

Albany Planning and Zoning Commission April 23, 2014 Meeting Summary

Draft Land Use Goals, Policies, and Actions

Consultant Barry Miller delivered a PowerPoint presentation on the proposed Land Use Element policies for Albany. A copy of the policies had been provided to Commissioners in their agenda packets and posted to the website on Friday April 18.

Two clarifying comments from Commissioners were considered: How are we integrating other plans and planning documents? How does this draft relate to the “audit” presented at the last meeting?

An opportunity for public comment was provided. Robert Outis noted that the Draft policies assumed no changes at the waterfront. He felt that was a bad assumption and it was short sighted of the city to do a long-range plan when the largest developable property in the city was off-limits for discussion. He urged the Commission to not “punt” and rely on vague platitudes for the waterfront. Without a vision for this area, this is not really a plan. He noted that Measure C did not ban development on the waterfront, it simply requires a vote before a land use change is approved. He also felt it was short sighted to assume no development on the UC Village remainder properties.

Anne Hersch summarized an email received from Ken Friedman regarding the draft policies. He requested that the city maximize flexibility on mixed use sites, allow taller buildings at nodes, including the area around the Albany Bowl, allow flexible daylight plane and setback requirements for parcels abutting existing multi-family buildings, increase parking flexibility, and allow increased height and density to create more viable development opportunities.

The Commission then discussed the draft goals, policies, and actions. The following comments were made:

1. I appreciate the reorganization of the goals and am okay with them as presented. I understand the benefit of the overarching goal, and see the Community Character goal as dealing with more of the fine grain issues.
2. Perhaps elevate the discussion of the industrial area—it seems lost in Policy 1.4 (title “PDR” is mis-leading. Perhaps this is the West Albany Business District.)
3. Seek Council direction on whether a Waterfront Element should be included. Think carefully and proceed with caution. Don’t let that Element bog down the process.
4. Perhaps the Gill Tract policy should under “Environmentally Sensitive Areas” (Goal 5)
5. Make sure there is a strong emphasis in the policies on encouraging new housing
6. Incorporate sustainability policies—zero energy mandate for residential units by 2020, targeting carbon-free power and energy efficiency, communitywide renewable energy, food security and urban agriculture, correcting our parking standards
7. Develop guidelines for each neighborhood. Move Action 2.C to Goal 6, since it could also apply to the CMX area. There may be underlying characteristics in the CMX area that we want to

emulate in new areas. Give the neighborhoods a stronger identity. *Another commissioner questioned the need for such guidelines—would this add another layer of regulation? The City already has residential design guidelines. Can we be less prescriptive, and let the character of neighborhoods grow more organically? Another commissioner cited the example of West Berkeley, where design guidelines encouraged buildings like Pyramid Brewery, which is in keeping with the area’s industrial character. Could guidelines help preserve the character of streets with McGregor bungalows?* The need for guidelines which do not impede modern architecture was noted.

8. Be more consistent with the use of “that” vs “which”

The other comments dealt directly with the content of the goal, policy, action statements. These are summarized below:

- Policy 1.2 should more explicitly reference the desire for employment growth and new jobs, since the balance is currently heavily weighted toward housing.
- Policy 1.3: change “shopping” streets to “commercial” streets
- Policy 1.7: cross-reference policies to be located elsewhere in the plan on how the city will address global climate change
- Policy 1.10: add other agencies: UC, transportation agencies, EBRPD
- Actions under Goal 1: (a) identify and remove barriers to housing construction; (b) undertake an economic development strategy to grow the employment base; (c) be a leader in climate change solutions.
- Policy 2.5: Make it a little more positive. Allow 2nd story additions to let homes be adapted to meet changing family needs, etc.
- Policy 2.7: Policy sounds a little bit anti-business. How can it be framed in a more positive way.
- Policy 2.10: Move it up higher—this is a priority.
- Action 2.C: Move to Goal 6. Change “homes” to buildings since this could also apply to commercial and industrial areas.
- Policy 3.1: Confirm the allowances for 2.0 FAR and 3.0 FAR on Solano and San Pablo
- Policy 3.4: Name Solano/San Pablo as a node. Include an action to incentivize development here, and meet with property owners to talk about lot consolidation and other ways to create a more vibrant place here.
- Potentially list Marin/San Pablo as a node? Maybe, but probably not—area is currently auto-oriented and has open space on one corner.
- Does Policy 3.10 conflict with our goal to protect residents on Adams and Kains?
- Policy 3.14: rename as “Northern Gateway.”
- Action 3.B: Allow 4-stories (or even 5 stories) at nodes
- Action 3.C: Awkward wording in 2nd to last line. Should be “while meeting the needs of local business and minimizing overflow...”
- Action 3.E: perhaps 5 story buildings within 100 feet of the intersection.
- Action 4.D: Delete due to uncertain legal status

- Policy 5.1: Change “forested” to “non-urbanized”, since there may be opportunities for grassland restoration.
- Policy 6.4: Add sidewalk repair
- Add Policy 6.11 on sustainable infrastructure. Renewable energy, composting, recycling, bike racks, EV parking, etc.
- Policy 6.7: drop reference to Albany farmers market on Solano, and keep it more generic “farmers markets”. Also add temporary street closures for block parties to build a sense of community.
- Action 6.C: Note that one purpose of a street tree program is to establish planting palettes for certain streets which can strengthen the identity of the city and create a stronger sense of place--- such as the sycamores on Marin Avenue. Also, a street tree program can ensure that the right types of trees are planted to reduce maintenance costs
- Add Action to acquire the Veterans building and another action to expand the senior center (perhaps this goes in the Community Services and Facilities Element and gets cross-referenced here).
- Action to encourage energy retrofits of the housing stock (or cross reference to that action wherever it is included).