

CHAPTER

3

LAND USE
ELEMENT

A. INTRODUCTION

The Land Use Element is the cornerstone of the General Plan. It establishes the basic policies guiding the physical form of the city and provides direction on development, conservation, and land use compatibility issues. The Element includes Albany’s official Land Use Map, showing the types of land uses envisioned for the city in the coming years.

Land use changes have the potential to make Albany more vibrant, economically healthy, and sustainable than it is today. But without proper direction and coordinated public investment, change can also be adverse. The Land Use Element strives for positive outcomes by setting limits on appropriate uses and densities, directing change to specific areas of the city, and guiding the character and form of new development. Policies in this Element are complemented by those in other elements of the General Plan, ensuring that priorities are balanced.

Government Code Section 65302(a) defines the requirements for the Land Use Element. The Element must designate the general distribution, location, and extent of land used for housing, business, industry, open space, recreational facilities, education, public buildings and lands, mineral extraction, and waste disposal. It must also contain standards for population density and building intensity. These standards must be coordinated with plans for transportation and infrastructure, and must also reflect environmental constraints such as flooding and steep slopes.

The Element is organized into five parts. The first part includes a profile of existing land uses. The second part presents the Land Use Map, including definitions of the land use categories shown on the Map. The third part provides guidance for areas of the City with the greatest potential for change in the next 20 years. Part Four addresses community design and historic preservation. The final section presents the goals, policies, and actions for land use and community design.



Ordway Street

B. PROFILE OF EXISTING USES

Albany is part of a continuous urbanized area extending 50 miles along the east side of San Francisco Bay from Richmond on the north to San Jose on the south. Most of the East Bay area in the Albany vicinity was developed in the early 20th Century. In 1950, Albany's population was already 17,600, only slightly less than its current total.

The city's land area is approximately 1,144 acres (1.8 square miles). The western flank of the city, consisting of approximately 180 acres west of I-80/ I-580, consists of waterfront open space and the Golden Gate Fields racetrack. The freeway itself is a major land use and physical presence, cutting a wide swatch across Albany's west side.

A narrow band of industrial uses lies alongside the freeway, running parallel to the Union Pacific Railroad tracks. Beyond this band and moving east, Albany Hill rises in the north, while large-scale public land uses are present in the south.

The lower slopes of Albany Hill include high and medium density development, while the ridgeline itself is protected open space. The eastern two-thirds of the city contain residential neighborhoods. Single family homes predominate, but lots are small and densities are fairly high. The average net density in single family neighborhoods is 11.6 units per acre, roughly double the density found in most suburban communities.

Most of Albany's neighborhoods are developed along a rectilinear street grid. There are roughly 25 north-south streets and fewer than ten major east-west streets, forming blocks that are generally 200 feet wide and 400 to 600 feet long. Most of this area was subdivided in the first three decades of the 20th Century, with rectangular lots of 25 to 50 feet in width and 100 feet in depth. The street grid is interrupted in places by schools, parks, and a former streetcar route, but is mostly continuous. The grid is one of Albany's defining characteristics and gives the City a comfortable, walkable scale.

Albany Land Use

Fast Facts*

1,144	Total acres
419	Residential acres
62	Commercial and Industrial acres
107	Commercial Recreation acres
133	Public and Institutional acres
112	Open Space acres
291	Street, Highway, and Rail acres
20	Vacant acres

* Tabulation is based on existing land uses as of 2015, using Tax Assessor data and aerial photos.

Source: Barry Miller Consulting, 2015

Residential Uses

Residential uses encompass 37 percent of Albany.¹ This includes about 343 acres of single family housing, 35 acres of townhomes and 2-4 unit buildings, and 41 acres of multi-family housing. Collectively, this acreage contains approximately 4,000 single family homes, 800 units in townhomes and 2-4 unit structures, and 2,000 multi-family apartments and condominiums. Another 973 units of multi-family housing exist within University Village, which is classified as a “public” land use despite its residential character.

Table 3-1 shows the range of single family residential lot sizes in Albany. Figure 3-1 shows this data spatially, with different colors corresponding to different lot sizes.

The data reflects the platting patterns of Albany’s original subdivisions, with a large number of 2,500 (25 x 100), 3,800 (38 x 100), and 5,000 (50 x 100) square foot lots. The mean size for developed residential lots is 4,036 square feet. Just over one-third of the lots in the city are less than 3,750 square feet, the minimum single family lot size permitted under current zoning regulations. Less than 10 percent of the city’s lots are over 5,000 square feet.

An estimated 1,500 homes in Albany—representing almost 40 percent of the city’s single family housing stock—were built by Charles Manning MacGregor in the 1920s and 1930s. Most were modest two- and three-bedroom homes ranging from 1,000 to 1,500 square feet in size, incorporating California Bungalow or Period Revival styles. The “MacGregors” were functional and affordable but also incorporated attractive facades and durable materials. Many of the homes incorporated Mediterranean features such as large picture windows, archways, tiled fireplaces, and built-ins. This has sustained their appeal for several generations.

¹ This total excludes mixed use (residential above commercial) development. Local street acreage is also excluded.

Table 3-1: Single Family Lot Sizes in Albany, 2014 (*)

Lot Area	Number of Lots	Percent of Total	Total Area (acres)	Percent of Total
Smaller than 2,500 SF	66	1.8%	3.3	1.0%
2,500-2,999 SF	624	16.9%	36.4	10.6%
3,000-3,499 SF	317	8.6%	23.6	6.9%
3,500-3,749 SF	311	8.4%	25.5	7.4%
<i>Total smaller than 3,750 SF</i>	<i>1,318</i>	<i>35.7%</i>	<i>88.8</i>	<i>25.9%</i>
3,750-3,999 SF	720	19.5%	63.0	18.4%
4,000-4,499 SF	401	10.9%	38.7	11.3%
4,500-4,999 SF	217	5.9%	23.4	6.8%
5,000-5,499 SF	789	21.4%	91.2	26.6%
5,500-5,999 SF	113	3.1%	14.8	4.3%
6,000-6,499 SF	55	1.5%	7.8	2.3%
6,500-6,999 SF	27	0.7%	4.2	1.2%
7,000-7,499 SF	16	0.4%	2.7	0.8%
Larger than 7,500 SF	38	1.0%	7.8	2.3%
<i>Total larger than 3,750 SF</i>	<i>2,376</i>	<i>64.3%</i>	<i>253.6</i>	<i>74.1%</i>
GRAND TOTAL	3,694	100.0%	342.4	100.0%

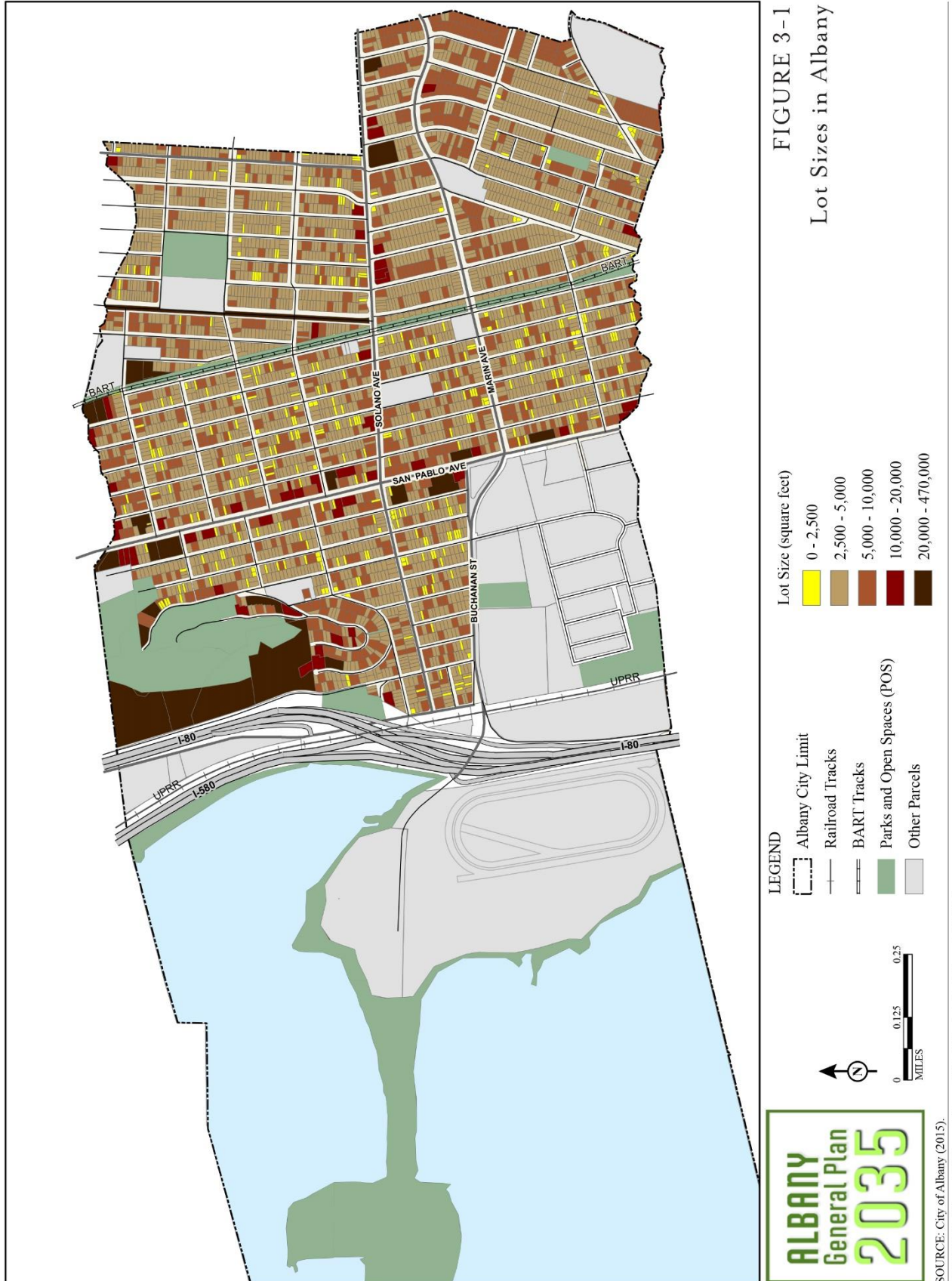
(*) Includes lots developed with single family homes only.

Source: Alameda County Assessor's Records, 2014. Barry Miller Consulting, 2014

The City's earliest zoning regulations permitted multi-family development in the area between San Pablo Avenue on the west and Masonic Avenue on the east. This resulted in a development pattern of small multi-unit buildings scattered among single family homes. A 1978 voter-initiative established single family zoning in this area and increased the citywide parking requirement to two spaces for residential units, regardless of structure type or bedroom count. Prior to 1959, on-site parking was not required for residential development, and between 1959 and 1978 one space per unit was required.

Multi-family uses are clustered along the west side of Albany Hill, and to a lesser extent along the eastern and southern slopes of the Hill, along Kains Avenue and Adams Street, and in the area between Kains and Evelyn, north of Brighton Avenue. The area along Kains and Adams was previously zoned as a "Commercial Expansion" area for the San Pablo corridor, but was rezoned to high density residential uses as an outcome of the 1992 General Plan.

