

CITY OF ALBANY
SUSTAINABILITY COMMITTEE
STAFF REPORT

Agenda date: July 16, 2014

TO: Albany Sustainability Committee

FROM: Barry Miller, Planning Consultant
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SUBJECT: General Plan Update

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

This is an informational report for discussion only.

Background

The City of Albany is updating its General Plan, the long-range planning document that will guide Albany's growth and development for the next 20 years. The Plan is divided into "elements" (chapters) that address land use, transportation, housing, parks and open space, conservation, safety/noise, and community facilities. The existing General Plan was adopted in 1992 and does not reflect current data, forecasts, or issues in the City. Adoption of a General Plan is required by State law, and must be completed in conformance with Government Code requirements.

The Plan Update process started in March 2013 and is expected to be completed in early 2015. The new Plan will have a horizon year of 2035. The Planning and Zoning Commission has been holding monthly study sessions on the emerging Plan, and is the primary conduit for public discussion. Other City Commissions and Committees are also participating in the project through periodic updates and work sessions.

A briefing on the General Plan was provided to the Sustainability Committee on April 29, 2013. The purpose of that briefing was to orient Committee members to the project and respond to initial questions and ideas. Since that time, staff and the consultant have performed the following tasks:

- Completion of the Albany Housing Element and certification of that Element by the State Department of Community Development. The Housing Element is part of the General Plan but stands on its own as a separate document. The Element was adopted by the City Council in March 2014 and received State certification in June.
- Completion of General Plan technical studies such as noise monitoring and traffic counts.
- Completion of draft "existing conditions" reports on key long-range planning topics, including transportation, air quality, noise, geology, hydrology, biology, hazards and utilities.
- Development and maintenance of a project website, including interactive features which enable the public to weigh in on long-range planning topics.
- Development of a new Draft Land Use Map illustrating expected patterns of future growth in the City over the next 20 years. The City has also developed a set of population and employment

forecasts which accompany the Map, indicating the increment of growth projected in various subareas of Albany.

- Community input, solicited through Commission meetings, City Council briefings, public hearings, a Town Hall meeting (on housing), and printed and web-based material about the General Plan Update.
- Development and preliminary vetting of goals, policies and actions on land use, transportation, housing, and parks and open space.

Upcoming milestones include the completion of policies and actions for the remaining chapters of the General Plan, including conservation and sustainability, community facilities, environmental hazards (safety and noise), and the waterfront. The policies and actions will be packaged in a Draft General Plan document by the end of 2014. An Environmental Impact Report for the project is also underway. The current schedule anticipates public hearings on the new General Plan in early 2015, with adoption in the Spring.

The Sustainability Committee briefing on July 16 will focus on the General Plan Conservation and Sustainability Element. The Conservation Element is a required component of the General Plan, and addresses the management of natural resources, including soils, water, minerals, vegetation, creeks, wildlife habitat, and similar topics. The City has expanded the required scope of this Element to include sustainability policies, providing a bridge to the Climate Action Plan and a framework for local “green” initiatives. In addition to including these policies in their own element, the theme of sustainability underpins the entire General Plan, particularly its land use and transportation policies.

Draft goals, policies and actions for Conservation and Sustainability are “**Attachment “A”**” to this staff report. **Attachment A will be sent out as a separate email on Monday July 14.** At the Study Session on June 16, the City’s consultant will walk the Committee through the Draft goals and policies, and solicit feedback from Committee members. A similar study session will be held on July 23 with the Planning and Zoning Commission. These study sessions will not be the last opportunity to comment—if needed, follow-up discussions with the Sustainability Committee may be scheduled.

General Plan Projections

The General Plan includes population, household, and employment forecasts for Albany for 2035. The forecasts are based on multiple sources, including the “official” forecasts used for regional planning purposes by the Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG) and the Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC). The forecasts also consider the availability of land for development, physical constraints, and the location of “housing opportunity sites” that have been identified by the Albany Housing Element.

