

Albany Planning and Zoning Commission
May 28, 2014 Meeting Summary

Study Session on Draft Transportation Goals, Policies, and Actions

Barry Miller delivered a PowerPoint presentation on the Draft Transportation Element. He noted that he had delivered a similar presentation to the Traffic and Safety Commission the previous week; notes from that meeting were included in the agenda packet. The Traffic and Safety Commission reviewed the Element thoroughly and did a page by page walk through. They also took public comment.

Chair Donaldson asked for comments from the Commission. Nick Pilch asked that the transportation policy audit be posted on the website. Commissioner Pilch was also concerned that the 1992 General Plan was the starting point for the new Element, since many of the concepts from that era are not relevant any more.

The Chair indicated he thought Policy 1.1 might be unrealistic because it puts pedestrians ahead of cars. He noted that the streets were built for cars, and they were still the dominant mode of travel. Clay Larsen (speaking from the audience) agreed, and stated that most people get around by car and this was verified by census data. The language should reflect actual transportation modes and not an idealized view. Both Nick Pilch and David Arkin disagreed and suggested leaving the Policy as is.

On Action 1.D, Commissioner Arkin wanted to make sure that the language would not preclude proposals such as the meandering sidewalks that had been proposed for 715 Hillside. He also suggested that Goal 2 be edited to explain that the ultimate goal (of reducing GHGs) was to mitigate climate change. Chair Donaldson asked that Action 2.B (last sentence) be edited to add bicycling to the list.

On Goal 3, the following changes were suggested:

- On Policy 3.6, both Doug Donaldson and Nick Pilch suggested adding language about completing the sidewalk network.
- In the actions under Goal 3, Phil Moss suggested an action to put a link to 511.org on the City's website.
- David Arkin suggested that the City make it easier for homeowners to hire contractors to repair the sidewalks. Create a process for people to improve their own sidewalks. Chair Donaldson suggested a new action to "explore a sidewalk improvement funding mechanism, and streamline the process that allows residents to improve their own sidewalks."
- On Action 3.C (bridge over I-80), Chair Donaldson asked where this came from. Nick Pilch said it was from a Cerrito Creek study. Phil Moss said a tunnel would be too expensive. The Chair noted that the equivalent bridge in Berkeley was very expensive. Emeryville contributed to the cost. Maybe Richmond or El Cerrito would contribute to the cost of a bridge in Albany. Perhaps add this to the action (the possibility that this would be jointly funded by other cities).

The following comments were made on Goal 4:

- Nick Pilch suggested that Policy 4.1 be reworded to read “Collect, analyze, and periodically report out on data on traffic accidents”. He also wondered if the annual report proposed by Action 4.A was frequent enough.
- On Policy 4.,10, David Arkin suggested that the City use red curbs, etc., to keep the streets clear for emergency vehicles.
- On Action 4.B, Phil Moss suggested that the statement be amended to also enforce the illegal use of sidewalks by bicycles.

On Policy 5.4, Phil Moss noted that “cut through” traffic was a problem due to trucks as well as cars. He observed that the City no longer had truck route signs, and needed to do a better job educating merchants that there were designated routes for delivery trucks, etc. Chair Donaldson indicated that goods delivery was an ongoing concern, and that double parking on commercial streets was also an issue. Nick Pilch wondered if trucks should be addressed in the goal under “vehicle flow.” Phil Moss stated the City should make sure its bike routes did not interfere with truck routes.

The Commission generally agreed with Traffic and Safety’s proposed revisions to avoid school-related traffic. The following specific points were made:

- Nick Pilch suggested that Policy 5.4 be amended to say “local cut through motor vehicle traffic between...”
- On Policy 5.6, the list of traffic calming devices (such as...) should be expanded to include traffic circles and center islands.
- On Policy 5.10, the Commission discussed the idea of not having sidewalks on hillside streets. David Arkin thought this might work if there were still pathways---and pedestrians did not have to walk in the street. Perhaps delete the words “discourage sidewalks” and instead include a focus on pedestrian walkways and trails. A suggestion was made to amend the municipal code language 20.24.040(F)(10) which discourages sidewalks in the RHD zoning district.
- A separate suggestion was made to add a policy to encourage Creekside trails, where feasible (or to cross-reference relevant policies in the Park/Open Space or Conservation Element).

Chair Donaldson asked if the Commissioners had comments on the notes from the Traffic and Safety meeting on Goals 6/7. Nick Pilch said he generally concurred with their comments and direction. He suggested that Goal 6 be reworded so that “vehicle flow” was changed to “motorized and non-motorized vehicle flow” to acknowledge bikes, etc. The Commission also suggested adding something here about mitigating the effects of El Cerrito Plaza area development on Albany streets. He encouraged the City to use vehicle miles traveled (VMT) as a metric rather than the number of trips generated.

Chair Donaldson said that the City should maintain connectivity in its network and avoid blocking the grid with barriers, as Berkeley had done. David Arkin suggested that an Action be added to create separated bicycle lanes.

The Commission had an extended conversation about parking. Nick Pilch concurred with the use of market pricing for parking. Chair Donaldson said there had historically been a belief in Albany that parking should be free. He also expressed the position that the City did not have a parking shortage and noted that most homes had ample parking and most streets did not have parking problems. He did not think we are yet at the critical mass point where we need to start charging for parking. Phil

Moss disagreed, and said he felt the City should start charging for parking. Nick Pilch indicated that the City had done parking surveys. While he agreed with the Chair that Albany did not have the degree of parking problems that San Francisco had, he still felt the city should do more studies to understand parking supply and demand and then make pricing decisions based on the data. He thought that residential permit parking would go a long way to resolve the issue around Solano and San Pablo and indicated he supported the idea of permit parking. Phil Moss indicating that the parking problem on Solano is caused by employees, not shoppers. Employers block driveways and take up spaces for customers. An in lieu fee could be used to pay for a parking permit program.

The following suggestions were made by the Commission on the Goal 7 (parking) actions:

- Edit the title of Action 7.B to refer to Ballot Measure, not Ballot Initiative
- Note that the objective of 7.B is not to “reduce auto use” but rather to reduce carbon footprint and VMT.
- Add a new action to continue angled parking on Solano and consider adding angled parking on the residential side streets (to increase the supply and reduce the demand on the space in front of homes).
- Add a new action to develop an employee parking management program for Solano to get long term parking off the side streets, and to extend the time restrictions on the side streets.
- Change Action 7.D to add “Evaluate Albany’s commercial parking requirements, including the dimensions of spaces and aisles, relative to...
- Consider dropping Action 7.D---is it realistic to pursue development of a municipal parking lot? (Pilch) Perhaps this should be framed as something that should be done in the context of new development? (Arkin) This was examined during the zoning update---the two sites were either by BevMo or behind the theater.
- Add an action to study the feasibility of residential permit parking (based on data)
- Delete Action 7.F, because the Traffic and Safety Commission felt it would be too difficult to enforce rules that tenants could not own a car (tenants would just keep their cars on the street, which could create problems).