The average density on multi-family property in the city is 46 units per acre, which is substantially higher than the average in most Bay Area cities. The area along Pierce Street along the west side of Albany Hill has one of the highest densities in the Bay Area outside the major cities, with approximately 820 condominiums on 14 acres.



Commercial and Industrial Uses

Commercial uses in Albany are clustered along the San Pablo and Solano corridors and along the Eastshore Highway in southwest Albany. Industrial uses are almost entirely located on parcels abutting the Union Pacific Railroad right of way on the west side of the City. Approximately 250 parcels are developed with commercial or industrial uses in the city, totaling 62 acres.

San Pablo Avenue extends approximately one mile through Albany, from the El Cerrito city limits on the north to Berkeley on the south. Typical land uses include service stations, auto body shops, car dealerships, restaurants, banks, small shopping centers, discount stores, and retail shops and service businesses. Several newer buildings contain multi-family housing above ground floor commercial uses. There are also a variety of medical, dental, and professional service offices. Buildings are generally 1-3 stories in height. Some structures are built to the front setback and others are set back from the street with parking areas in front.

The Solano Avenue commercial district extends about one mile from just west of San Pablo Avenue to the Berkeley border, and continues into North Berkeley on the east. On the easternmost four blocks within Albany, the north side of the street is in Berkeley and the south side is in Albany. The right of way is approximately 80 feet wide, but wide sidewalks, diagonal parking bays, curb bulbouts, landscaping, and the design of the travel lanes give the street a narrower feel.

Solano has traditionally functioned as Albany's "Main Street." Relative to San Pablo Avenue, there are a larger number of office buildings and restaurants, smaller retail footprints, and almost no auto-related uses. Notable buildings include the Albany Theater, Safeway, and the Post Office. There are also several multi-family residential buildings.

The West Albany district consists of the parcels along the Union Pacific Railroad and the I-80 Freeway. Uses are auto-oriented and large-scale, reflecting the area's location and industrial character. The area includes Albany's largest commercial property, a 163,000 square foot Target store on a 9-acre parcel.



Commercial storefronts, Solano Avenue

Photo: Doug Davidson



Golden Gate Fields, viewed from Albany Hill

Commercial Recreation Uses

Golden Gate Fields is defined by the Alameda County Tax Assessor as an “improved other commercial recreation activity.” It has historically had a General Plan designation of “Commercial Recreation.” The Albany portion of the site is approximately 107 acres and includes the racetrack, parking lot, clubhouse, and seating areas. The track complex extends south into Berkeley, where most of the stables are located.

Public and Institutional Uses

Public and quasi-public uses in Albany include federal, state, and local government facilities, as well uses such as private schools and houses of worship. Collectively these uses comprise almost 12 percent of the city. Public uses are the predominant land use in the southwest part of the city.

The University of California Village family housing complex comprises about 77 acres. The complex houses 15 percent of Albany’s residents and includes 973 apartments, recreation areas, administrative offices, a community garden, and community facilities. The complex was reconstructed in 1999-2008 and focuses on providing housing for University students who are married and/or have children.

The 16-acre campus of the United States Department of Agriculture Western Regional Research Center is adjacent to University Village on the northwest. The 300,000 square foot facility was constructed in 1939 and is one of four national research centers used to study agriculture, nutrition, food safety, crop production, animal production and protection, and similar issues. About a mile away at the north end of Adams Street, the State Orientation Center for the Blind assists visually impaired adults in leading independent lives.

Local government facilities in Albany include approximately 21 acres of public school campuses and 3 acres of City facilities, including City Hall, the Library/Community Center, and the Senior Center. The largest private institutional facility is St. Mary's College High School, which occupies about 13 acres in the southeastern corner of Albany. Other institutional uses include the YMCA and several churches.

Open Space

Albany contains about 21 acres of “active” City-owned parkland and 91 acres of “passive” open space. The active parkland consists of Memorial Park, Ocean View Park, Terrace Park, Ohlone Greenway, and the Dartmouth Mini-park. The passive parkland includes roughly 27 acres on Albany Hill (including Albany Hill Park, Creekside Park and privately-owned conservation easement lands on the west side of the Hill), and about 64 acres of unimproved shoreline at the Eastshore State Park.

Transportation

Transportation uses comprise more than one-quarter of Albany's land area. A majority of this area—over 200 acres—consists of local street rights of way. Street rights of way are generally 50 to 100 feet wide, including sidewalks, curb strips, parking lanes, and travel lanes. Freeways comprise about 68 acres, including Interstates 80 and 580. The right-of-way of the Union Pacific Railroad, which runs roughly parallel to the freeways, is approximately 16 acres.

Vacant Land

Vacant land includes undeveloped parcels that are not in use for park or conservation purposes. Only 21 acres in Albany meet this criteria and half of this total is associated with a privately owned parcel on Albany Hill. There are also 24 vacant residentially zoned parcels (only nine of which are large enough to support a home), nine vacant commercially zoned parcels and two vacant industrially zoned parcels. There is also a 4.4 acre vacant City-owned parcel on Pierce Street, most of which is planned for a neighborhood park.



Photo: Doug Dowdman

Gateview Towers and Albany Hill, viewed from Eastshore State Park

C. GENERAL PLAN LAND USE MAP AND CATEGORIES

The Albany General Plan Map (Figure 3-2) shows the pattern of land use desired for Albany in 2035. Future land use decisions must be consistent with the designations on the Map, including the definitions and standards in this section.

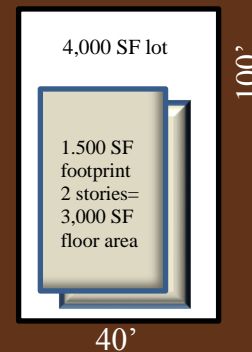
A total of 13 categories appear on the map, including 11 base categories and two overlay categories. The base categories include four residential categories, four commercial and mixed use categories, and three public and open space categories. Each category appears in a different color on the Map. The two overlay categories are mapped “on top” of base categories where special conditions apply.

Definitions of each category depicted on the map are listed below. As required by the California Government Code [65302(a)], standards for development density or intensity are included for each category. In residential areas, this is expressed by setting a limit on the number of units that may be built per acre. To estimate the number of *persons* per acre, the number of units can be multiplied by the projected average number of persons per household, which is 2.5.

In non-residential areas, allowable development intensity is expressed through Floor Area Ratios, or FARs (see text box at right). For zoning purposes, FAR limits also may apply to residential lots. Consistent with State Density Bonus law, densities up to 35 percent above the maximums listed here may be permitted for projects incorporating affordable or senior housing. As required by State law, such projects are also entitled to development incentives such as additional height and reduced parking.

Understanding Floor Area Ratio

Floor Area Ratio (FAR) refers to the ratio of building area to land area on a site. Albany’s zoning regulations establish FAR limits on most properties in the city, effectively capping the square footage that may be built on each parcel. The FAR limits avoid overly massive or bulky buildings. This helps maintain the character of single family neighborhoods and guides the design of new buildings along major corridors.



$$\text{FAR} = 3,000 / 4,000 \text{ or } 0.75$$

In the illustration above, a 3,000 square foot building (two floors at 1,500 square feet each) on a 4,000 square foot lot yields an FAR of 0.75. The Planning and Zoning Code provides further guidance on how to calculate building area. Special provisions apply for covered and below ground parking, attics, atriums, and other unique building features.

Residential Categories

Low Density Residential

This designation is intended for areas where the prevailing land use consists of detached single family homes with front, side, and rear yards. The maximum density is 17 units per net acre (approximately one unit per 2,500 square feet of land area). This density limit recognizes that about 35 percent of Albany's existing single family lots are between 2,500 square feet and 3,750 square feet. However, any lots to be created in the future in Low Density Residential areas are subject to a minimum lot size standard of 3,750 square feet. Secondary units are permitted in all Low Density Residential areas, subject to appropriate standards and review procedures.



Medium Density Residential

This designation is intended for areas characterized by a mix of single family detached homes and small multi-unit buildings, as well as attached housing types such as townhomes and duplexes. These areas have many of the characteristics of lower density neighborhoods, such as yards and driveways, but have a more diverse mix of housing unit types than low-density areas. The maximum density is 35 units per net acre (approximately one unit per 1,250 square feet of land area). New development in areas with this designation is subject to a minimum density requirement of 20 units per acre. Secondary units are permitted in all Medium Density Residential areas, subject to appropriate standards and review procedures.



High Density Residential

This designation is intended for areas characterized by multi-family housing. Although single family homes and duplexes may be present, the prevailing housing type consists of apartments, condominiums, townhomes, and similar higher density housing types. The maximum density is 87 units per net acre (approximately one unit per 500 square feet of land area). However, development at the top end of this range is only permitted at Gateview Towers, where it reflects the density of existing development. The maximum elsewhere is 63 units per acre.



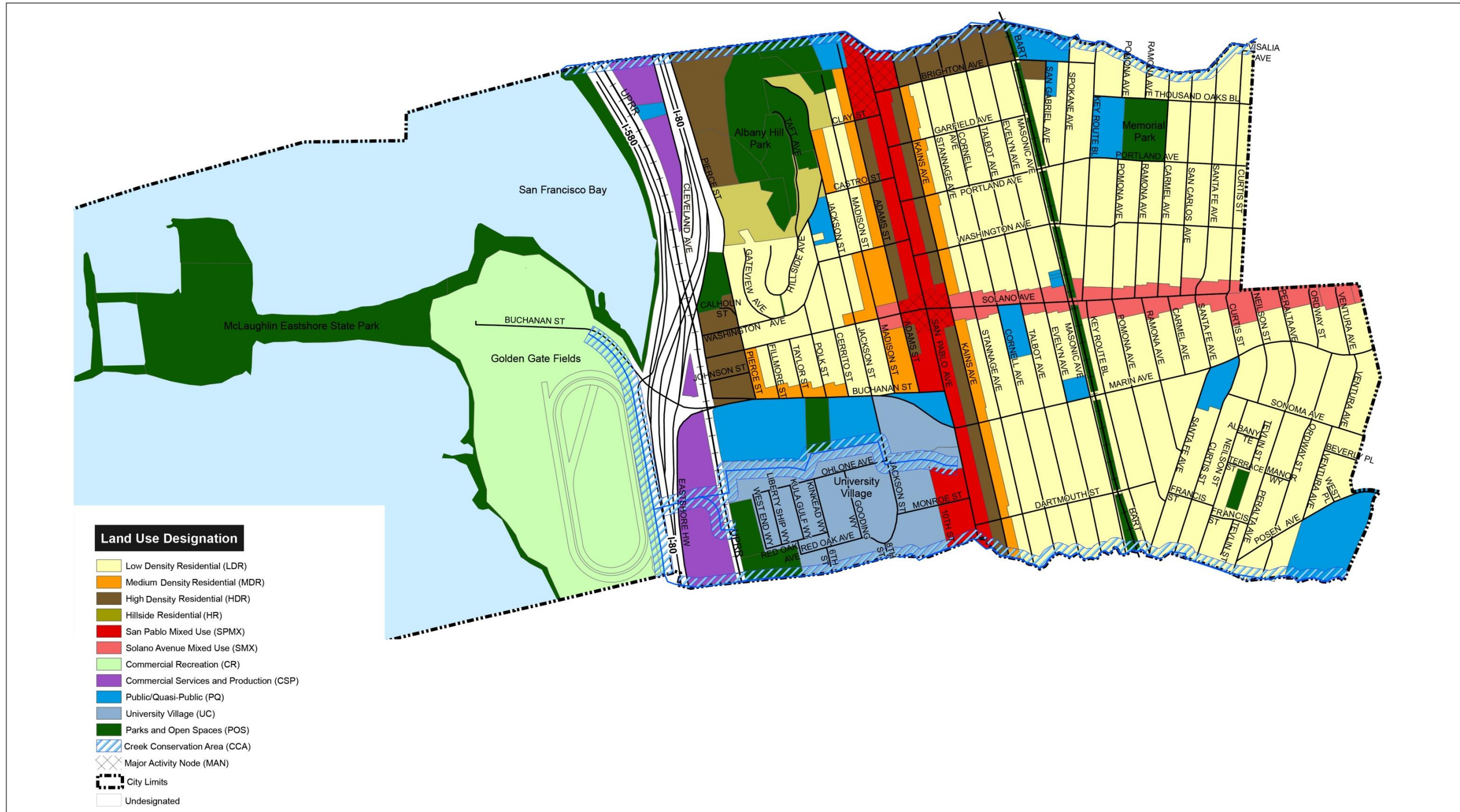
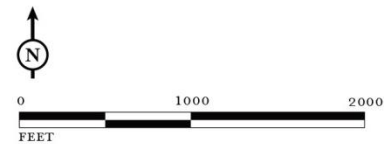
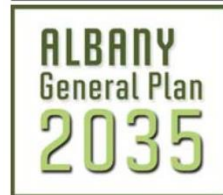


FIGURE 3-2
Albany 2035 General Plan Map



SOURCE: CITY OF ALBANY, 2015.

