

Albany Planning and Zoning Commission November 12, 2014 Meeting Summary

Draft Environmental Hazards Goals, Policies, and Actions

Consultant Barry Miller delivered a PowerPoint presentation on proposed Environmental Hazards policies for Albany. Barry explained that these policies met the Government Code requirement for the General Plan Safety and Noise Elements. A copy of the policies had been provided to Commissioners in their agenda packets and posted to the website on Friday November 7.

An opportunity for public comment was provided. Alexa Hauser indicated she was pleased to see a program to retrofit soft-story buildings, since that dovetailed with programs to conserve affordable housing (many of the soft-story buildings contain lower cost apartments). Commissioner Moss noted that one of the reasons there were so many soft-story buildings is that the soft-story design was at one time the most efficient way to meet parking requirements for apartments. He suggested that we consider adding a program to incentivize retrofits by allowing one or more parking spaces to be converted to usable space (or bike parking, etc). He also noted that he had recently done a project in a Central Valley city that had different noise standards for daytime and night time. He suggested Albany look at this approach, since there were relatively high night time noise levels. Barry Miller indicated that the proposed measurement system added a “penalty” for nighttime noise, per the state guidelines.

The Commission cautioned that the City not get caught in a difficult situation where our housing goals conflict with our noise goals. We should be careful not to preclude much needed new housing simply because the ambient noise levels exceeded traditional guidelines. Focus on mitigation of noise in such instances, rather than forbidding development. This could be a new policy.

Commissioner Eisenman noted that Berkeley requires a noise study for hot tub motors, because they have the potential to create loud noises that disturb neighbors. Given the small lots in Albany, and the other potential noise sources (chickens, goats, second units, attic vents, hood vents, etc.), perhaps the City should adopt a policy to maintain quiet in residential yards, and encourage the muting or insulation of mechanical noise sources.

Commissioner Donaldson noted that the environment in the City was relatively noisy, particularly along the BART line. Building sound walls is not feasible since the line is elevated, and it would be wrong to penalize homeowners by saying they cannot build second stories, etc. due to ambient noise levels. BART should be the responsible party and should work to reduce noise. The burden should be on them to run quieter trains and maintain the tracks rather than the homeowner. Commissioner Moss noted that the County was not a strong advocate for noise abatement in Albany, relative to other parts of the County. Commissioner Donaldson suggested the City approach BART with requests to address the very loud noise levels along the tracks. It was further noted that building and construction technologies had evolved to the point where it was possible to meet the 45 dB interior space noise standard even in areas

where it was very noisy outdoors. This was done for the 701-707 Solano townhomes and could be done on other sites near the freeway. Acoustical reports should be used to determine appropriate mitigation.

The following specific changes to policies and actions were suggested:

- Goal 1: Do we need to mention landslides? The hazard risks are low (afternote: Staff has checked the hazards maps and there are indeed mapped landslide hazards on Albany Hill. Thus, the language for the goal has not changed).
- Policy 1.2: We mention ensuring that school buildings are resilient but the City has no control over their design. How is this reconciled?
- Policy 1.3: Do we need to set a threshold for when a structure must be retrofitted? (Staff indicated that was probably more detailed than appropriate for a General Plan)
- Commissioner Donaldson noted that there were liquefaction maps for Albany (prepared through USGS) that should be referenced or included in the Plan. They showed much of the western part of the city was vulnerable. Consider adding a policy to check liquefaction hazards as part of the development review process, and include an assessment of liquefaction potential in soils reports.
- Commissioner Moss noted that flood hazards could be reduced by “low impact development” (LID) efforts to encourage gray water recycling, retention of runoff to reduce flood flows, directing runoff into wells and cisterns, etc. Commissioner Donaldson wondered if the C.3 stormwater management requirements (to retain stormwater on site in new development) might ultimately reduce flood hazards to the point where flood plain boundaries constricted. The Commission suggested we add an action to periodically update flood plain maps and monitor the effect that stormwater runoff and management was having on flood potential.
- Policy 1.8: add a cross-reference to the Sustainability Element and the Waterfront Element
- Goal 2, after the policies, add a cross-reference to the Community Services and Facilities Element for policies on urban structure fires and fire prevention
- Under Goal 3, add an action to work with Stopwaste.org to do an annual household hazardous waste (HHW) collection day or to work with other cities to make it easier for Albany residents to properly dispose of HHW
- Under Goal 4, add a policy on Long-Term Recovery planning that looks at planning beyond the 72-hour period. This would cover post-disaster rebuilding efforts, restoration of services, economic issues, rebuilding and reconstruction strategies, etc
- Add a new Action 5.D to work with BART to reduce train noise and seek out potential mitigation (insulation etc.) to reduce noise levels along the tracks. Reduce the cost burden on applicants and persons living along the BART tracks and recognize that BART should be responsible.