

City of Albany



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

This is the one in a series of Planning and Zoning Commission Study Sessions on the Albany 2035 General Plan Update. This Study Session will cover land use assumptions for the General Plan, and ideas for land use policies to be included in the Plan. An opportunity for public comment will be provided. The Study Session will immediately follow a scoping session on the Environmental Impact Report to be prepared as part of the General Plan Update process.

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

Growth Assumptions

General Plan growth assumptions are shown in Table 1 below. The forecasts for 2035 indicate the addition of 665 households, 1,345 residents, and 830 jobs during the 20-year planning period from 2015-2035. Albany would have 8,080 households, about 19,885 residents, and just under 6,000 jobs by that year.

The household forecast is consistent with ABAG Projections 2009, which is the set of forecasts that has been used during the recent past for transportation planning, air quality planning, and other applications. However, the household forecast shows less growth than is envisioned by Plan Bay Area, the most recent regional planning document adopted by ABAG and MTC in compliance with SB 375. The Plan Bay Area forecasts show Albany gaining 1,170 households between 2010 and 2040, resulting in 8,740 households by 2040. If the 2010-2040 forecasts are interpolated, this would equate to 8,500 households by 2035, which is more than 400 households higher than the General Plan forecast. The City is not obligated to use the Plan Bay Area forecast, but should provide justification (in the Plan and EIR) as to why it is not realistic.

Table 1: Albany 2035 General Plan Growth Assumptions

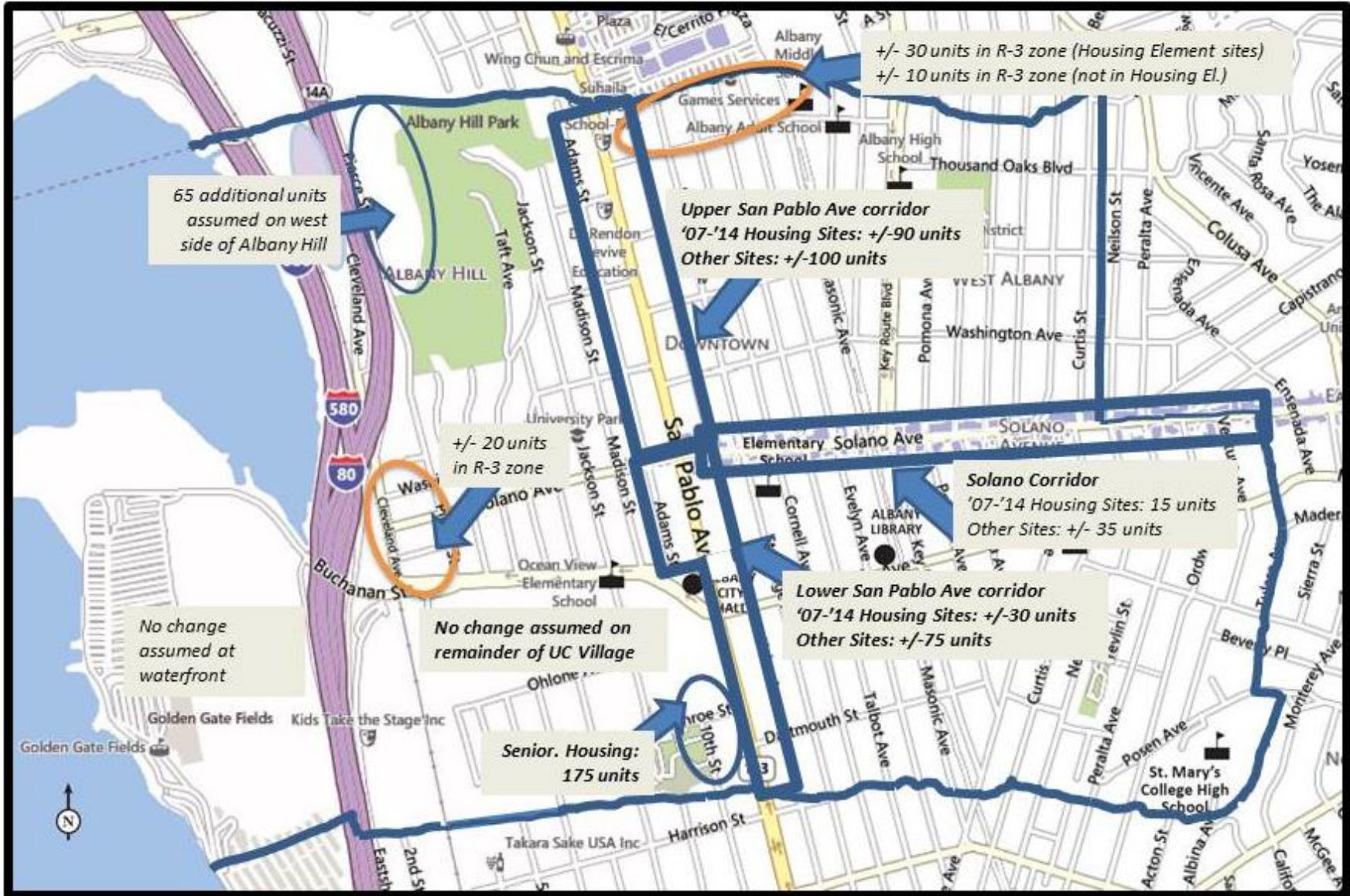
	2015	2035	Net Growth
Households	7,415	8,080	665
Population	18,540	19,885	1,345
Employment	5,150	5,980	830

