

**CITY OF ALBANY
CITY COUNCIL AGENDA
STAFF REPORT**

Agenda Date: 02/19/2008

Reviewed by: *BP*

SUBJECT: Establishment of a Subcommittee of two City Council Members to Meet with Representatives of the University of California, Berkeley to Discuss Future Plans for University Village

REPORT BY: Jeff Bond, Planning and Building Manager
Ann Chaney, Community Development Director

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

That the City Council establish a subcommittee of two Council members to meet with representatives of the University of California, Berkeley to discuss future plans for University Village.

BACKGROUND

This item has been placed on the agenda at the request of Mayor Lieber.

University Village is a 77-acre property owned by the University of California and is primarily used as housing for UC Berkeley students with children. Redevelopment of the Village began in 1998, and amendments to the master plan were made in 2004. At the beginning of the project, there were 920 units of housing, and upon completion of housing currently under construction (“East Village and West Village Housing”), there will be 973 units of housing.

The portion of University Village between Jackson Street and San Pablo Avenue currently includes the Gill Tract research facility operated by the UC Berkeley College of Natural Resources, the Village community center and administrative offices, and Albany Little League fields. In addition, Codornices Creek forms the southern boundary of the project.

As part of the 2004 amendments to the master plan, the University envisioned in this area a large mixed-use project including student housing, retail, new community and administrative facilities, and relocated little league fields. The proposed project, however, did not include land for urban agriculture/education facility that had been requested by Urban Roots. Although the UC Board of Regents approved the master plan in June 2004, the University has subsequently indicated that it will not be implemented as originally envisioned.

Also in 2004, a three-party Memorandum of Understanding between the cities of Berkeley and Albany and the University of California was approved that has resulted in series of habitat and flood control improvements to Codornices Creek from San Pablo Avenue to the Union Pacific railroad tracks. As part of the approval process for the Creek project, a mitigated negative declaration was prepared pursuant to the requirements of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). The first phases of the creek restoration project have been successfully completed. Future phases of the approved plan for the creek would displace one of the Albany Little League fields and potentially reduce the outdoor play area at the Albany Children's Center.

In addition, in 2007, the remaining World War II era housing ("Section A" housing) was demolished. The University and the City have entered into an agreement to use a portion of the area at the northeast corner of Jackson and Monroe as the location for temporary public safety facilities while the seismic retrofit of City Hall facilities are underway.

DISCUSSION

An application was submitted to the City on October 31, 2007 for rezoning, planned unit development, design review, subdivision, and other actions required for a mixed-use development at the northwest and southwest corner of San Pablo Avenue and Monroe Street. Under the 2004 UC Berkeley proposal, this area was to be developed with up to 727 units of student and faculty housing and 73,000 square feet for retail uses, including a 40,000 square foot grocery store.

Under the current proposal, the project footprint has been reduced and now is proposed to consist of 175 units of senior housing (both independent and assisted living types of units) and 85,000 square feet of retail space, including a 55,000 square foot grocery store. Because the uses associated with the proposed project are not related to the University's educational function, the City's approval of the project is required. Details on the proposed project are described in the attached staff report to the Planning and Zoning Commission (Attachment 1).

To date, UC Berkeley has not provided specific information about the intended long term plans for the Gill Tract and the remaining parcels along the east side of Jackson Street that are not included in the footprint of their current application. For the portion of the Gill Tract north of Village Creek, the University's Master Plan (Attachment 2) calls for "Recreation and Open Space" uses. The Jackson Street parcels south of Village Creek are designated for "Housing, Parking, Open Space and Recreation." The land use designations in the 2004 UC Berkeley Master Plan, and the related policy statements are general in scope, and do not provide the City and members of the public the level of specificity necessary to understand the long-term vision for the area. In addition, the status of the use of the Gill Tract by the College of Natural Resources is unclear. Finally, the timing of the completion of the removal of the diseased trees is uncertain. Thus, one of the purposes of the proposed subcommittee is to explore with UC Berkeley the potential for documenting the University's intentions for the remainder of the property.

Other planning considerations not addressed in the Mixed-Use Project application that may be subject to discussion include:

- Location for an urban agriculture/education facility;
- Alternative future locations of Albany Little League fields;
- Feasibility of re-design for the restoration of Codornices Creek;
- Future location for the Albany Children’s Center;
- Restoration of Village Creek;
- Improvements to parking and circulation at Ocean View School;
- Bike and pedestrian safety improvements along Buchanan Street;
- Preparation and implementation of a replacement landscape plan for the portion of the Gill Tract where diseased pine trees have recently been removed;
- Consideration of portions of University Village for designation in the City’s 2009 Housing Element as a potential site for residential development; and
- Replacement of the University Village Community Center.

The next step for processing the mixed-use project application is to schedule a public meeting to give interested parties an opportunity to provide guidance to the City’s CEQA consultant on what topics should be evaluated during the CEQA document as well as policy issues that should be considered in the City’s planning process. The scoping session would normally be scheduled as part of an upcoming Planning and Zoning Commission meeting.

If established, the Council subcommittee would meet with representatives from the University, City staff, and community interests. Mayor Lieber and Councilmember Wile have volunteered for appointment to a subcommittee.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

Establishment of a City Council Subcommittee would not have a financial impact. There are substantial financial impacts associated with various potential uses of the site, including revenues generated by retail and non-University serving housing land uses, cost of providing services to the area, and a potential cost to the City of developing and operating public facilities

Attachments:

Attachment 1 – Planning and Zoning Commission study session staff report

Attachment 2 – University Village Master Plan

Attachment 3 – Site Map