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New development in areas with this designation shall be subject to a minimum density requirement of 20 units per acre. Secondary units are permitted in all High Density Residential areas, subject to appropriate standards and review procedures.



Hillside Residential

This designation is intended to apply to sloped land on Albany Hill. Special development standards have been established for this area to conserve natural resources, limit disturbance of unstable terrain, and recognize the visual sensitivity of the hillside setting. The maximum density is 9 units per net acre. However, development at the top end of this range is not permitted on all sites. Two zoning districts apply, including one district on the west side of the hill with a maximum density of 6 units per net acre and one district on the east side of the hill with a maximum density of 9 units per net acre.

On any given parcel with this designation, the transfer of density to the least visually and environmentally sensitive part of the site is encouraged in order to minimize hillside disturbance, preserve the ridgeline, and maximize open space preservation. Both single and multi-family housing are permitted in this designation, although use permit requirements apply to multi-family units. Secondary units are permitted in all Hillside Residential areas, subject to appropriate standards and review procedures.

Commercial and Mixed Use Categories

San Pablo Avenue Mixed Use

The designation applies to parcels with frontage along San Pablo Avenue or that are otherwise part of the San Pablo Avenue business district. The General Plan envisions a transformation of this corridor from auto-oriented commercial uses to more attractive, pedestrian-oriented, mixed use development. Retail, office, service, and other commercial uses are accommodated by this designation.



Higher density residential uses are strongly encouraged, if they are located above or behind commercial uses facing San Pablo Avenue. Buildings that are entirely residential may be considered, subject to conditions specified in the General Plan. Residential uses are subject to a minimum density standard of 20 units per acre and a maximum of 63 units per acre.

The maximum floor area ratio (FAR) for non-residential space on any given parcel in San Pablo Avenue Mixed Use is 0.95. Additional floor space, up to a total FAR of 2.25, is permitted provided that the floor space above and beyond the base FAR of 0.95 consists of residential uses. Bonuses to allow intensities up to FAR 3.0 may be provided through zoning. A 38-foot height limit applies. Zoning overlay districts may apply within this area to achieve particular General Plan objectives, such as reducing impacts on nearby residential uses and creating “nodes” at key locations.

Solano Avenue Mixed Use

This designation applies to parcels with frontage along Solano Avenue or that are otherwise part of the Solano Avenue business district. The Solano Avenue corridor has a “Main Street” character, with small, local-serving shops, offices, restaurants, and services in a pedestrian-oriented setting. The corridor also includes civic uses, multi-family housing, and unique uses such as the Albany Theater. Future development should reinforce this character and include a similar mix of uses. Higher density residential uses are encouraged, if they are located above or behind commercial uses facing Solano Avenue. Buildings that are entirely residential may be considered, subject to conditions specified in the General Plan. Residential uses are subject to a minimum density standard of 20 units per acre and a maximum of 63 units per acre.

The maximum floor area ratio (FAR) for non-residential space on any given parcel is 1.25 and the maximum building height is 35 feet. Additional floor space, up to a total FAR of 2.0, is permitted provided that the floor space above and beyond the base FAR of 1.25 consists of residential uses, and that these uses are not located on the ground floor facing Solano Avenue.



Zoning overlay districts may apply within this area to achieve particular General Plan objectives, such as reducing impacts on nearby residential uses and creating “nodes” at key locations.



Commercial Recreation

This designation applies to the Golden Gate Fields property. Consistent with voter-approved Measure C (1990), the designation provides for a limited range of water-oriented uses as well as park, open space, conservation, recreation, and commercial recreation activities. Where commercial uses occur, a maximum floor area ratio (FAR) of 0.5 applies. As prescribed by Measure C, uses that are not specifically authorized by the Albany Zoning Ordinance for this area may only be approved through a citywide ballot measure.



Commercial Services and Production

This designation permits a variety of uses, including retail, production, light manufacturing, distribution, and repair. Live-work uses, artist’s studios, “maker” activities, and similar uses are also permitted. The designation applies to a linear corridor along the Union Pacific Railroad. Its intent is to provide adequate space to meet the needs of larger-scale commercial and creative activities and light industrial uses which are consistent with the character of the city and which present minimal health and safety hazards to Albany residents. Properties with this designation are subject to a maximum allowable FAR of 0.5.



Major Activity Node

This is an “overlay” designation that is used to identify areas within the San Pablo and Solano Avenue business districts that are appropriate for uses that generate higher volumes of pedestrian activity. Zoning regulations for activity nodes may permit additional building height, or may require or incentivize ground floor uses which create active street life and foot traffic. The nodes areas are also priority areas for future capital investment in transit, streetscape improvements, public art, and other public realm improvements. They are particularly important to defining Albany’s “sense of place.”

Public and Open Space Categories

Public/Quasi-Public

This designation corresponds to uses that are owned and operated by public agencies such as the City of Albany, the Albany Unified School District, the State of California, and the federal government. It includes City Hall, the Library and Community Center, and the City's elementary, middle, and high schools. It also includes large institutional uses, such as St. Mary's College High School and other religious facilities. Utility-owned land also may be included in this category. Residential uses are not permitted in this designation. To the extent permitted by law, properties with this designation are subject to a maximum allowable FAR of 0.95.



University Village

This designation applies to the University of California's Albany landholdings, also known as University Village or UC Village. University Village includes a mix of multi-family housing for UC Berkeley married students and families, as well as ancillary uses such as athletic fields, common open space, and community facilities. Other academic and community-oriented uses such as teaching, research, offices, and urban agriculture are permitted. Residential uses are subject to a maximum density of 34 units per net acre. To the extent permitted by law, non-residential uses, including recreational and academic buildings, are subject to a maximum allowable FAR of 0.95. Land uses in areas with this designation may be governed by master planning documents prepared by the University.



Parks and Open Space

This designation includes Albany's parks, including portions of Albany Hill, the Albany waterfront, linear parks such as the Ohlone Greenway (including BART), existing City parks such as Memorial Park and Ocean View Park, and planned City parks such as Pierce Street Park. It may also include land within large private developments that has been set aside as permanent open space through conservation easements or other means. In those park areas where recreational facilities are permitted, structures are subject to a height limit of 35 feet and a maximum coverage limit of 25 percent.





Creek Conservation Area

This is an overlay designation, meaning it applies in addition to one of the categories listed above. It is used to identify areas within 100 feet of the centerline of Codornices Creek along the southern city boundary, Cerrito Creek along the northern city boundary, and Village Creek, which is primarily on the University Village and Golden Gate Fields properties. The intent of the Creek Conservation Area is to ensure that the uses permitted under the “base” designation occur with minimal disruption of riparian vegetation, and minimal adverse effects on flooding and erosion. The City has developed a Watercourse Overlay District to establish standards for achieving these objectives.

Undesignated Areas

Approximately 66 acres on the General Plan Map are undesignated. These areas correspond to Interstates 580 and 80, and the Union Pacific Railroad Corridor. The City has limited jurisdiction over these areas, and they are in active use as state and federally regulated transportation facilities. The City will work with Caltrans, Union Pacific, and other appropriate state and federal regulatory agencies to ensure that the underlying lands are managed in a way that is consistent with this General Plan. The rights of way should be safe, well-maintained, and convey a positive impression of Albany. Opportunities to both improve the appearance of these areas, and put them to productive use should be pursued. Landscaping, signage, and design changes should support the creation and pursuit of such opportunities. Uses detrimental to community values should be prohibited.

Table 3-2 summarizes the total acreage in each General Plan category.

Table 3-2: Acreage by General Plan Category(*)

Land Use Category	Acreage	Percent of Citywide Total
RESIDENTIAL	584	51.0
Low Density	465	40.6
Medium Density	37	3.2
High Density	63	5.5
Hillside	19	1.7
COMMERCIAL/ MIXED USE	241	21.1
San Pablo Avenue Mixed Use	44	3.9
Solano Avenue Mixed Use	30	2.6
Commercial Recreation	137	12.0
Commercial Services and Production	30	2.6
PUBLIC/OPEN SPACE	254	22.1
Public/Quasi-Public	63	5.5
University Village	67	5.8
Parks and Open Space	124	10.8
<i>Undesignated (Freeway/Rail ROW)</i>	<i>66</i>	<i>5.8</i>
GRAND TOTAL	1,144	100.0

(*) City street right-of-way is reflected in the totals for each category.

D. FOCUS AREAS

In most of Albany, there is a close relationship between *existing* land uses and expected *future* land uses. However, six areas with the potential for change have been identified for more focused consideration. Each of these areas presents unique planning challenges related to urban design, environmental protection, transportation, and community character. The narratives below should be used in tandem with General Plan policies to ensure that future changes in use are consistent with the citywide vision.

San Pablo Avenue Corridor

Prior to the construction of Interstate 80 in the mid-1950s, San Pablo Avenue was the major north-south highway through the Central East Bay. This encouraged the pattern of region-serving, auto-oriented land uses that still exists today along much of the Avenue. San Pablo Avenue is the gateway to Albany from the north and south, the location of City Hall, and home to many of the city's businesses. Its future is vital to Albany's economic health and identity.

For the past three decades, the City has worked to transform the Avenue into a more pedestrian-oriented "retail boulevard." An Urban Design Concept Plan was prepared in 1989, followed by Design Guidelines in 1993. A San Pablo Avenue Vision Plan was adopted in 1998, followed by a Streetscape Plan in 2001. Capital improvement projects called for by these plans, including landscaping, lighting, and crosswalks, have improved the street's appearance. More recently, a Complete Streets Plan was adopted for San Pablo Avenue and Buchanan Street. The Plan calls for bicycle lanes, wider sidewalks, and raised medians in key locations.

