

Albany Planning and Zoning Commission

March 26, 2014 Meeting Summary

General Plan EIR Scoping Session

A scoping session was held on the General Plan EIR, which is being prepared concurrently with the General Plan. The purpose of the scoping session is to provide an opportunity for the public to learn more about the project EIR and to provide an opportunity for comment. Amy ##### from LSA Associates delivered a PowerPoint presentation and highlighted the topics to be covered by the EIR, the major tasks and milestones, and the process for commenting.

The Commission was given an opportunity to ask questions on the presentation and project:

1. Are you looking at all CEQA topics or only selected topics. *Amy responded that all topics would be covered.*
2. Will the Active Transportation Plan be considered as part of the project? Will the Plan be rolled into the General Plan, and will its impacts be considered in the EIR. *It was explained that the General Plan Transportation Element would incorporate key policies and actions from the ATP. The ATP was subject to its own CEQA review.*
3. How will the EIR consider alternatives? *We will develop alternatives to project in collaboration with staff. One alternative will be to retain the existing plan, e.g., the "No Project" alternative.*
4. How will the EIR treat undergrounding of utilities? *This would be considered in the section on Aesthetic and Visual Impacts, if relevant.*
5. How do you evaluate impacts that are hard to quantify, like the effects of increased density on the quality of life? Especially impacts such as parking shortages and the lack of retail if we allow ground floor residential uses on the commercial streets? *Another commissioner noted that these were really General Plan policy issues rather than CEQA issues, since they related more to the community's vision. Another Commissioner noted that because this was a "program" EIR rather than a "project" EIR, it was tricky to evaluate impacts.*
6. It is questionable whether parking impacts have to be evaluated by CEQA, but this is a big issue in Albany and we should cover it even if its not mandatory. *The comment was noted.*
7. Make sure we include quality of life metrics when we set our CEQA thresholds, to the extent possible.
8. Please use the new OPR guidelines for traffic.
9. Regarding project alternatives, one alternative should look at the Plan Bay Area forecast, which exceeds the General Plan forecast. Another alternative might maintain our current high parking requirements, and assumes less development. We should also consider how the waterfront might be treated in the alternatives. Perhaps development of Golden Gate Fields should be considered as one of the alternatives (not the project alternative, however).
10. Make sure that Eastshore state park improvements are considered in the Parks and Rec section.
11. Are there any implications to not using the Plan Bay Area forecast?

The only public comment received was on digital billboards, but the speaker was informed that item would be heard later on the agenda.

Land Use Element Presentation

Barry Miller did a presentation on the growth forecasts and assumptions to be used in the General Plan, and the “audit” of land use policies in the existing General Plan. Following the presentation, there was a discussion of the material.

Commissioner comments:

1. I agree with the idea of creating a new overarching goal on the future of the city, rather than just focusing on residential character. We should aspire to be a vibrant city. We should mention recreational improvements. We should be walkable and bikeable. Some of our retail is shifting to personal services due to structural changes in the national retail economy. We should consider the implications for Albany’s our land use regulations. Are there uses we need to regulate more closely to avoid over-concentration? Do we need to be more judicious about pubs and entertainment venues?
2. We should also look at the possibility of an infill BART station (without parking) at Solano Avenue. Perhaps this could be in our “high growth” alternatives analysis.
3. Some of the residential issues on the list of future policies may not belong in the General Plan because they relate to operations rather than land use. For example, the effects of construction on neighborhoods. *Another commissioner disagreed.*
4. Second units should be covered as a land use issue.
5. Combining the goals for the commercial areas seems reasonable. Differentiate Solano and San Pablo through separate policies.
6. Encourage taller buildings at the nodes, higher FARs at Solano-San Pablo. The Farmer’s Market is an activity hub and is a good example of the sort of thing that goes on in a node. What happened to the node at Marin/San Pablo?
7. Transition from Solano Avenue to the residential areas on both sides is a key issue. Setbacks, screening, daylight plane regulations—these are all important. The GP should provide the context for how the zoning regulations address this transition.
8. Relocation of auto services to the freeway area did actually happen, per the 1992 Plan. But car dealerships are changing their formats and now it may be possible to keep them on San Pablo?
9. Consider development impacts on public services, including BART
10. Need to coordinate with the school district. We need to know their plans.
11. Waterfront Element---yes or no? Good to have separate policy for Albany Hill.
12. Yes to minimum density in SC and SPC.
13. We need a policy to require improvements to park and open space as the city grows—pocket parks as well as neighborhood parks. Dedication of open space should be required in new development.
14. Commercial on the side streets crossing Solano goes deeper on the south side than the north side. Look at transitional uses—homes in the SC area on the north-south streets. Allow 100%

residential here, even if in the SC zone, since that is the existing use. Could also be 100% commercial.

15. Keep the residential character goal—new residential should convey a village atmosphere. In commercial areas, make sure we provide some front setback instead of having long unbroken walls on the street.
16. What are the factors inhibiting retail growth on Solano? *Staff replied that on-line retail was changing shopping patterns. Perhaps a merchant survey could be listed as an action item in the Plan?* A commissioner noted that more of Solano was going to personal services.
17. How is child care handled in this chapter.
18. A commissioner suggested that the presentation be shared via google.docs
19. Yes to a Solano BART station.
20. There is some inconsistency in the feedback we are providing. On the one hand, we want to preserve residential—but we also want vibrant business. Can we have both? Emphasize *neighborhood* character rather than *residential* character. The two can be better integrated and can co-exist. Make it easier, not harder, to locate a business on Solano.
21. Our residential character is not in jeopardy and the residential streets will be fine on their own because residents will preserve their financial assets and invest in their homes. I'm more concerned about the health of our retail area. Note that the lower end of Solano has weaker retail than the upper end.
22. Free parking is antithetical to promoting businesses... perhaps we should consider pay parking to increase turnover.
23. Incorporate the additional housing called for by the UC Village Master Plan. I didn't see it in the projections.
24. What is the historical context for Solano and San Pablo being separate goals?
25. Income diversity among our residents is one of Albany's strengths and we should include that as a goal. It's an important part of our character. Affordable housing is important to achieving that goal.
26. Include other plans, like ATP and the Parks MP.
27. Identify architectural prototypes for different neighborhoods—how can we encourage new development to be compatible? For example, corrugated metal siding in CMX?
28. Add an action to update the SPC guidelines

Public Comment

Ken Friedman asked staff to clarify that minimum residential density standards in the SPC and SC areas only applied to projects that included housing, and that there was not a proposal to make housing mandatory in all new commercial developments. He liked the focus on retail, and encouraged the commission to maximize flexibility and not limit uses. He liked the opportunity to do residential, but the high parking requirements are an issue, and more incentives are needed. Clarify the intent of the PRC overlay. San Pablo and Solano is a tricky place for a node because the parcels are very small. How about a node by the Albany Bowl—the parcels are larger. Consider waiving the daylight plane requirements for parcels abutting Kains and Adams if they already have three story buildings.