The growth assumptions are shown geographically in Figure 1. Most of the 665 new households would be associated with growth on the San Pablo corridor. This includes 175 households in the recently approved senior housing development at 1130 San Pablo Avenue and another 295 households on scattered sites with San Pablo frontage. The scattered sites include parcels specifically identified in the Albany Housing Element as “housing opportunity sites” (such as the Hertz Rental Car lot) and other sites with long-term development potential. Approximately 50 households are presumed along the Solano corridor, and approximately 65 households are presumed through small multi-family infill projects in the existing R-3 zone. Another 65 households are presumed on the 11-acre vacant tract on the west side of Albany Hill. The remaining capacity is associated with individual vacant lots and second units in established neighborhoods.

The projections assume no substantive changes in General Plan Map designations or zoning. The maximum density on the San Pablo and Solano corridors is presumed to continue to be 63 units per acre.¹ No changes in height limits are proposed. No additional development is presumed on the UC Village properties (beyond the recently approved housing and retail development). No changes to the waterfront are presumed. In the event changes to existing land uses on the waterfront are proposed, a General Plan Amendment would be required.

¹ Densities of up to 85 units per acre are allowed for affordable housing using state and local density bonus provisions.

Figure 1: Growth Assumptions for 2035 General Plan



Existing Land Use Element Policies

The existing (1992) General Plan Land Use Element goals and policies (including amendments approved in 2004) are included as Appendix “A” to this staff report. Appendix A is formatted as an “audit” of the existing policies, with the policy listed in one column and an assessment of the policy in the column next to it. The assessment notes whether the policy should be carried forward, edited, deleted, or replaced.

The goals (and related policies) in the adopted Land Use Element are organized into the following topic areas:

1. Residential Character
2. San Pablo Corridor
3. Kains-Adams Corridors
4. Solano Corridor
5. Transition areas along Solano cross-streets
6. Industrial area
7. UC Village
8. Public Facilities
9. Community Design

Some of these goals/policies apply to specific areas of the City and others apply more globally to the entire city. Some of the policies are actually “actions” that were to be implemented following adoption of the General Plan in 1992. Some of these actions have been completed, some are ongoing, and others have yet to be accomplished (and may or may not remain valid).