Most of the City's future residential and mixed use development opportunities are located along San Pablo Avenue. The corridor is envisioned as a vibrant mixed use street, with architecture that reflects the high quality of the neighborhoods to the east and west. Sensitive transitions to lower density development east and west of the Avenue is critical.



Albany's "PDA"

The term Priority Development Area – or PDA—is used by the Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG) to highlight where the region's growth will be focused in the next 25 years. PDAs are well served by public transit and have relatively high densities and diverse uses. Focusing office, retail, and housing in these areas can make it easier to travel without a car. Locally-designated PDAs are the focus of ABAG's *Sustainable Communities Strategy*, a plan to curb greenhouse gases through land use and transportation planning, required by Senate Bill 375.

In December 2011, the Albany City Council approved a resolution requesting that ABAG designate the Solano and San Pablo corridors as a PDA. As of 2016, there are 43 areas in Alameda County that have been approved by ABAG as either *planned* or *potential* PDAs. The *planned* PDAs are areas that are covered by a specific plan or area plan with detailed provisions for growth. The *potential* PDAs are areas where such a plan does not exist, but where the capacity for growth has been identified. The Solano and San Pablo Avenue corridors have been designated as a *potential* PDA. The designation improves eligibility for future funding.



800 block of San Pablo Avenue

Consistent with the adopted design guidelines for the Avenue, new construction should incorporate features such as awnings, lighting, color, decorative facades, parapets, and distinctive rooflines that enhance building character. Bolder designs are encouraged to create a stronger sense of place. New buildings should be sited close to the front property line, and should step down in height toward the rear property lines to respect the scale of development along Kains Avenue and Adams Street. Parking should be located to the side or rear of buildings, or in structures, rather than in surface lots along the Avenue.

The most significant development opportunity on the corridor consists of 6.3 vacant acres on the west side of San Pablo Avenue at Monroe Street, at the entrance to University Village. The site is planned for a 175-unit senior housing development and 45,500 square feet of commercial space. Public art and streetscape improvements also are planned in this area.

The changes at University Village will redefine Albany's southern gateway and could become a catalyst for development on the east side of San Pablo Avenue in this vicinity. The massing and design of development should reinforce the urban character of San Pablo Avenue while retaining compatibility with lower scale buildings along Kains Avenue to the east.

Further north, the intersection of Solano and San Pablo Avenue should be reinforced as the commercial hub of Albany. The area has been designated a "Major Activity Node" on the General Plan Map, meaning that active ground floor uses such as retail stores and restaurants are particularly important here. The existing pattern of tightly clustered storefronts near the intersection should be extended to the north and south, and special urban design, public transit, and streetscape improvements should communicate that this is the city's commercial center. Buildings exceeding the 38-foot height limit should be considered in this location where community benefits such as affordable housing and open space are provided.

The blocks between Solano Avenue and Clay Street / Brighton Avenue provide additional opportunities for new commercial, residential, and mixed use development. Several Housing Opportunity Sites have been identified along this section of the corridor, including the former Sizzler Restaurant and Mechanics Bank. Where feasible, new buildings should incorporate amenities such as small plazas, public art, and outdoor dining areas. Again, buildings should be designed to protect privacy and sunlight on adjacent lower-scale properties along Adams Street and Kains Avenue.

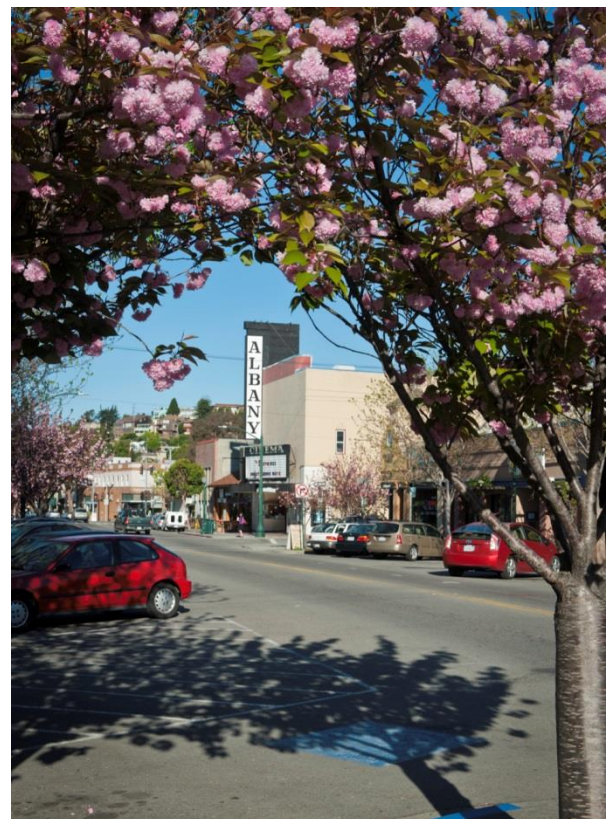
Like the San Pablo/Solano intersection, the northern end of the corridor has been designated a Major Activity Node on the General Plan Map. This area is close to El Cerrito Plaza and is a short walk from the El Cerrito Plaza BART Station. As a major city gateway, development here should convey a positive impression of Albany and capitalize on opportunities for transit-oriented development. The Albany Bowl at 540 San Pablo is the largest site in this area. The bowling alley and adjacent properties to the north encompass about 2.2 acres. The site could be redeveloped with entirely commercial uses, or alternatively as a mixed use project with multi-family housing above or adjacent to commercial uses.

Solano Avenue Corridor

The Solano Avenue commercial district extends from Madison Street on the west to the Berkeley border on the east. Solano Avenue embodies the ideal qualities of a “village” shopping district, including distinctive architecture, a comfortable scale for pedestrians, interesting storefronts, great restaurants, small local businesses, and iconic buildings such as the Albany Theater. The street invites strolling, browsing, and interacting with friends and neighbors. Solano Avenue provides fewer development opportunities than San Pablo Avenue, although there are a number of sites with the potential for change.

As on San Pablo Avenue, there are also frequent applications to improve or alter existing structures, or to change uses in existing storefronts or upper story spaces. Given the limited amount of off-street parking available, the proximity to single family homes, and the density of existing uses, these applications are sometimes controversial.

The largest privately-owned site on Solano Avenue is the 1.56-acre Safeway at 1500 Solano Avenue. The site includes a 24,000 square foot supermarket built in 1964 and recently modernized. Proposals to upgrade the store were considered in 2008-2012, including one alternative to replace the building with 61,000 square feet of retail floor space and a 197-space parking structure. In the event a more substantial redesign or replacement is proposed in the future, it should include ground level commercial uses directly abutting the street frontage, continuing the pattern of continuous storefronts that characterize the rest of the Avenue. Opportunities for including housing should be explored at that time.



1100 block of Solano Avenue

Photo: Doug Davidson

Elsewhere on Solano Avenue, future infill development should maintain commercial facades built at or near the front setback line. The existing 35' height limit and related development standards are appropriate and should be retained.

Along many of the perpendicular side streets that intersect Solano Avenue, zoning allows commercial uses in the first one or two single family homes on the block. This creates a transition zone between commercial and residential uses, and provides opportunities for service businesses, small offices, child care, and similar activities on otherwise residential streets. This is a positive attribute of the commercial district and it should also be retained.

Parking availability will continue to be an issue on Solano Avenue in the future. The 1990-2010 General Plan called for developing a one-acre municipal parking lot, but there are no viable opportunities for such a lot at this time. Other parking management strategies will continue to be explored.

Albany Hill

Albany Hill is the city's most iconic natural feature. Most of the ridgeline and upper slopes have been acquired by the City and are protected as permanent open space. With a few notable exceptions, the lower slopes have been developed and are subject to special hillside zoning regulations, or they are protected by conservation easements.

The Albany Hill / Creekside Master Plan provides guidance for managing vegetation on the hill, primarily to reduce fire hazards, restore native habitat, and provide appropriate levels of public access.

A single undeveloped privately-owned 11-acre parcel remains along the Pierce Street frontage just south of the Gateview Condominiums. The parcel includes about 660 feet of frontage along Pierce Street and extends up the hill a distance of about 775 feet to Taft Street. The entire site is steep and much of it is covered by eucalyptus forest.



The top of Albany Hill is visible above a fog bank blanketing the city.

Allowable residential density on the site was reduced from 12 units per acre to 6 units per acre through a voter-approved initiative in 1994. Thus, maximum development potential is approximately 66 units. Despite the low density zoning, the preference on the site is for townhome or clustered development, with the allowable number of units transferred to the least sensitive and most accessible areas along Pierce Street. Ingress and egress should be from Pierce Street, with the upper slopes protected by a conservation easement, transfer to public ownership, or equivalent mechanism.

Eastshore Highway/ Cleveland Avenue

The area along Cleveland Avenue west of I-80 and Eastshore Highway south of Buchanan Street has historically been Albany's only industrial district. Proximity to the Union Pacific Railroad and interstate highways have shaped the existing land use and parcelization pattern. Some of the existing uses in this corridor have the potential to intensify or redevelop during the next 20 years.

The corridor is envisioned primarily as an employment district for uses which might not be appropriate on the San Pablo and Solano corridors due to their external impacts or need for freeway visibility. The City particularly encourages activities in this area that advance Albany's reputation for sustainability and innovation.

The area could support "maker" spaces, artists' studios, technology incubators, and other types of light industry. It could also support commercial activities that relocate from San Pablo Avenue as that street evolves into a higher value retail boulevard, including automotive and auto-oriented activities. Live-work uses also may be appropriate, provided that noise and air quality impacts can be mitigated and a suitable environment for habitation is provided.

Given the area's visibility from the freeway and distance from residential areas, the corridor presents an opportunity for architecture that incorporates an industrial or modern aesthetic. Public realm improvements, including signage and landscaping, can help give the area a more cohesive image and strengthen its perception as a "district." Completion of a new Public Works Center at 540 Cleveland may be a catalyst for private investment on nearby sites.



