

Albany Planning and Zoning Commission

March 11, 2015 Meeting Summary

Draft Waterfront Element Goals, Policies, and Actions

Consultant Barry Miller delivered a PowerPoint presentation on proposed Waterfront Element policies for Albany. Barry explained that this was an “optional” element of the General Plan, but it was recommended for inclusion due to the large number of planning documents addressing the Albany waterfront, and the high level of community interest in the topic. The element is not intended to change City policies for the waterfront, but rather to articulate policies that have already been adopted, especially for planned open space areas. A copy of the policies had been provided to Commissioners and posted on the website in advance of the meeting.

Chair Donaldson asked why there were six goals, and also asked Mr. Miller to clarify the difference between italicized and non-italicized text. An explanation was provided. Chair Donaldson noted that there were very different parameters for decisions on the waterfront depending on who owned the site. He noted his own preference that ownership be used as the organizing framework and asked if the goals could be organized to include one for Albany’s lands, one for EBRPD lands, and one for the private lands. Later in the meeting, Commissioners Friedland, Menotti, and Giesen-Fields disagreed, indicating they liked the current organization. Miller noted that ownership affected policies in goals 1 and 2, but that the rest of the policies applied to all parts of the waterfront, regardless of ownership. He also noted that this was a 20-year Plan, and ownership was likely to change in the coming years. Donaldson agreed.

Donaldson also asked Miller to clarify what the “Waterfront Master Plan” was, since this document was referenced in Measure C. Jeff Bond provided a response. Donaldson said it would be useful to have a clear answer to this question, since it was a legal issue. Donaldson asked if a voter-approved General Plan Map amendment was needed to show the plateau as open space rather than Commercial Recreation, and Jeff Bond indicated this would not be necessary.

An opportunity for public comment was provided.

Robert Cheasty, Citizens for Eastshore State Park, indicated he has been involved in the state park efforts since the beginning. He said the goals and policies were generally on target, but noted that “habitat protection” should be added to Goal 1. Also, the City should introduce this element with a preamble that expresses how the park came about. This is a repurposing of the waterfront—it was a landfill and it is being transformed into a jewel. This took enormous effort, and the spirit of that transformation is not fully captured by these policies. The overarching goal should be to incorporate the shoreline into the Eastshore State Park, and that is not fully communicated. We should note that much of Golden Gate Fields will also be included in the park. Also, keep in mind that the park is owned by the state and operated by EBRPD. State ownership trumps local zoning.

Brian Parker, Citizens for Eastshore State Park, indicated that the policies are moving in the right direction, but the draft does not fully communicate the visionary goal of a great waterfront park. With respect to Golden Gate Fields, the document should be structured to receive the project that will ultimately land here---the minimum cost for infrastructure is \$125 million, so the policy to have “small scale local businesses” is not realistic. Be careful not to insert policy language under Goal 6 that gets in the way of getting the best project possible on Golden Gate Fields. Don’t send the wrong messages. Since there was not an economic adviser on Voices to Vision, the schemes that came from that process may be unrealistic. We will need to incentivize what we want when redevelopment of that site is ultimately proposed.

Patricia Jones, Citizens for Eastshore State Park indicated that CESP liked most of the content and had specific comments that would be communicated in writing at a future date. She agreed that conservation and habitat preservation should be added to Goal 1.

Caryl O’Keefe indicated she mostly agreed with the first few speakers. Her comments focused on Goals 1 and 6. She had concerns about the General Plan committing to transfer the Bulb to EBRPD for a park. We don’t know enough yet to make that commitment. There is still no funding commitment. Keep this more flexible in case the transfer does not work out for the City. Also, clarify that Goal 1 only addresses the public land. It is OK for the policies to reference Voices to Vision, but the narrative text under Policy 6.2 is a concern. It doesn’t belong in the General Plan and it should be deleted. Measure C is in place and it should be up to the voters decide if a proposal is appropriate. Let the property owner do the work.

Ed Moore indicated that, in general, he liked the policies. He indicated that he is a proponent of the designation of this area as a cultural landscape (national register designation). He noted that a recent opinion piece in Berkeleyside raised interested arguments about water-oriented recreation here. He also cautioned that the City’s zoning has no effect on state lands. He didn’t think there were any archaeological resources on the site, but it does have high artistic value. The action in the Draft to document the cultural resource significance of the site is not sufficient. The City should go a step further and propose a cultural resource designation. Also, be careful in giving any credibility to Voices to Vision. It was not a policy document. In response to a question from Donaldson, Moore provided additional justification for why he believed the waterfront was a cultural landscape.

Chair Donaldson asked for specific comments on the document from the Commission.

Goal 1 Comments

- Policy 1.4: Doubtful that there are critical archaeological resources on the site given its history as a landfill—the policy is problematic and should be reworded. (Donaldson)

Goal 2 Comments

- Perhaps add “managed camping” to Policy 2.2 (Donaldson)

Goal 3 Comments

- Policy 3.1-this is critical—note that Berkeley is advancing a project at Gilman with a roundabout (Menotti)
- Policy 3.5: What is the intent of the policy about water access. Should we leave open the future possibility of ferries? (Menotti)
- Action 3.B: Plan for a robust trail network, including a loop around the bulb (Donaldson)
- Action 3.D: Expand to address parking for the bulb and neck also (Donaldson)

Goal 4 Comments

- Do not remove non-native plants if it eliminates the history of the area (Kent).

Goal 5 Comments

- Edit Policy 5.3 to bring the italics into the policy. “...are consistent with principles of ~~“greener”~~ green design and construction, which may include LEED certified construction, the use of photovoltaics and other alternative energy sources... etc. (Giesen-Fields)
- Policy 5.5: use a word other than “development” since the meaning is unclear (Menotti). “Structural” might be better. Change this (Donaldson agrees).
- This focuses on environmental sustainability. How do General Plans deal with fiscal sustainability? Should we call for fiscal sustainability also—either here or in the discussion of reuse of GG Fields? (Menotti)
- Is there a conflict between a “sustainable shoreline” (Goal 5) and a rip-rap shoreline (Action 5.A)? (Kent)

Goal 6 Comments

- Policy 6.4 is unrealistic and should be eliminated (Friedland). Others agree.