

**TO:** Albany City Council  
**cc:** Waterfront Committee  
Beth Pollard, City Administrator  
Ann Chaney, Community Development Director  
**FROM:** Fern Tiger Associates  
**DATE:** July 10, 2009  
**RE:** Voices to Vision Update

As you are aware, the community sessions phase of the Voices to Vision process concluded last week. Thus we thought this would be a good moment to provide you with a brief update on the project. First, I'd like to take this opportunity to thank each of you for participating in the community sessions and to offer a special thanks to those of you who helped with outreach efforts. For our staff the sessions proved gratifying, informative, energizing, and of course exhausting. We were impressed by the thoughtfulness of the participants, their innovative ideas, their willingness to spend two hours of their time on these issues and to express their true opinions to a group of neighbors and strangers, and their graciousness in expressing their appreciation to our staff for a chance to share their ideas in an honest and neutral forum. Indeed, more than 40% of those completing the evaluations took the time to thank us for running the session and/or for providing information to the community.

### **Summary of Project Activities**

**May 1 - July 1, 2009**

- Disseminated "Voices to Vision" publication (approximately 9,500 copies) to all Albany addresses via first class mail
- Launched [www.voicestovision.com](http://www.voicestovision.com)
- Created electronic and phone access (in three languages) for information, communication, and RSVP process related to session participation
- Displayed waterfront model (1"=100') at community center/library
- Announced community process through wide variety of outreach techniques and venues, including press, banners, poster, flyers and postcards distributed door to door (each residence receiving two separate hits), email lists and list-servs, tables at Safeway, Green Albany Day, etc.
- Facilitated 38 community sessions to maximize opportunities for participation by Albany residents and regional stakeholders (additionally offered sessions for businesses located in Albany as well as sessions to be conducted in Spanish and Chinese; child care was provided at select sessions)
- Developed and implemented process to ensure Albany residence, one-time only participation, RSVP confirmation, session follow up (including thank you and opportunity for "no-shows" to register for another session)

### Selected Highlights (and miscellaneous information)

- Successful public education campaign through publication (including information about the history and context of waterfront development, information that addressed common questions, and detailed graphic maps and diagrams) sent to every address in Albany (approximately 9,200 addresses)
- Exceeded academically-credible 4% benchmark of participation (Rubin and Rubin, Community Organizing and Development) as well as early process goal of 600 unduplicated participants, with more than 650 session attendees, including more than 630 adult Albany residents (or 5.6% of the total Albany adult population, including University Village residents)
- A total of 589 residents RSVPed to attend a session; 165 registered “on site;” 114 were “no-shows;” (total 640 participants)
- Of those who completed the participant information form and/or the session evaluation form, our quick preliminary scan shows that:
  - More than 60% had not engaged in previous waterfront public discussions
  - 93% thought their session was better than they had expected
  - 98% thought their viewpoints were recognized
  - 92% felt they learned a lot from the session
  - 100% were actively engaged
  - 12% were age 40 or younger (excluding youth); 36% were between 41 and 55 years old; 52% were 55 and older
  - 18% have lived in Albany for less than 5 years; 13% for 6-10 years; 26% for 11-20 years; 20% for 21-30 years; 23% more than 30 years
- 25% of participants came to sessions held in the final week of the process (June 25 through July 1, which included the three previously unpublished, new dates) which we attribute primarily to word of mouth (and perhaps also to procrastination)
  - *“I was not planning to attend as a result of the acrimonious processes held previously. Then I heard from two neighbors who bitterly opposed each other during the Caruso time. Both told me the process was worthwhile, logical, and respectful. So I came and I’m glad I did.”*
  - *“My 19-year-old son reluctantly came with me, intending to leave within the hour. He stayed for the entire thing.”*
  - *“I thought it would be boring, but it wasn’t at all.”*
- More than 400 participants who completed the evaluation form stated they plan to participate again in the fall; less than 2% of those who filled out the evaluations stated they “might” participate again in the fall
- Amid the many comments such as “great community building;” “amazing facilitation;” “well-presented and well thought out;” “thanks for doing this, great job;” “I have participated in many development discussions in other cities and in facilitated sessions at work, and this was the best by far;” and “consensus building was pleasant and not confrontational – what a surprise;” “awesome;” there were some who were less enthusiastic: “the cost for this is high for a town our size;” “session was too ambitious for the time allotted;” “needed more time for discussion after the map part;”

*“should have served cookies;” “planning for property we don’t own just doesn’t make sense.”*

- Session participation ranged from one round with just 4 participants to several with more than 40 participants.
- There are many wonderful anecdotes to share once we’ve thoroughly reviewed all of the comments, but a few early ones stand out:
  - One participant changed her session date because it coincided with her delivery date; she came to the session about 10 days after delivering a baby boy, with little Henry (the youngest attendee of Voices to Vision)
  - One small group that worked together on their map exchanged emails and decided to stay in touch
  - People got acquainted (or re-acquainted) with neighbors; local residents saw people they had not seen in years
  - We celebrated the last session with a big cake!

We hope this information is helpful and look forward to proceeding with the full evaluation, analysis, and preparation for the next and final phase of this project that will start up in the fall.