Former industrial building, now in use for tire sales on Cleveland Avenue

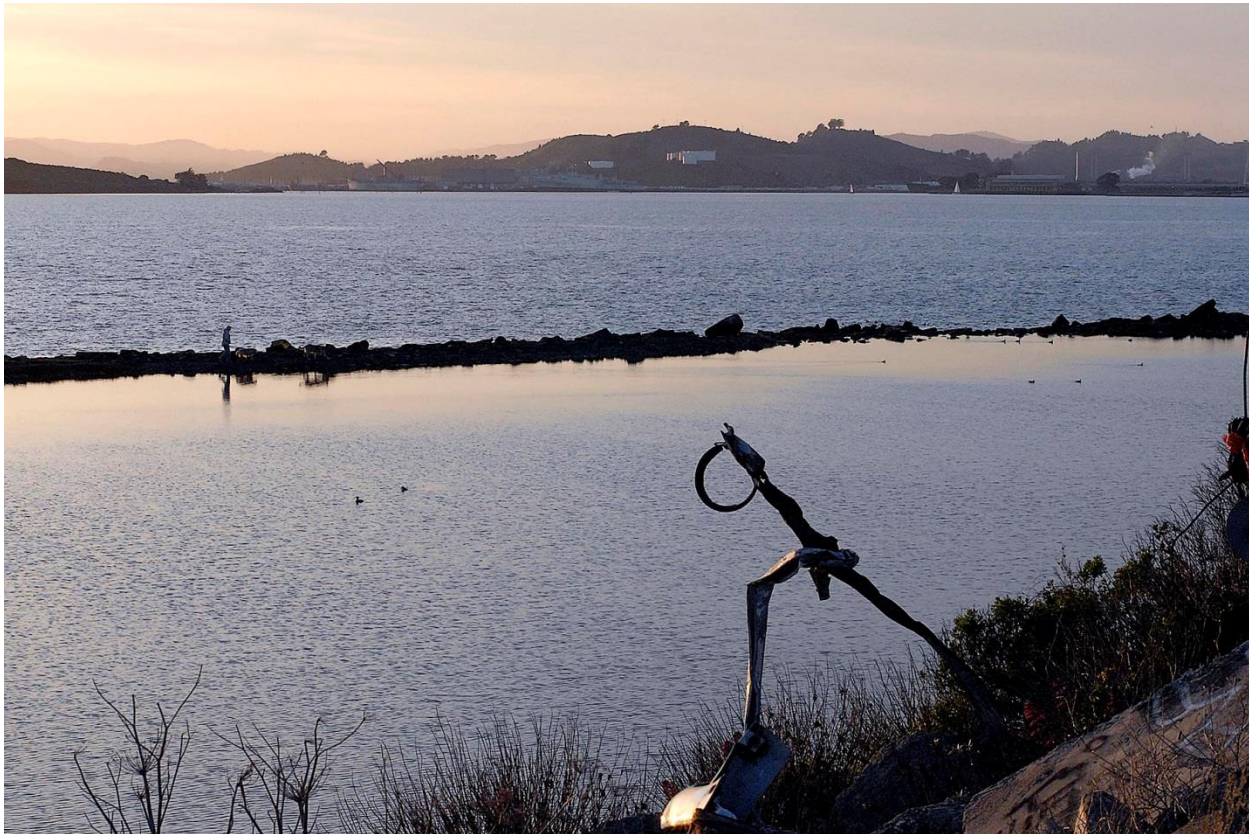


Photo: Doug Davidson

Lagoon at the Albany Bulb

Albany Waterfront

The Albany Waterfront consists of about 175 acres, including roughly 107 acres at Golden Gate Fields and 68 acres at McLaughlin Eastshore State Park. A separate Element of the General Plan has been included to provide policy guidance for this area. The Waterfront Element focuses on the publicly owned properties rather than on Golden Gate Fields, which is privately owned.

Golden Gate Fields is the only remaining year-round horse racing track in Northern California. At the time of adoption of the 2035 Albany General Plan, it was owned by the Stronach Group, a Canadian-based company that operates racetracks in California, Florida, Maryland, and Oregon. The track is currently in active use and is an important revenue generator and employer in Albany.

Any change in land use regulations associated with the racetrack will be subject to Albany Measure C, a voter initiative that has been in effect since January 1, 1990. Measure C gives citizens approval authority over any General Plan change, zoning change, or development project at the waterfront.

The 2035 General Plan assumes no land use changes at the waterfront during the 2015-2035 planning horizon. However, it is acknowledged that future initiatives and development proposals for Golden Gate Fields are likely to be put forward by 2035. Such plans would be subject to a future General Plan Amendment, including detailed analysis, community discussion, and a public vote.

University Village

University Village comprises 77 acres and is bounded by San Pablo Avenue on the east, the Union Pacific Railroad on the west, Codornices Creek on the south, and the USDA, Ocean View Elementary School, and Buchanan Street on the north. Land uses are governed by a 2004 Master Plan, which was an update to an earlier Master Plan adopted in 1998. Much of the Master Plan has been implemented, including reorientation of the internal street system and reconstruction of student family housing.

As noted earlier in this chapter, 6.3 acres along San Pablo Avenue is planned for development with senior housing and retail uses. The remaining 70 acres includes a number of areas identified for potential new uses in the Master Plan, generally located east of Jackson Street. An area of approximately 10 acres bounded by San Pablo Avenue, Village Creek, Jackson Street, and Buchanan Street is currently in use for agricultural experimentation and research.

The 2004 Master Plan calls for continued use of this area as open space. An adjacent area of about five acres along Jackson Street south of Village Creek currently includes additional agricultural research facilities and modular buildings. Under the Master Plan, this area could potentially be redeveloped with housing.

The Master Plan also raises the possibility of relocating the Little League Field from 10th Street to the area east of Ocean View School, and developing housing in its place, although there are no plans to implement this change at this time. Other community facilities, including a child care center, are also envisioned in the Village area.

Because the Village is owned by the University of California, the City has limited jurisdiction over its development. Albany will work closely with the University to achieve outcomes that are consistent with this General Plan. The City encourages the University to update its 2004 Master Plan to reflect completed and pending projects, and updated priorities for the next decade.



Student family housing at University Village

Around Albany

Over the next 20 years, Albany will be impacted by development in adjacent communities, particularly Berkeley and El Cerrito. Like Albany, both of these cities have identified San Pablo Avenue as a “Priority Development Area”, indicating their intent to focus growth on the corridor. As in Albany, both cities have adopted policies that support the replacement of older auto-oriented commercial uses with housing and mixed use projects.

In Berkeley, mixed use projects along San Pablo are subject to a four story, 50’ height limit. Residential-only projects are allowed with a use permit and are subject to a three-story 40’ height limit. In El Cerrito, a recently adopted Specific Plan calls for 1,700 additional dwelling units along the San Pablo corridor, and 243,000 square feet of additional commercial space. The City of Albany will work closely with El Cerrito and Berkeley as their plans are implemented, and will pursue measures to mitigate the impacts of development in these cities on Albany.

Elsewhere on Albany’s perimeter, the West Berkeley Industrial district continues to evolve as a regional employment center. The West Berkeley blocks along the Albany boundary include a number of heavy industrial uses such as the solid waste transfer station and steel fabricators, as well as lighter industrial uses such as mini-warehouses and construction suppliers. There is also a large City of Berkeley park (Harrison Park) just south of the Albany City limits. Harrison Park includes Gabe Catalfo Field and the Berkeley Skate Park. Two additional sports fields adjoin Harrison Park on the University Village property within Albany.

Further south, the Gilman Corridor is continuing to evolve as a retail district, while the neighborhood to the south is experiencing residential, live-work, office, and light manufacturing growth. This is expected to continue for the next 20 years.

Along the waterfront, Golden Gate Fields Racetrack straddles the City limits, and the McLaughlin Eastshore State Park extends north into Richmond and south into Berkeley. Any discussion of the future of the racetrack will require collaboration with Berkeley, while planning for the State Park will involve nearby cities as well as the State, resource agencies, and the East Bay Regional Park District.

One of the largest planned development areas in the East Bay is located just a few miles northwest of Albany along the Bay shoreline in Richmond. The Richmond South Shoreline Specific Plan covers a 220-acre area, and provides capacity for 5.7 million square feet of business, commercial, and research and development space, 720,000 square feet of retail space, and 4,070 housing units. The area is also planned for the future UC Berkeley-Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory Richmond Bay “Global” Campus, which would contain up to 5.4 million square feet of floor space.

There are also large multi-family residential projects planned close to the Albany line, including a 172-unit apartment complex on Central Avenue in Richmond and a 128-unit condominium just north of Cerrito Creek in El Cerrito (now under construction). Elsewhere along the border, the adjacent cities primarily contain low and medium density residential neighborhoods with little potential for change. Albany will continue to coordinate its planning and development services with these communities, and address transportation, community services, and other issues of mutual interest along the border.



View east from Albany Hill, Berkeley Hills in background

E. COMMUNITY DESIGN AND PRESERVATION

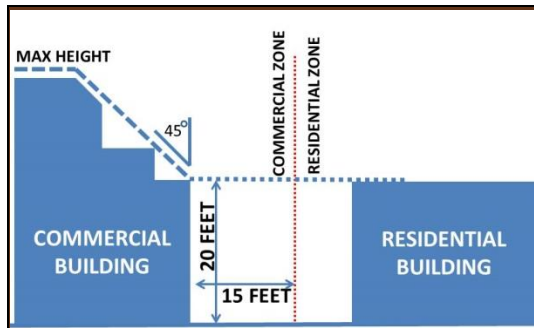
Views

Many homes in Albany have filtered or panoramic views of nearby landmarks, particularly San Francisco Bay and the hills of Marin County, Alcatraz and Angel Islands, the Golden Gate and Bay Bridges, the San Francisco skyline, the Berkeley Hills, the El Cerrito Hills, and Albany Hill. Other homes enjoy shorter-range views of landscaped yards, nearby homes, street trees, and adjacent streets. Large specimen trees occur throughout the city, providing orientation and adding beauty to the urban landscape.

Given the small size of most Albany homes, many owners seek to build additions and second stories. This creates the potential for view impacts and requires trade-offs between preserving community character and promoting investment in the city's housing stock. The City has developed Design Guidelines to help achieve a balance between view preservation and home expansion.

View protection is also addressed in the Albany Municipal Code. The zoning regulations include standards for height and bulk which preserve views, maintain light and air, and protect aesthetic quality. Daylight plane regulations have been adopted so that taller buildings step down in height as they approach property lines in order to preserve privacy and sunlight in adjacent yards (see text box).

The Zoning Code also includes special provisions for hillsides established to protect scenic beauty and preserve significant ridgeline or bay views from Albany Hill. The Code also regulates the siting of wireless communication facilities, noting that such facilities must avoid unreasonable interference with neighboring properties and be placed in locations where their visual impact is least detrimental to scenic vistas.



Daylight Planes

Like many cities, Albany has adopted daylight plane regulations in its zoning ordinance. These regulations require that taller buildings “step down” in height as they approach property lines, in order to reduce shading and the loss of privacy on adjacent lots. This is a particular concern on the rear property lines of commercially zoned parcels, which in some cases abut one-story single family homes.

For parcels on San Pablo Avenue, the regulation means that the 38 foot height limit can only be achieved on a portion of each property, since that limit becomes gradually lower toward the rear of the lot. The maximum height at a distance of 15 feet from the rear property line is 20 feet. The zoning regulations include additional information on how daylight plane is calculated, and what the regulations are in different zones.

Gateways

Gateways can create a first impression and lasting image of a community. A well designed gateway communicates vitality and prosperity while a neglected gateway can communicate disinvestment and a lack of civic pride. The major gateways into Albany are Buchanan Street east of I-80, the locations where San Pablo Avenue enters the city on the north and south, and the locations where Marin and Solano Avenues enter the city on the east.

The City’s Public Art Master Plan places a special focus on beautifying these locations. The Buchanan Gateway includes the “Rose Wave” sculpture and the southern Gateway on San Pablo is planned for a major new installation adjacent to new senior housing. The northern gateway presents opportunities for improvement. Gateway signage, public art, and distinctive architecture should be incorporated in the event that development in this area, including the Albany Bowl site. Opportunities to strengthen the visibility of Cerrito and Codornices Creek should also be pursued as gateways are improved. The creeks define the north and south edges of the city and can influence the character of its gateways.

Urban Form and Architecture

Albany has a large inventory of early 20th Century residential and commercial architecture. While there is great diversity in architectural style and exterior materials, there is also a strong sense of unity and consistency established by the street grid, lot patterns, and age and scale of the housing stock.

