

## WORKING DRAFT FOR REVIEW BY SUSTAINABILITY COMMITTEE

### Summary of Sustainability Committee Discussion on the Albany General Plan July 16, 2014

The Sustainability Committee discussed the Draft Conservation and Sustainability Element of the General Plan at its July 16, 2014 meeting. Consultant Barry Miller delivered a PowerPoint presentation, including an overview of the project and the proposed conservation and sustainability goals in the new Element. The following comments were made:

- What is the legal authority of the General Plan –is it advisory or mandatory? Is the city required to comply with its policies? (*Barry explained that it is legally binding; however, the language uses verbs like “encourage” and “support” to provide flexibility. Where a directive is mandatory, the language is firmer, using words like “require” and “prohibit”.*)
- How will “Voices to Vision” be considered in the General Plan, since it was not “adopted” per se and is not a policy document. (*Barry explained that Voices to Vision would be described in the narrative but that its recommendations did not translate easily into policies since they were aspirational*)
- Barry explained that sustainability was a “thread” that ran through many elements of the Plan. In addition to having a Conservation and Sustainability chapter in the Plan, there are also sustainability principles inherent in the Land Use Element, the Transportation Element, and so on. Committee members asked to see the other elements to understand the broader context for policies in the Conservation and Sustainability Element.

Barry reviewed the seven goals in the new Element.

- How are public health issues reflected in the General Plan, particularly those related to toxics and hazmats? (*Barry explained that public health was another overarching theme that underpinned all elements of the Plan. Specific issues relating to toxics are addressed in the Environmental Hazards Element. Other aspects of public health such as walkability are in Transportation. Air quality is addressed in the Conservation Element.*)
- The first and fourth goals seem similar—what is the distinction between them?

#### Goal 1 Comments: Natural Features

- What does the verb “conserve” mean in the context of natural features? Does conserve mean don’t change it ever? When you say “conserve Albany Hill” or “conserve the waterfront,” what is the intent? The context is different than saying “conserve energy” or “conserve water.”
- “Conserve” may be an old fashioned word – legally, we don’t even have to call this the “conservation” element. The language feels dated. Try and avoid “1970s” terms.
- How does one take a directive to “encourage” something and then make it legally binding? How does this work in practice? (*Barry explained that the General Plan provided broad policy direction which is followed up by regulations such as the municipal code that are more specific and tangible.*)
- It was noted that Planning and Zoning approvals are contingent on findings that the approval is consistent with the General Plan, so even policies that “encourage” carry some weight.

- The Committee suggested we use more active verbs than “encourage” to give some of the policies more teeth. Perhaps some of these should say “require.”
- Where are historic and cultural resources addressed? (*Barry notes this is in the Land Use Element*)

#### Goal 2: Urban Forest

- How does a policy to abate hazardous trees affect eucalyptus trees on Albany Hill? Would this compel the City to remove these trees because of the fire hazard (*Barry replied that the General Plan cross-referenced the Albany Hill Creekside Master Plan on this topic, since it has detailed vegetation prescriptions for Albany Hill. Those prescriptions would still guide tree policy on the Hill.*)
- How does urban agriculture fit into urban forestry? Do the two conflict, or they complementary? (*Barry explained that they were complementary and that urban agriculture was covered in the Open Space Element and would be cross-referenced here*)

#### Goal 3: Air and Water Quality

- This goal sounds dated. It should address greenhouse gas reduction also. Think about renaming it “Air Quality, Water Quality, and....[something else that encompasses greenhouse gas reduction].”
- Does indoor air quality get addressed under this goal? (*Barry—we can add that*)
- What about leaf blowers—or more broadly, gasoline powered equipment? It’s a health-related issue as well as a noise issue.
- Policy 3-3 refers to construction-related impacts, especially earth movement and debris. Perhaps we should add a similar policy on day to day domestic activities that generate toxic air emissions, including leaf blowers, etc.
- There is a proposed policy here indicating the City will carry out state and federal mandates relating to air and water quality. If this policy was not here, the City would still be required to do this—so what is gained by stating it here? (*Barry noted that this particular policy was a carry-over from the 1992 Plan, and was important as an expression of City support for state and federal legislation to protect the environment and enforce these requirements once enacted*).

#### Goal 4: Plant and Animal Habitat

- A dark sky ordinance is a good idea. Text should provide more detail about what this would require and how it would affect lighting regulations—avoiding upward projection of light, avoiding broad spectrum street lighting, etc.
- Does the presence of a policy indicating the city’s intent to comply with CEQA on wildlife impact assessment imply that we’re not doing that now [*Barry notes that the City is already doing this, but it is not explicitly stated as a policy*]

#### Goal 5: Water and Energy Conservation

- Many of the CAP measures referenced in this section appear to have been expressed as policies rather than actions. What is the rationale behind that? [*Barry explains the rationale—those that were general expressions of intent, such as encouraging renewable energy use, were listed as policies. Those calling for a specific task to be completed were expressed as actions.*]

- There is no reference to the CAP GHG reduction goal for 2020. Should that be in here as a projection or a policy? (*Barry notes that the GHG reduction target would be referenced in the narrative text rather than as a policy, but we can certainly add that as a policy*)
- This is a 20-year plan, but the actions listed here express where we are right now. How can we include longer-term visionary actions that get us to 2035? In the future, we will have new data sources and technologies—we don't know what they are yet. How do we reconcile? (*Other members comment that this is addressed through future revisions of the Climate Action Plan. Barry notes that there is an action to regularly update the CAP.*)
- Perhaps make a commitment to do update the CAP every five years

#### Goal 6: Sustainable Development

- Policy 6.7 about being a regional leader in environmental policy seems buried in the text right now. We should bump it up and make it a bigger point—perhaps it can be one of our goals, or an overarching theme of the General Plan. It is a powerful statement.
- Are there other principles or overarching themes that can be distilled and bumped up—for example, our support for state and federal legislation on climate change?
- Where is sea level rise addressed? (*Barry notes that adaptation is addressed in this section*)
- There is a policy here to make climate change a planning consideration—this aligns with the earlier point about Albany being a regional leader.

#### Goal 7: Waste Reduction

- We talk about household hazardous waste here, but what about commercial waste—plastic containers, restaurant waste, cleaners, pesticides, plastic bags, etc. We should add a policy to address that as well. Perhaps replace “household hazardous waste” with “residential and commercial hazardous waste”
- Policy 7.5 is about collecting waste—where do we address reducing waste, by eliminating toxic materials etc.
- The policies under this goal address diversion, but we should also include a policy to reduce consumption so there is less waste to divert. Can we develop an absolute target for waste reduction, in addition to the 90% waste diversion target
- How can we integrate the sharing economy here—tool swaps, clothes swaps, reuse of items, the notion of a circular economy where items are shared or rented instead of purchased. This is a good way to express our aspiration to reduce consumption and waste (use less) as well as not landfilling waste (it was noted that Stopwaste has not yet tackled this issue through a quantified target).
- More broadly, how does the sharing economy get expressed in the General Plan as a philosophical theme? Are there land use and spatial implications?

Barry indicated the notes from the Committee meeting would be forwarded to the Planning and Zoning Commission. The Committee indicated they would like to discuss the notes at their September meeting. The Chair encouraged Committee members to review the Draft between now and the next meeting. Barry indicated he would prepare a new Draft after the Planning and Zoning Commission meeting that would be returned to the Sustainability Committee for further discussion. The Committee will consider forming a Subcommittee to discuss this further.