Current forecasts indicate:

- 780 households added between 2010 and 2035, for a total of 8,180 households by 2035
- 1,640 residents added between 2010 and 2035, for a total population of 20,150 by 2035
- 960 jobs added between 2010 and 2035, for a total of 5,980 jobs by 2035

Most of this growth is expected to occur on the San Pablo Avenue corridor, with smaller increments of growth along Solano Avenue and on underutilized parcels in the multi-family zoning districts. No land use changes to the waterfront have been presumed in the forecasts.

Sustainability Policy Audit

The intent of the Conservation and Sustainability Element of the General Plan is to integrate and synthesize existing policies, rather than to change the City's current policies. The General Plan is not intended to be an update of the Climate Action Plan, the Albany Hill Creekside Master Plan, or other planning documents that address resource conservation. It is broader in its scope than these documents, and less prescriptive in its recommendations. As appropriate, the General Plan will provide direction to amend or update related planning documents in future years.

Because the document is largely a synthesis of existing policies, one of the key tasks in preparing it was an "audit" of existing conservation-related policies in Albany. Among the documents reviewed were the 1992 General Plan and the Albany Climate Action Plan. The audit also considered regional plans and programs related to topics such as air and water quality.

It should be noted that there are numerous documents related to resource conservation along the Albany waterfront, including documents covering Eastshore State Park, the Albany Bulb, Albany Beach, and the Bay Trail. These areas will be addressed in a separate chapter of the General Plan focused on the Albany Waterfront. The Waterfront Element will emphasize the open space value of the shoreline and will not be proposing changes in policy or changes to the General Plan Map in this area (under Measure C, such changes would be subject to a citywide vote).

Draft Goals, Policies, and Actions

As noted above, Attachment "A" (to be provided in a supplemental staff report on Monday July 14) includes the Draft Conservation and Sustainability policies. This is a Working Draft for discussion only. Comments are encouraged and revisions are likely before a Draft General Plan is published.

The existing 1992 Albany General Plan combined the Conservation, Recreation, and Open Space Element into a single chapter. The new General Plan has separated Recreation and Open Space out as a separate chapter. Policies related to those topics (and parks) have been moved to that Element. The 1992 Plan goals related to Conservation were to:

1. Enhance the natural features of the City's creeks and increase public access to them
2. Increase street tree planting throughout Albany to beautify the City and purify the air
3. Preserve the crest of Albany Hill for public open space use
4. Maintain and improve the quality of the natural environment and cultural resources
5. Continue to value the importance of the Albany waterfront and shoreline as a place of scenic beauty

The existing plan includes 16 policies under these five goals. It does not address climate change, greenhouse gas emissions, sea level rise, or adaptation. It also does not address sustainability topics such as waste reduction, recycling, reclaimed water use, green building, and walkability. The existing plan includes only very brief mention of air and water quality, wildlife, energy and water conservation, watershed management, mineral conservation, and other topics typically found in a conservation element.

The new Conservation and Sustainability Element is more expansive in scope than the existing Plan and has considerably more policies. It includes eight goals, corresponding to the following topics:

- Protection of Natural Features (including creeks, Albany Hill, and the waterfront)
- Urban Forestry (including street trees)
- Land Resources

- Water Resources
- Air Resources
- Habitat Management
- Sustainable Development
- Planning for Climate Change

Policies and actions have been drafted for each of the goals listed above. In each case, the source of the policy is listed in small (8 point italics) font. The statements have been rewritten (and in some cases completely restructured) to reflect the focus and format conventions of a General Plan. In some cases, the statements are new and reflect best practices or other directives.

Study Session Format

The study session is envisioned as 60 to 90 minutes in length. There will be a short PowerPoint presentation on the goals, policies, and actions followed by discussion. Commissioners will be asked to share their thoughts about the draft policies, including additional policies or topic areas that should be covered. Public comment will be considered before the close of the study session. Comments may also be submitted in writing after the Study Session via email or feedback on the Project website.

ATTACHMENTS

- A. *Draft Conservation and Sustainability Goals, Policies, and Actions (7/14/14)*