Many Albany homes were built as single story bungalows of less than 1,400 square feet. As housing values and incomes have increased, additions to these homes have become common. Given the narrow dimensions and small size of most lots, this often requires adding a second story. The City has adopted design guidelines to reduce the perceived mass of two-story homes from the street, protect the privacy of adjacent properties, and promote architectural compatibility. For second story additions, the upper floor is often recessed from the front facade, maintaining a lower profile at the street. The City has adopted floor area ratio and lot coverage standards which discourage teardowns and very large homes.

More than 40 percent of the city's housing units are in multi-family buildings. Many incorporate modernist or mid-century designs typical of apartment construction in the 1950s and 60s. The quality and condition of these buildings varies. Some are in excellent condition and others need maintenance and repair. The public's expectations for multi-family architecture are much higher today than when these buildings were constructed. Today, there is more sensitivity to the effects of such construction on adjacent residences and the aesthetics of multi-family design and materials.

The City's commercial areas also have an eclectic mix of architecture spanning most of the 20th Century. San Pablo Avenue is characterized by a mix of building styles, signage types, setbacks, and off-street parking provisions. Solano Avenue tends to have greater cohesion, with many buildings that feature awnings, creative signage, interesting window displays, and pre-1940s architecture. On both streets, tree planting and undergrounding of utilities have improved the quality of the street. Solano Avenue, in particular, has an attractive street environment with landscaping, benches, bus shelters, and small plazas.

Albany has adopted design review standards to ensure that construction is visually and functionally appropriate to site conditions and surroundings, including natural landforms and vegetation. Design review also helps ensure the compatibility of signs, and achieves other policy goals relating to parking, water conservation, and waste management. Design review is required for new construction and most residential alterations, with exceptions for small accessory structures, changes which do not affect the exterior or which involve normal repair and replacement, re-roofing, skylights, and other minor changes.

The City has adopted design guidelines for residential additions and new homes. The guidelines are meant to enhance architectural creativity, respond to a variety of budgets and settings, and reflect Albany's eclectic mix of architecture. Design guidelines have also been adopted for San Pablo Avenue, with the objective of improving the ambiance and vitality of the street. The Municipal Code also addresses the design of buildings in the "node" around Solano and San Pablo, and calls for "tower elements" to distinguish this area from the rest of each street.



This second story addition incorporates many of the design features of the original home.

Landscaping and Street Trees

Trees, shrubs, and flowers enhance the city's appearance and bring nature into the built environment. Trees offer shade for pedestrians, provide privacy and a buffer from noise, improve mental health, relieve some of the effects of air pollution, and provide habitat for birds and urban wildlife. Trees can have positive effects on stormwater runoff and water quality and can increase property values. They can also sequester carbon, and contribute to efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

There are approximately 5,000 publicly owned trees in the City, located in City parks and along City streets. The City has developed an urban forestry program to promote street tree planting and good tree maintenance practices. Pruning of street trees is conducted on a three to four year cycle, with a priority on fast-growing trees or potential hazards. The City also conducts tree planting for a fee when requested by homeowners. A landscape and lighting assessment district generates revenues for street tree planting, landscaping, public street lighting, sidewalks, and park and recreational improvements.

The City has adopted an official tree removal policy, which includes procedures for emergency and non-emergency removal of trees on public property. Causes for emergency removal include immediate, clear, and imminent danger to the public. The policy calls for a replacement tree to be planted in 60 days or less. For non-emergency removal, a permitting process and removal criteria have been established.

A list of recommended street tree species and a process for selecting and maintaining trees have been established. Tree selection should consider factors such as the potential for sidewalk damage, the required level of maintenance and water, vulnerability to insect pests, and resilience in the face of climate change and more extreme weather events.



Street trees on 800 block of Ramona Avenue

Public Art

Public art includes artwork in the public realm, such as sculptures, murals and mosaics. In some cities, it may also include decorated functional elements, such as manhole covers, paving patterns and painted utility boxes. Architecture and landscapes can also be a form of public art, as they express a particular perspective and can provide a source of beauty and interest. Public art can improve the quality and design of buildings, streetscapes and public places and create a stronger sense of place for a community.

Albany has adopted an Art in Public Places Ordinance as a way to fund public art in Albany. Certain types of public and private construction projects must either include a public art component, or pay an in-lieu fee which contributes to the development of public art elsewhere in the city. Any project with a construction cost greater than \$300,000 must include a public art component equal to 1.75% of the total construction cost, or contribute 1.75% of the project cost to the Public Art Fund.

The City has adopted a Public Arts Master Plan to guide the siting of public art. Locations throughout the city have been evaluated for future art pieces, and several prominent and high visibility sites have been identified as candidates. In addition to formally commissioned art, the Albany Bulb has an eclectic collection of outdoor folk art, much of it fashioned from refuse.

Historic Preservation

Albany has a large inventory of early 20th Century buildings and a few structures that date to the 19th Century. Roughly 2,000 homes—half of the single family housing stock in the city—is 85 years old or more. Collectively, this housing creates an ambiance and character that is important to Albany residents and representative of a defining period in Bay Area history.

Alameda County tax assessor records indicate there are 32 structures remaining in Albany that pre-date the City's 1908 incorporation, with the oldest home built in 1895 (1063 Curtis) and the second oldest in 1899 (1119 Kains). The 32 structures include 17 built in 1906 and 1907 and 15 built before the 1906 earthquake. All 15 structures are single family or two-family homes, and they are not concentrated on a particular street or in a specific neighborhood. Only one structure in the city is formally listed on the National Register of Historic Places. This is the Peterson House, a private home located at 1124 Talbot Avenue (National Register #82002155). The house was built in 1906 and is considered significant for its post and beam construction, which was unusual at the time.

None of the city's civic or commercial structures have been formally designated as historic buildings. Many were built during the 1920s and 30s, principally along San Pablo and Solano Avenues. These buildings have been altered to varying degrees over the years, with some bearing little resemblance to the original structures and others more or less intact.



Peterson House (1124 Talbot) is Albany's only listed National Register landmark



Veterans Memorial Building (1932)

Current tax assessor records indicate only four remaining commercial structures which pre-date 1920, 43 commercial structures built between 1920 and 1929, and 37 commercial structures built between 1930 and 1939.² These structures are mostly single-story retail buildings, although a few are single family homes converted to offices, and several are automotive service or sales buildings.

Civic buildings in Albany generally date from the second half of the 20th Century. However, there are a few exceptions. The mission-style Veterans Memorial Building (1325 Portland) was completed in 1932. Albany United Methodist Church was built in 1927 and is the oldest still existing church in the city. The Post Office on Solano Avenue was built in 1938. The USDA facility on Buchanan Street is representative of the federal buildings of the late 1930s. It has been recognized by the American Chemical Society as a National Historical Chemical Landmark due to the pioneering work on frozen foods conducted there.

² "Year Built" data from the County Assessor applies to the primary structure if multiple structures are present.

Historic structures are defined in the zoning regulations. The regulations state that Variances may be granted for the rehabilitation of such structures if they are currently non-conforming. Additionally, one of the purposes of having floor area ratio limits (FARs) on single family lots is to preserve the scale and mass of the existing housing stock.

As of 2016, there has not been a systematic evaluation of historically important sites and buildings in the city. As Albany matures, the value of these structures will become more important to the heritage and character of the city. Policies and actions in this General Plan call for an expanded preservation program, including greater recognition of older buildings, sensitivity to historic context, and the protection of important historic architectural features.

F. GOALS, POLICIES, AND ACTIONS

GOAL LU-1: URBAN VILLAGE BY THE BAY

Maintain Albany’s character as an “Urban Village by the Bay” by sustaining the city’s residential neighborhoods, supporting thriving walkable business districts, conserving and improving access to the waterfront, and providing parks, open space, and public facilities that contribute to the city’s outstanding quality of life.

POLICIES

Policy LU-1.1: New Housing Opportunities

Create opportunities to meet the housing needs of current and future Albany residents by zoning land for a variety of housing types, particularly on underutilized commercial properties. To the extent possible, new development throughout the city should be leveraged to create on-site and off-site opportunities for housing serving very low, low, and moderate income households.

Policy LU-1.2: Balanced Growth

Promote a balanced mix of housing and employment growth so that more Albany residents have the opportunity to live, work, and shop in their community. Although housing production is a high priority, the City must also expand its economic base and encourage uses that create local jobs.

Policy LU-1.3: Business Districts

Maintain and enhance San Pablo and Solano Avenues as Albany’s principal commercial streets. Encourage a vibrant mix of ground floor retail and service uses that meet the needs of Albany residents, enhance the local tax base, provide job opportunities, and provide a safe, walkable environment.

Policy LU-1.4: Production, Distribution, and Repair

Provide opportunities for production, distribution, and repair (PDR) businesses in the areas along the Eastshore Highway and Cleveland Avenue, recognizing that this area has a substantially different character than the Solano and San Pablo business districts. In addition to facilitating PDR uses, land use regulations for this area should also facilitate auto-oriented uses, larger-scale retail uses, and live-work development.

Policy LU-1.5: Open Spaces

Provide a diverse range of open spaces to complement the urbanized areas of the City, including improved parks and playing fields, conservation areas on Albany Hill and along the shoreline, a publicly accessible waterfront, natural areas along creeks, areas for community gardens and urban agriculture, and private open spaces.

Policy LU-1.6: Albany Waterfront

Support an inclusive, transparent dialogue on all issues relating to the future of the Albany waterfront, including Golden Gate Fields. Decisions relating to the future of the waterfront shall abide by the provisions of voter-approved Measure “C.”

See the Waterfront Element for additional policies on the Albany waterfront.

Policy LU-1.7: Sustainable Development

Ensure that future development mitigates its environmental impacts to the greatest extent possible and is designed and constructed to advance the principles of sustainability. This should include the use of greener and net zero energy building practices, greater energy and water efficiency, and the design of new development in a way that encourages walking and bicycling.

See the Conservation and Sustainability Element of the General Plan for additional policies on climate change, energy and water conservation, and sustainable development.

Policy LU-1.8: Transit-Oriented Development

Encourage land use patterns that support transit use, including additional mixed use (commercial and higher-density residential) development along the San Pablo and Solano Avenue corridors.

Policy LU-1.9: Income Diversity

Recognize economic and income diversity as one of Albany's greatest strengths. Ensure that future land use decisions contribute to this diversity by creating housing and employment opportunities for persons of all incomes and backgrounds.

Policy LU-1.10: Interagency Coordination

Coordinate land use planning with the cities of Berkeley, El Cerrito, and Richmond, and with appropriate regional, state, and federal agencies, to address issues which cross jurisdictional lines, and to ensure that the potential impacts of development in these cities on Albany is mitigated.

IMPLEMENTING ACTIONS**Action LU-1.A: PDA Designation**

Work with ABAG, MTC, and other appropriate agencies to pursue the re-designation of San Pablo/Solano as a "Planned" Priority Development Area (PDA) rather than a "Potential" PDA. If appropriate, the City should pursue funding to prepare the necessary plans and regulations for a "Planned PDA" designation. Such a designation could improve the City's eligibility for transportation, infrastructure, streetscape, and planning grants in the future.

See the Housing Element for actions on housing production and conservation.

Action LU-1.B: Sustainable Infrastructure

Ensure that the City's capital improvement program places a priority on sustainable infrastructure projects, such as renewable energy, composting and recycling facilities, bicycle racks, and electric vehicle charging stations.