ANALYSIS

While the new General Plan does not necessarily need to carry forward existing goals and policies, the existing Land Use Element provides a good starting point for discussion. Observations about the existing policies are listed below, and will be discussed further at the Study Session. Input from the Commission is requested both on existing policies, and on potential new policy topics. Many land use issues commonly addressed by General Plans are not addressed at all in the existing Plan and could be added to the new Plan.

- The organization of policies into geographic areas (San Pablo, Solano, Kains-Adams, etc.) creates a number of problems. There is some redundancy, since the same policies apply to multiple areas. There also appears to be a focus on specific areas, without consideration of the “big picture” (e.g., citywide issues).
- There is no overarching goal about the kind of place Albany should be in the future or the way the city should grow. The first goal in the existing Plan is to preserve the City’s “residential character,” but this does not acknowledge the fact that the City also includes thriving shopping districts, industrial areas, open spaces, and a waterfront. The goal should be clarified, with a set of overarching policies about the mix of uses in the city. For instance, Albany should aspire to balance housing growth and job growth and create opportunities for new employment as well as housing, Albany should aspire for a sustainable development pattern in which residents can walk to local shops and services, and so on.

- The policies on “residential character” (Goal 1) do not really relate to residential character. Three unrelated topics are addressed (Albany Hill, the PRC overlay, and second units). The policies should identify what is meant by “residential character” and how it should be conserved. Policies could address topics like:
 - maintenance and upkeep of residential properties and enforcement of local codes
 - treatment of front yards, landscaping, fences, and other features that contribute to the quality of residential neighborhoods
 - discouraging “teardowns” of smaller homes and their replacement with much larger homes
 - special considerations for development on small (less than 3,750 SF) lots
 - issues related to lot mergers, lot line adjustments, and subdivision
 - transitions between higher density (R-3) development and lower density (R-1) development
 - mitigating the effects of nearby uses (such as retail, service, and schools) on residential areas
 - minimizing the potentially disruptive impacts of residential construction
 - encroachment of non-residential uses into neighborhoods (e.g., along Adams and Kains, or elsewhere where this has been an issue in the past)
 - compatibility of new infill homes and major additions (including second story additions) with adjacent homes
 - buffering of residential uses from road noise, air pollution, and external factors
 - provisions for home-based businesses
 - accessory uses and structures
 - compatibility of uses allowed in residential areas, such as group homes and day care
 - treatment of non-conforming uses in residential areas
 - beautification and greening programs in residential areas (street trees, etc.)
 - protection of views and vistas from individual homes

- Rather than having a separate set of policies for Solano and San Pablo Avenues, the City could instead present a common goal for its mixed use corridors. Policies under this goal would address the issues covered by Goals 2, 3, 4, and 5 in the existing Plan. It is not necessary to have policies on allowable floor area ratio (e.g., Policy 2.5, 2.5.a, 2.7, 4.1, 4.1.a) in the General Plan, since this is already covered in the definitions of the land use categories.

- Policies for commercial and mixed use corridors could cover:
 - the character of each corridor, and the extent to which different segments serve different functions (for example, how would the area around Solano/San Pablo differ from the northern end of the corridor close to El Cerrito Plaza?)
 - the intent of any “nodes” to be designated along the corridor. The definition of a “node” is unclear in the existing General Plan. Are these simply places where there should be a stronger sense of place (through signage, public art, public space, bus stop locations, ground floor retail and restaurant uses)? Or are these places where taller buildings and higher densities might be considered (4 stories instead of 3 stories, etc.). Also, where should nodes be located? At the San Pablo/Solano intersection only, or in other locations?
 - future of individual parcels along the San Pablo and Solano corridors (for example, the existing Plan talks about the former library on Solano)

