

October 15, 2007

To: Albany City Council

From: Brian Parker, Chair
Albany Waterfront Committee

RE: Waterfront Planning Process – Recommendation of Planning Scenario #3

On March 19, 2007 the Albany City Council heard a request from the Waterfront Committee and provided direction to City staff calling for a work program to be prepared for the City's Waterfront Planning Process. Based on the Council's direction Don Neuwirth of Neuwirth & Associates was retained to develop a work program for presentation to the City Council in consultation with the Waterfront Committee and Planning and Zoning Commission

To assist with this effort the Waterfront Committee has met repeatedly with Don Neuwirth to provide input on the design of the work program with study sessions on June 7th and June 19th, 2007. Public testimony was received and an informal conversational format allowed the discussion of a wide variety of issues and factors in relationship to planning the Albany waterfront. On July 5th the Committee discussed the matter further. At the Waterfront Committee public meetings on September 6 and September 18, 2007 the Committee heard presentations from Mr. Neuwirth regarding four planning scenarios outlined in his report entitled "Albany Waterfront Planning Preliminary Report" dated September 4, 2007.

Additional Comments to be Presented on November 6, 2007:

Don Neuwirth's Final Report dated October 12, 2007 substantially altered many of the critical details associated with Scenario #3 as contained in his Preliminary Report, upon which we based our recommendations below. The Final Report altered the recommendation in the Preliminary Report by deemphasizing the need for an intensive public participation program and technical background information in critical areas such as public finance. In addition two thirds of the suggested expenditure are now proposed for an architectural design competition that was never discussed with the Waterfront Committee or the public. While the overall conceptual direction of Scenario #3 remains the same, I expect that the Waterfront Commission will be submitting additional comments and recommendations when we meet to review Neuwirth & Associates Final Report on November 1, 2007. We will present our additional recommendations at the City Council Meeting on November 6, 2007.

RECOMMENDATION:

On September 18, 2007 the Waterfront Committee took action to recommend to the City Council that the City proceed with a waterfront planning process based on **Scenario #3 – A Grounded Visioning Program for the Waterfront**, as described in the Neuwirth & Associates report.

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The majority of the Waterfront Committee preferred Scenario #3 because its visioning process would be grounded in a detailed resource analysis and administrative realities. Scenario #3 is also preferred, in part, because it takes into consideration input provided to date at the various public forums. While not intended to immediately develop a traditional planning implementation outcome (general plan amendment, specific plan or rezoning) it would support a vigorous civic engagement and educational process aimed at developing a shared vision for the future of Albany's waterfront.

The approach provided by Scenario #3 is based on an intensive public participation process. Education would be the keystone to supporting the creative process. A variety of public involvement techniques would be utilized for example small group meetings and public opinion surveys.

The outcome would be a vision of the waterfront with specific goals and objectives for future land use changes. Natural and cultural resources as well as public services would be examined in the public arena.

The landowner's involvement would not be necessary other than to allow access to its property for environmental assessment. However, if Magna chose to participate, a more detailed set of alternative land use patterns could be developed, with the consideration of the landowner's preferred options.

At the end of the process envisioned in Scenario 3, the City would have a high level roadmap for the future of the waterfront.

FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS:

Once the recommended visioning process is completed the Waterfront Committee would support using its conclusions to proceed further in the planning for the property. This additional planning work would hinge on major participation and funding by the landowner. This subsequent planning phase could result in the preparation of a specific plan, EIR and/or development agreement. As part of this effort the detailed waterfront development plan would be submitted to Albany voters for approval under the requirements of Measure C.

MINORITY RECOMMENDATION:

While the majority of the Waterfront Committee supported planning Scenario #3, two members (Holan and Larson) recommended Scenario #1, "Do Nothing Now." In making this recommendation, both members noted the current lack of commitment by property owner to the planning process, and the fact the City is already committed to two large planning projects in the next two years. The minority members agreed with Mr. Neuwirth's stated goal of, "an outcome to ... the process that leads to some real change on the Albany shoreline," and expressed their concern that this would not be accomplished with yet another visioning process. Accordingly, the minority concluded that it would not be wise to spend \$500,000 on a waterfront planning process at this time.