Carmel Avenue

GOAL LU-2: RESIDENTIAL NEIGHBORHOODS

Preserve and enhance the high quality of Albany's residential neighborhoods.

POLICIES

Policy LU-2.1: Context-Sensitive Design

Ensure that infill development in residential areas is compatible in density, scale and character with the established neighborhood context.

Policy LU-2.2: Mixed Density Areas

In areas designated for high and medium density residential uses, ensure that new development is designed to minimize sharp contrasts in height, consider the potential for loss of sunlight and privacy for adjacent homes, and provide buffering and screening from nearby lower density uses.

Policy LU-2.3: Design Guidelines

Maintain residential design guidelines and design review procedures that promote the compatibility of residential alterations and additions with existing homes and that strive to reduce impacts on neighboring properties. The guidelines should be used to encourage high-quality, visually distinctive architecture, and the use of durable, attractive construction materials.

Policy LU-2.4: Community Standards

Implement construction regulations, code enforcement practices, and building inspection programs that protect neighborhood character, support responsible property management, and ensure the health and safety of Albany residents.

Policy LU-2.5: Second Units

Encourage development of secondary dwelling units and recognize their potential to meet a substantial portion of Albany's affordable housing needs. Seek creative solutions to parking, design, and access issues so that second units are accommodated with minimal impacts on neighborhood character and adjacent properties.

Policy LU-2.6: Second-Story Additions

Ensure that second story additions to single story homes are designed to minimize increases in height and bulk, and to reduce their perceived mass from the street and surrounding yards.

Policy LU-2.7: Home-Based Businesses

Allow home-based businesses in Albany, subject to standards which ensure that off-site impacts are minimized and the residential nature of the structure is maintained.

Policy LU-2.8: Kains Avenue and Adams Street

Maintain Kains Avenue and Adams Street as predominantly residential streets. Land use regulations should limit the encroachment of commercial uses onto parcels that are currently developed with housing. Residential uses along these streets and in adjacent areas should be protected from the potential adverse impacts of commercial uses through special setback requirements. The use of these two streets for primary access to non-residential uses shall be discouraged or prohibited as appropriate.

Policy LU-2.9: Non-Residential Uses

Ensure that non-residential uses in residential areas, such as child care centers, houses of worship, and group homes, are designed and operated to minimize adverse effects on nearby homes and neighborhoods.

Policy LU-2.10: Small Lots

Recognize small residential lots (less than 3,750 square feet) as a basic feature of Albany's neighborhoods, and ensure that development regulations support the use of such lots in a productive way.

Policy LU-2.11: Front Yards

Encourage the management and design of front yard space, including landscaping and fences, to complement residential architecture and enhance neighborhood aesthetics.

See the Conservation and Sustainability Element for policies on the use of Bay-friendly landscaping.



Mixed density housing on the east side of Albany Hill

Policy LU-2.12: Residential Beautification

Enhance the appearance of residential areas through street tree planting, street lighting and sidewalk improvements, landscaping, and other investments that beautify local streets.

IMPLEMENTING ACTIONS

Action LU-2.A: Small Lot Standards

Consider special zoning standards for small lots (3,750 SF or less) that reflect the smaller setbacks and higher lot coverage typically associated with such lots. One option may be to consider a new zoning district or zoning overlay for areas where the prevailing lot size is less than 3,750 SF.

Action LU-2.B: Multi-Family Design Guidelines

Expand the City's design guidelines for multi-family housing to more comprehensively address residential design issues in the City's medium and high density zoning districts.

Action LU-2.C: Amendments to Design Guidelines

Amend and expand Albany's Residential Design Guidelines to proactively address the preservation of Albany's architectural history. This should include descriptions of the prevailing architectural styles and design elements of Albany homes, as well as guidelines for the treatment of such elements in substantial alterations and additions. This should also include guidelines for the sensitive introduction of contemporary architecture in a traditional context.

GOAL LU-3: BUSINESS DISTRICTS

Maintain vibrant commercial districts that provide and an attractive, walkable environment for shopping, dining, entertainment, and services.

POLICIES

Policy LU-3.1: Mixed Use Development

Encourage mixed use development combining residential uses above ground floor commercial uses along the San Pablo and Solano Avenue corridors. The City's zoning regulations should continue to provide floor area ratio (FAR) incentives for projects that include multi-family residential uses on the upper stories. State density bonus provisions for affordable housing may be used to allow floor area bonuses above and beyond those provided by the City of Albany, up to a maximum FAR of 3.0 for parcels on San Pablo Avenue and 2.0 for parcels on Solano Avenue.

Policy LU-3.2: San Pablo Avenue

Continue to foster the transformation of San Pablo Avenue from an auto-oriented commercial strip to a pedestrian- and transit-oriented retail boulevard. San Pablo Avenue should be a source of community pride, with distinctive buildings, an attractive streetscape, and a diverse mix of uses.

Policy LU-3.3: Solano Avenue

Enhance the pattern of tightly clustered retail storefronts, active ground floor uses, and specialty shopping, dining, and personal services along the Solano Avenue corridor. Any future infill development on Solano Avenue should maintain and enhance this pattern.

Policy LU-3.4: Solano/San Pablo

Enhance the intersection of Solano and San Pablo Avenues as the "center" of Albany and a major activity node. Land use regulations and design guidelines should reinforce the identity of this area as a hub of pedestrian traffic, distinctive architecture, and active ground floor uses.

Policy LU-3.5: West Albany Creative District

Encourage creative arts uses, "makers" and entrepreneurs, technology, and live-work activities which complement the existing commercial and industrial uses along Eastshore Highway and Cleveland Avenue in West Albany.

Policy LU-3.6: Flexibility

Ensure that land use regulations and other City requirements are sufficiently flexible to respond to the evolving needs of local retailers, and changes in the retail and service industries.

Policy LU-3.7: Commercial Design

Encourage distinctive architecture in Albany's commercial districts, with massing, height, façade design, signage, exterior materials, and lighting used to establish a strong sense of place and orientation. New buildings should be sited to enhance the sidewalk space, with any on-site parking located to the side or rear of a structure rather than between the structure and the street.

Policy LU-3.8: Buffering

Require buffering of residential uses, particularly along Kains Avenue, Adams Street, and the perpendicular side streets that intersect Solano Avenue, from the potentially adverse impacts created by nearby commercial activities. This should include special setback and daylight plane regulations to be applied where commercial zones abut lower density zones. It may also include special use, design, and noise standards.

Policy LU-3.9: Office Space

Support development of additional office space on commercially zoned land, especially for local-serving businesses and Albany residents seeking to establish or expand businesses in the city. Zoning should identify areas where office space is acceptable on the ground floor, and areas where office space should be limited to upper floors so that ground floor space is used for retail activity or other more active uses.

Policy LU-3.10: Use Permits

Maintain use permit requirements for businesses with the potential to create off-site impacts. Establish conditions of approval as needed to reduce the potential for traffic, noise, parking, odor, and other external effects.

Policy LU-3.11: Automotive Uses

Support the continued presence of automotive businesses in the city, including auto sales, auto servicing, auto accessories, and auto repair. Where such uses are located on the San Pablo Avenue corridor, they should be designed and operated in a way that is consistent with the overall vision of San Pablo Avenue as an attractive, walkable shopping street and that minimizes adverse impacts on nearby residences.

Policy LU-3.12: Lot Consolidation

Support the consolidation of underutilized parcels on the Solano and San Pablo corridors to create sites that are more viable for future mixed use development, including on-site parking. Development on larger sites should be designed to respect the fine-grained character of nearby properties, and should be articulated into multiple smaller storefronts rather than long, unbroken facades.

Policy LU-3.13: Urban Open Space

Ensure that new open spaces, including pocket parks, courtyards, plazas and other accessible outdoor areas, are developed to meet the growing demand for open space as new mixed use development occurs.

Policy LU-3.14: Parking Management

Manage parking along the San Pablo and Solano Avenue corridors in a way that meets the needs of local businesses, provides convenience for local shoppers and patrons, and minimizes spillover parking onto nearby residential streets. The use of shared parking lots is strongly encouraged.

See the Transportation Element for additional policies on parking.

Policy LU-3.15: Northern Gateway

Ensure that any future development on the Albany Bowl site, and surrounding sites along San Pablo Avenue north of Clay Street, reflects the importance of this area and its function as a northern gateway to the City.



600 block San Pablo Avenue

Policy LU-3.16: Golden Gate Fields

Require any future redevelopment of Golden Gate Fields to take place as part of an overall plan that is consistent with Albany’s values, protects the shoreline as a place of scenic beauty, and advances principles of environmental sustainability.

IMPLEMENTING ACTIONS**Action LU-3.A: Economic Analysis**

Conduct market studies of the San Pablo and Solano business districts in order to better understand the needs of local businesses, existing uses of space, constraints to business growth, and potential changes that would improve the business climate. Specific attention should be given to the balance between retail and personal service uses in commercial districts.

Action LU-3.B: Major Activity Nodes

Develop land use and design regulations that reinforce key areas along San Pablo and Solano Avenues as major activity nodes, particularly around the intersection of these two streets.

Subsequent planning studies should identify the desired character, activities, and development standards at the San Pablo-Solano node, the Northern Gateway node, and other nodes that may be identified in the future. The purpose of a node is to intensify pedestrian-oriented retail, commercial and mixed use activities at key locations. The City will work with property owners and neighbors in these areas to explore incentives, facilitate lot consolidation, and create more viable development opportunities.

Action LU-3.C: Commercial Parking Studies

Evaluate commercial parking requirements to ensure that they are consistent with national best practices, support shared parking and car-sharing programs, and contribute to local sustainability objectives.

Action LU-3.D: San Pablo Avenue Design Guidelines

Update the San Pablo Avenue Design Guidelines. In addition to providing direction on building scale, commercial facades, landscaping, and public improvements, the guidelines should consider the segmentation of the corridor into “districts” which are different in their function and character. If such districts are identified, zoning code amendments should be considered to reinforce the desired character.

Action LU-3.E: Building Height at Commercial Node

Subject to additional community input and discussion, consider restoring a 45-foot height limit along San Pablo Avenue within 500 feet of the Solano Avenue intersection and allowing a 50-foot limit within 100 feet of the intersection.

Action LU-3.F: Transition Parcels

Consider special zoning regulations for the commercially zoned parcels on the perpendicular streets that cross Solano Avenue that contain existing older single family homes. Such regulations would establish specific conditions for commercial uses in these properties to minimize potential impacts on neighboring residential properties.

Action LU-3.G: PRC Zone

Consider changes to the “Planned Residential Commercial” (PRC) overlay district which further incentivize the inclusion of housing on underutilized commercial properties.

Action LU-3.H: Potential BART and Capitol Corridor Stations

Maintain a dialogue with BART and surrounding property owners on the long-term feasibility of an “infill” BART station without off-street parking along Solano Avenue (near Key Route). Also, in conjunction with future planning for the Eastshore/ Cleveland corridor and/or the Albany waterfront, consider the possibility of an “infill” passenger rail station along the Capitol Corridor/ Union Pacific tracks.

See the Transportation Element for actions on parking and BART.

GOAL LU-4: CIVIC, INSTITUTIONAL, AND MEDICAL USES

Recognize civic and institutional facilities as an essential element of Albany's identity and an important part of the quality of life in the city.

