient capacity to meet its RHNA.

¹ The 20 unit per acre figure applies to cities in metropolitan areas with populations less than 25,000.

Land Use Categories

At the next Study Session, we will also walk the Commission through the land use categories that are currently used in the Albany General Plan. The intent of this exercise is both to familiarize commissioners with the existing “vocabulary” of the General Plan, and also to discuss whether or not existing General Plan categories need to be changed. Staff has identified a number of issues with the categories that should be addressed through the update process.

In theory, General Plan categories are used as the basis for a city’s zoning regulations. General Plan categories are usually broader than zoning districts, and there are often multiple zoning districts within a given category. In Albany, there are presently a few areas where General Plan and zoning categories are not completely aligned, and there are a number of locations on the General Plan Map that do not match their zoning. These discrepancies may be rectified through a combination of General Plan changes (or “corrections”) and future zoning changes.

The existing General Plan categories are described below. The descriptions below are paraphrased, and incorporate amendments to the General Plan approved in 2004

Residential Categories

Low Density Single Family Housing. Consists of single family residences at densities from 1 to 17 units per acre.

Medium Density Multi-Family Housing. Includes duplexes, and 3-6 unit apartment buildings. Ranges from 17-34 dwelling units per acre, with an average of 27 units per acre.

High Density Multi-Family Housing. Density range is 17 to 63 units per net acre, with an average of 39 units per acre.

Albany Hill Planned Residential (referred to on the General Plan Map as “Planned Development 6 du/ac” and “Planned Development 9 du/ac”). This category has been applied to Albany Hill to allow for creative residential design which responds to the natural landform and the desire to retain open space on the ridgeline. Residential density was reduced from 12-18 units per acre to a 6-9 unit per acre range through a voter initiative in 1994.

Residential Towers. This category was added through a 2004 General Plan Amendment to recognize that the existing densities at Gateview (555 Pierce) are 87 units per acre. It applies only to the 466-unit Gateview development.

Commercial, Mixed Use, and Industrial Categories

General Commercial (also called “San Pablo Avenue General Commercial”). Region-serving commercial land uses. Improvement to visual appearance and intensification of commercial uses is desired. Allowable Floor Area Ratio (FAR) is 0.95, with a 45’ height limit. In 2004, this category was amended to specifically note that residential and mixed use development is allowed, with an FAR of 2.25 (and bonuses allowing up to 3.0), provided the commercial portion does not exceed 0.95. The amendment also allows multi-family housing at 1.75 FAR, provided an active ground floor activity is located along the San Pablo frontage.

Community Commercial (also called “Solano Avenue Community Commercial”). Main Street character, with a variety of local-serving retail, service, and office uses, interspersed with apartments. Recommended maximum Floor Area Ratio (FAR) is 1.25, with a 35’ height limit. In 2004, this category was amended to allow mixed use development with an FAR up to 2.0, and to allow projects that are mostly residential up to an FAR of 1.25, with a note that “housing on the ground floor of the Solano Avenue frontage is not encouraged.”

Planned Residential Commercial (PRC). This is intended to encourage redevelopment of existing commercial uses on the San Pablo corridor into mixed use developments typically comprised of street-level retail with high density residential uses on rear street frontages and second floors. These areas are seen as suitable for high density housing given the proximity to services and transit. In addition, PRC areas provide a transition from commercial uses on San Pablo to medium density residential uses on adjacent streets. No density range is given in the 1992 Plan.

Commercial Recreation. This designation applies to Golden Gate Fields and its environs. Although it is shown on the General Plan Map as a commercial category, it appears in the portion of the Land Use Element addressing the waterfront. A maximum FAR of 0.5 applies.

Light Industrial (also referred to as “Commercial/Service/Light Industrial”). Permits a variety of retail, repair, manufacturing, and live-work uses. Generally mapped along the railroad tracks.

In addition to the categories listed above, a 2004 General Plan amendment established the concept of commercial “nodes” around the intersections of Solano Avenue with San Pablo, Masonic, and Santa Fe. These are areas where more intense pedestrian-oriented retail and mixed use development could be considered.

Public Categories

Public/Quasi-Public. Includes schools, churches, and utilities, with a maximum FAR of 0.95. The General Plan Map further calls out which P/Q parcels are City properties (City Hall, Library) and churches. A 2004 amendment added Caltrans, UP, and BART lands to this category.

In addition, three categories have been designated for the UC Village property as follows:

- Residential Recreation. Medium residential densities up to 34 units/ acre, including recreational facilities and community centers, with FAR up to 0.95 for recreational buildings.
- Residential, Recreation, Commercial. Medium residential densities up to 34 units/ acre, including recreational facilities and community centers, with FAR up to 0.95 for recreational buildings, retail, and office development.
- Residential, Commercial. Medium residential densities up to 34 units/ acre, plus retail and office development at a maximum FAR of 0.95.

The General Plan Map also identifies a category (not defined in the text) called “Research,” which applies to the USDA facility.

Open Space Categories

The General Plan text describes two categories, listed below. However, the General Plan Map only identifies one category of open space (Parks and Recreation), plus an overlay area called “Creek Conservation Zone” which runs along the Codornices and Cerrito Creeks.

Public Open Space. This includes city parks, including portions of Albany Hill and the waterfront. Buildings up to 35’ are permitted, with a maximum coverage of 25%, on a case by case basis.

Private Open Space. This applies to permanent private open space set aside when the Gateview, Bridgewater, and Bayside Commons development were approved. It also includes two UC-owned parcels.

ANALYSIS

During the Study Session, the City’s consultant will provide an analysis of the existing land use categories, along with “food for thought” about how the categories might be changed to eliminate ambiguities, improve consistency with zoning, and respond to current trends in land use mapping. This is an informational session, intended for input from the Commission and public.

Among the potential topics for discussion are:

- Do the residential categories adequately cover the different types and densities of residential uses that occur in Albany? Are the density ranges appropriate? Can the categories be simplified?
- Do the commercial and mixed use categories adequately cover the different types of commercial uses that occur in the city? Are they still logical?
- Should the UC Village and USDA properties retain a “public” designation on the General Plan Map, or should the Map reflect the actual (or approved) uses in the UC Village Master Plan? (eg., residential, commercial, industrial, etc.)
- Should the Public/Quasi Public designation continue to specifically call out churches and City property?
- Are there specific Map issues and/or zoning inconsistencies that should be addressed during the General Plan Update?

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

N/A