- the desired mix of uses on the corridors, and how to address excessive concentrations of certain uses (e.g, nail salons, cell phone stores, etc.)? how can the retail base of the City be strengthened and better serve residents?
 - transitions and buffering between commercial uses (on both Solano and San Pablo) and nearby residential areas (on Kains/Adams and other side streets).
 - balancing auto-oriented uses with pedestrian-oriented uses (are uses with parking lots in front okay in some areas but not in others?)
 - balancing “inactive” uses such as office space with “active” uses such as retail
 - balancing “local serving” uses with “regional” uses
 - future of auto-sales and auto-repair uses
 - architectural design (transparency and height on ground floor, signage, location of structure and entries on the property, pedestrian features, compatibility with nearby uses, etc.)
 - compatibility between residential and commercial uses within vertical mixed use projects
 - landscaping and streetscape improvements along the corridors
 - incentives to include housing above ground floor commercial uses
 - setbacks, screening, and daylight plane requirements between commercial uses and nearby lower density housing
 - issues related to storage of vehicles on side streets
 - outdoor seating, sidewalk uses, etc.
 - sustainable business practices and green business development
 - adaptive reuse of older commercial buildings
- There is currently only one policy on Albany’s industrial area in the entire General Plan. The stated goal is to “increase the vitality” of this area, but it would be helpful to articulate a vision for its future. What kinds of uses would work here in the long term? Tech? Live-work? Large-format retail? The existing Plan envisions the relocation of auto sales/service businesses from San Pablo to the Eastshore / Cleveland area. Is this still viable?
 - The future of UC Village is presently addressed through a series of 1992 policies that are now outdated. These should be updated based on the UC Village master plan and completion of the Albany Village family housing.
 - It might be worth adding a separate goal for Albany Hill, with a series of policies that incorporate the key recommendations of the Creekside Master Plan. These policies would address maintenance of the existing residential uses on the hill, protection of open space and parkland, the future of private developable land, protection of important views, conservation of natural resources, and similar topics.
 - Policies on public facilities (now under Goal 8) will probably be moved to the new “Community Services and Facilities” Element of the General Plan. Nonetheless, there are issues related to mitigation of development impacts (on schools, fire and police, etc.) that should be covered here. There may also be land use issues associated with large public facilities (such as the Department of Rehabilitation Orientation Center for the Blind and the USDA laboratory). These could be covered in the Land Use Element.

- There is a community character goal (Goal 9), with policies on the positive elements of Albany’s character (architecture, views, etc.), creeks, street trees, Albanu Hill, and gateways. Some of these topics will be covered under other goals, but it will still be appropriate to have policies on topics such as gateways, signage, lighting, undergrounding of utilities, historic preservation, public art, and similar design issues.
- A general goal and set of policies on the waterfront should be added, either here or in a free-standing Waterfront Element.
- The existing General Plan is silent on a number of important issues that are regularly before the Planning and Zoning Commission. New policies could be developed on:
 - Siting of wireless communication facilities
 - Expansion of private institutions, such as churches or private schools (St. Mary’s, etc.)
 - Siting of medical marijuana facilities
 - Entertainment uses and alcoholic beverage sales
 - Coordination with Berkeley, Richmond, and El Cerrito on key decisions

The Commission should think about other recurring land use issues that might be covered by new General Plan policies.

The focus of the above bulleted lists is on potential land use **policies**. The General Plan also includes “**actions**” which are intended to implement policies. As policies are developed, we should also think about any specific steps that may be needed to carry them out. For example, are updates to design guidelines needed in order to achieve the policies for San Pablo Avenue? Are specific zoning revisions needed to address buffering between residential and commercial uses? Questions like these will need to be considered as part of this discussion.

Study Session Format

The study session is envisioned as 60-90 minutes in length. There will be a PowerPoint presentation on the growth assumptions, followed by discussion. Commissioners will be asked to weigh in on the assumptions and offer feedback. There will then be several more PowerPoint slides on the land use policy audit, followed by additional discussion. Commissioner will be asked to share their thoughts about possible new policies, or additional topic areas that should be covered. Public comment will be considered before the close of the study session.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

N/A

APPENDIX A: LAND USE POLICY AUDIT (attached)