POLICIES

Policy LU-4.1: Civic Facilities

Provide outstanding schools and public facilities that meet the educational, social, and recreational needs of Albany residents. Such facilities should provide safe, attractive places for the delivery of services to Albany residents and businesses while fostering interaction among persons of all ages and interests.

Policy LU-4.2: Large-Scale Institutional Uses

Work with community institutions such as St. Mary's College High School, the USDA, and the California Department of Rehabilitation Orientation Center to address neighborhood impacts and long-term facility planning issues. Such institutions are a valued part of the Albany community and should be sustained.

Policy LU-4.3: Health Care Facilities

Encourage the development of small-scale facilities that meet local health care and medical needs.

Policy LU-4.4: Mitigating Development Impacts

Ensure that the effects of proposed development projects on civic uses, such as schools, parks, the Library, and other public buildings are considered before such projects are approved. Provisions to mitigate impacts and ensure that development "pays its way" through fees or improvements to public facilities should be included in project approvals.

Policy LU-4.5: University Village

Recognize University of California (UC) Village as an integral part of the Albany community. Land use decisions on the University's property should be compatible with nearby uses and provide collateral benefits to Albany residents and businesses wherever feasible. Important natural features at University Village, such as Village Creek, Codornices Creek, and significant tree stands, should be protected.

Policy LU-4.6: Gill Tract

Support future uses of the Gill Tract (San Pablo Avenue at Buchanan Street) that are consistent with the University's academic objectives while also responding to the community's desire to retain a substantial portion of the property for open space, urban agriculture, and recreational uses.

Policy LU-4.7: UC Financial Support

Work with the University of California to obtain financial and/or in kind support for City infrastructure, services, and capital facilities that are used by residents of University Village. This could include support for public safety, public streets, parks and open spaces, sanitary and storm sewers, and similar services and facilities.

Policy LU-4.8: Coordinated Park Planning

Coordinate planning for the park and open space lands owned by the City, the University of California and the Albany School District to improve public access, increase use, and improve traffic safety for students, pedestrians, cyclists, and automobiles.

IMPLEMENTING ACTIONS

Action LU-4.A: University Village Master Plan Update

Encourage the University to update its Master Plan for University Village to reflect the completion of the family student housing redevelopment project, the approval of the retail and senior housing project along San Pablo Avenue, and the remaining opportunities for infill development and open space protection on the balance of the site.

Action LU-4.B: University Village Community Facilities

Explore opportunities for new community facilities on the University Village site, consistent with the University Village Master Plan.

Action LU-4.C: St. Mary's Enrollment Cap

Maintain a long-term agreement with St. Mary's College High School to cap enrollment at 600 students, plus a 5 percent margin to account for attrition (equivalent to an absolute cap of 630).

GOAL LU-5: ENVIRONMENTALLY SENSITIVE AREAS

Ensure that land use and planning decisions protect the quality of Albany's natural environment and conserve environmentally sensitive areas.

POLICIES**Policy LU-5.1: Albany Hill**

Ensure that any future development on Albany Hill is designed and planned to respect natural topography, minimize grading, respond to soil and drainage conditions, minimize impacts on parking and narrow streets, and protect view corridors. The entire crest of Albany Hill shall remain a non-urbanized open space area. In addition, the City will work with local and regional open space advocacy groups such as the Trust for Public Land to promote open space conservation and additional land acquisition on the Hill.

Policy LU-5.2: Albany Shoreline

Work collaboratively with federal, state and regional agencies, shoreline open space advocates and other interest groups, and Albany residents to enhance the recreational, ecological, and open space value of the Albany waterfront.

See the Waterfront Element for additional policies on shoreline open space improvements.

Policy LU-5.3: Albany's Creeks

Maintain a Creek Conservation Zone (CCZ) along Cerrito, Codornices, and Village Creek. Protect the existing riparian habitat within the CCZ and restrict development as necessary to conserve the creek environment.

See the Conservation and Sustainability Element for additional creek policies.

Policy LU-5.4: Archaeological Resources

Protect Albany's archaeological resources, including remains and artifacts from Native American settlement. The City will coordinate with local tribal representatives and follow appropriate mitigation, preservation, and recovery procedures in the event that important resources are discovered during development.

IMPLEMENTING ACTIONS**Action LU-5.A: Albany Hill Vacant Parcel**

Work with the owners of the vacant 11-acre parcel on the west side of Albany Hill to cluster the site's allowable development in a way that enables a majority of the property to be conserved as open space.

Action LU-5.B: Prehistoric and Archaeological Resource Protection

Continue to maintain standard conditions of approval for new development which require consultation with a professional archaeologist in the event that any subsurface prehistoric or archaeological remains are discovered during any construction or preconstruction activities on a development site. This includes consultation with Native American organizations prior to continued site work in the event such remains are discovered.

Action LU-5.C: Golden Gate Fields

Ensure that any future change of use at Golden Gate Fields is planned and designed to conserve environmentally sensitive areas on the site, including the shoreline, wetlands, and Codornices Creek.

GOAL LU-6: COMMUNITY CHARACTER AND PRESERVATION

Retain and enhance the positive elements of Albany’s visual character, including prevailing architectural styles, locally important landmarks, significant views, and natural features.

POLICIES**Policy LU-6.1: Historic Preservation**

Encourage expanded recognition, public education, and appreciation of Albany’s large inventory of early 20th Century homes and commercial buildings. Such buildings help define Albany’s sense of place and identity.

Policy LU-6.2: Gateways

Maintain high standards for the appearance of buildings, properties, and public space at the major entrances into Albany, particularly along Buchanan Street east of I-80, on San Pablo Avenue at the Berkeley and El Cerrito borders, at the end of the I-80 off-ramps, and on the Ohlone Greenway. Such areas should convey a positive impression of the City and create a sense of arrival that distinguishes Albany from adjacent cities.

See the Community Services and Facilities Element for policies on public art.

Policy LU-6.3: Views and Vistas

Consider protection of vistas from public viewpoints when reviewing new development applications.

Policy LU-6.4: Streetscape Improvements

Improve the visual character and safety of heavily traveled Albany streets through streetscape improvements such as lighting, signage, landscaping, sidewalk extensions and repair, public art, and tree planting.

See the Transportation Element for additional policies and actions on “complete streets.”

Policy LU-6.5: Signage

Treat commercial signage as an integral part of building design, and an opportunity to enhance the visual character of the city.

Policy LU-6.6: Lighting

Manage exterior lighting to reduce potential light and glare impacts, improve public safety, enhance night time visibility, complement local architecture, and enhance the character of the city.

Policy LU-6.7: Activating Public Space

Support activities such as farmers markets, outdoor concerts, street fairs, temporary street closures for block parties, and other programmed events that activate public space and provide gathering places for Albany residents.

Policy LU-6.8: Waterfront Identity

Improve Albany’s identity as a waterfront city, particularly through measures which safely connect Albany neighborhoods to recreational areas and trails along the shoreline. The City should work to improve pedestrian and bicycle access across the Union Pacific Railroad and Interstate 80 so that residents can more easily access existing and planned shoreline improvements. It will also ensure that any reuse of the Golden Gate Fields property enhances the city’s waterfront identity.

Policy LU-6.9: Commercial Property Upgrades

Support the upgrading of older commercial properties, particularly along San Pablo Avenue, and Eastshore Highway/ Cleveland Avenue.

Policy LU-6.10: Wireless Facilities

Minimize the visual impact of wireless communication facilities by: (a) concealing wireless facilities in existing structures where possible; (b) using camouflage and screening techniques to hide or blend such facilities into the surrounding area; (c) designing facilities to be aesthetically pleasing and respectful of neighborhood context; and (d) concealing related mechanical equipment and devices in underground vaults or other unobtrusive structures.

IMPLEMENTING ACTIONS

Action LU-6.A: San Pablo Avenue Streetscape Master Plan

Update the San Pablo Streetscape Master Plan to reflect an emphasis on transit-oriented development, and improved provisions for pedestrians and bicyclists.

Action LU-6.B: Public Improvements

Identify public improvements for San Pablo and Solano Avenues and identify funding for such improvements in the City's Capital Improvement Program. This should include enhanced public spaces along both streets.

Action LU-6.C: Street Tree Program

Develop a comprehensive street tree master plan and planting program, including desired species and maintenance practices. Apply for grants and other funds which enable such a plan to be prepared and implemented. Street tree selection should minimize the potential for sidewalk damage and address issues such as climate resilience. Likewise, the design of sidewalks and planter strips should accommodate a variety of street tree types and sizes.

Action LU-6.D: Preservation Advocacy

Pursue development of a historic preservation program for Albany. Such a program could include a register of locally important historic buildings, markers and plaques which acknowledge key landmarks and sites, provisions to protect and enhance the defining qualities of the City's older buildings, and education and outreach on local resources and the benefits of preservation. Amendment of the Zoning Code to provide for historic preservation should be considered as part of this effort.

Action LU-6.E: Façade Improvements

Consider opportunities and potential funding sources for design assistance, façade improvement programs, and other measures that help local businesses and property owners update commercial buildings.

Action LU-6.F: Utility Undergrounding

Continue to pursue funding for utility undergrounding, consistent with PG&E Rule 20A procedures.

Action LU-6.G: Cultural Resource Identification

Pursue an agreement with the Northwest Information Center (NWIC) at Sonoma State University to identify properties on which further field studies of cultural resources may be required in the event demolition or construction on those properties is proposed. Where such resources are present, the City may require preconstruction surveys and project-specific recommendations to protect significant archaeological, paleontological, or historic resources.

Action LU-6.H: Sign Ordinance Revisions

Update Section 20.32 of the Municipal Code (Sign Regulations) to reflect best practices, ensure full compliance with recent court decisions, and address local objectives such as the elimination of billboards along major thoroughfares.

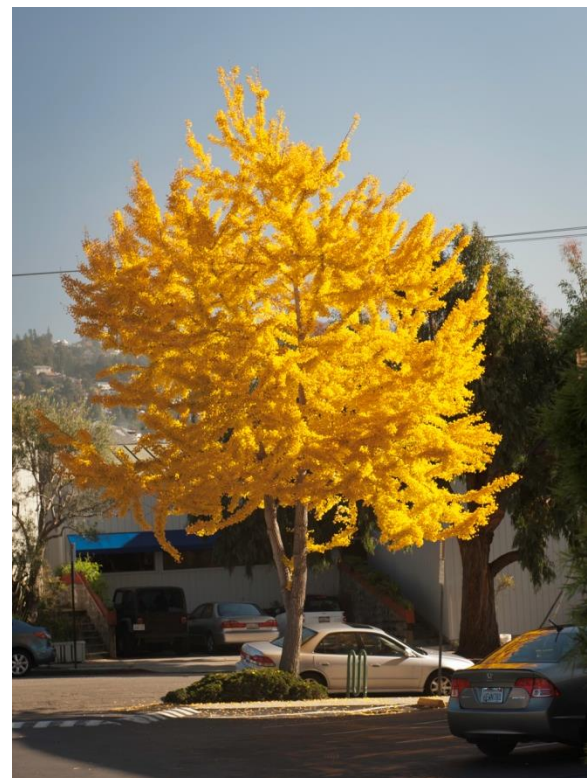


Photo: Doug Davidson

Ginkgo tree on Peralta Avenue

