

# City of Albany



**TO:** ALBANY PLANNING & ZONING COMMISSION  
**FROM:** BARRY MILLER, GENERAL PLAN CONSULTANT  
**SUBJECT:** GENERAL PLAN UPDATE  
**DATE:** FEBRUARY 25, 2015

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## **REQUEST**

This is the 19<sup>th</sup> Planning and Zoning Commission Study Session on the Albany 2035 General Plan Update. This Study Session will focus on the proposed new Waterfront Element of the General Plan. An opportunity for public comment will be provided.

## **STAFF RECOMMENDATION**

This item is a study session and no Commission action is required.

## **SITE LOCATION**

The General Plan applies to all property in the City of Albany.

## **BACKGROUND**

The Planning and Zoning Commission has been conducting monthly or bi-monthly Study Sessions on the Albany 2035 General Plan Update for the last 20 months. About half of the Study Sessions have related to the Housing Element—including the 2007-2014 Housing Element, and more recently the 2015-2023 Housing Element Update. The other half have been topic-based, covering a different chapter or “element” of the Plan at each session.

To date, study sessions have been held on land use, transportation, parks/open space, conservation/sustainability, environmental hazards (safety/noise), and community services and facilities. The only topic not yet covered is the Albany waterfront, which will be the subject of its own General Plan element. The February 25 session will focus on the draft goals, policies, and actions in this new element.

## **CONEXT**

### **Legal Requirements**

California Government Code Section 65302 identifies the seven mandatory elements of a General Plan. These are land use, transportation, housing, open space, safety, conservation, and noise. Cities are also encouraged to add “optional” elements to their plans to address issues of local importance. Once an “optional” element is adopted, it carries the same legal weight as a “mandatory” element.

While Albany’s 1992 General Plan did not include any optional elements, the 2015 General Plan will include two. One of these is a Community Services and Facilities Element and the other is a Waterfront Element. The intent of the Waterfront Element is to synthesize existing plans for the area into a cohesive framework. The intent is not to change current policy or introduce new policies. Such changes would necessitate a citywide vote under Albany Measure C, as well as a subsequent planning process beyond the scope of the General Plan update. The General Plan does not preclude such a process from taking place in the future.

### **Waterfront Policy Audit**

As with all other elements of the General Plan, the first step in creating the waterfront goals, policies and actions was to conduct an “audit” of existing plans and policies. The documents reviewed included:

- 1992 Albany General Plan. The 1992 Plan includes a number of policies for the waterfront in the Land Use Element and in the Conservation, Recreation, and Open Space Element. The 1992 Plan also includes the General Plan Map, which establishes land use designations for the area.
- 1995 “Proposal for the Albany Portion of the Eastshore State Park.” This document was submitted by Albany to the East Bay Regional Park District (EBRPD) to articulate the City’s aspirations, ideas, and priorities for the creation of the new state park at the waterfront.
- 2002 Eastshore State Park General Plan. This Plan was a joint project of the California Department of Parks and Recreation, the EBRPD, and the Coastal Conservancy. It is both a general policy document and a programmatic guide for improving subareas within the park boundaries. The Plan has provided the framework and benchmark for subsequent plans and improvement activities within the State Park boundaries.
- Albany Beach EIR. Although this document is not a “plan,” it includes detailed project-level recommendations for the restoration of the Albany Beach and completion of the Bay Trail along the shoreline.
- 2004 Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Master Plan. This is a citywide policy document which includes policies and action measures aimed at improving the city’s parks, including parkland along the waterfront.
- 2008-2011 Voices to Vision. Voices to Vision was a City-sponsored process which engaged the community in a discussion about the future of the waterfront. The outcome is not a planning document, but rather a statement of findings and observations, and ideas for future consideration. Basic principles were established through this process and were summarized in the audit.

In addition to these documents, the policy audit considered provisions of the Municipal Code relating to the Waterfront, including Chapter XIX (Waterfront) and the Waterfront Zoning District. Other planning documents, such as the Public Arts Master Plan, the Climate Action Plan, and the Active Transportation Plan (which all address the Waterfront indirectly) were considered.

The plans and documents listed above are footnoted as “sources” for the proposed policies and actions in the new Waterfront Element.

### **Draft Goals, Policies, and Actions**

Attachment “A” to this staff report includes the Draft Waterfront Element goals, policies, and actions. This is a Working Draft. Comments are encouraged and revisions are expected before a Draft General Plan is published.

Six goals have been identified.

The first goal addresses the transformation of the Albany Waterfront into a state park. Much of the content is drawn from the State Park General Plan, including the emphasis on environmentally sensitive site planning, environmental education, view protection, and hazard remediation. The policies and actions support the transition planning activities that are now underway.

The second goal focuses on new recreational opportunities. Again, the State Park General Plan is the primary source, with policies addressing the different activities envisioned for the Albany shoreline area.

The third goal focuses on access. This includes better connections from the areas east of I-80 to the shoreline, as well as better lateral access along the shoreline itself (e.g., the Bay Trail and spur trails). This section also expresses an emphasis on bicycle and pedestrian access over motorized vehicle access.

The fourth goal focuses on natural resource protection. It incorporates existing policies on the protection and restoration of sensitive habitat areas, both on land and in the marine environment. It also addresses the buffering of activity areas from environmentally sensitive areas.

The fifth goal emphasizes sustainability. Policies address topics such as sea level rise, shoreline protection, water quality, green construction, and recognition of the “carrying capacity” of the waterfront area.

The sixth goal focuses on the future of Golden Gate Fields. It is primarily based on policies in the 1992 Plan and municipal regulations (Measure C), supplemented by the discussion that took place during Voices to Vision.

### **Commission Discussion**

The Planning and Zoning Commission will be introduced to the draft Waterfront Element goals, policies, and actions at their study session. As the Commission considers this material, the following questions will be asked:

- Do the policies as stated provide appropriate direction on the topic?

- Are there “missing” topics that should be added?
- Are there additional implementation measures (“actions”) that should be considered?

An opportunity for public comment will be provided at the study session. Members of the public are encouraged to share their thoughts on the questions above.

**ATTACHMENT A:** Draft Waterfront Goals, Policies, and Actions