

AN ANALYSIS FOR THE CITY OF ALBANY

# Improving the Efficiency and Effectiveness of Albany's Commissions, Committees and Boards

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## Executive Summary

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An organizational review of the City of Albany's municipal operations provided to the City Council in 2009 revealed that for a city of its size, Albany has more advisory bodies than almost any other city in the region. It further identified that staff members feel "stretched thin" in providing support to these advisory bodies. Staff liaisons, who are assigned to provide administrative support, education, and coordination, find it difficult to allocate the necessary time for Albany's advisory bodies. Smaller cities, such as Albany, have fewer staff members, who tend to have a wider range of responsibilities.

There are two characteristics of Albany's advisory bodies that compound this problem: 1) Individual advisory body members are able to contribute their own items to public meeting agendas, resulting in longer meetings, and 2) Advisory bodies tend to request, and staff liaisons tend to provide, background, research and education on these member-added items. This results in staff experiencing fatigue, and neglecting regular work duties in favor of completing work requested by advisory body members.

A survey of advisory body members, conducted for this review, revealed mostly positive responses, but also revealed some problematic outcomes for members. A majority of respondents reported that they felt underused or overlooked by the City Council, they were frustrated at the lack of public participation at meetings, they were unclear about their roles, or that the time commitment and/or workload is too large.

This report is based on interviews, reviews of best practices, and attendance at advisory body meetings. It presents individual reviews and recommendations for each of Albany's commissions, committees, and boards, which can be found beginning on page 11 of this report. This report also provides seven recommendations for improved effectiveness and efficiency of Albany's advisory body system. Implementing the recommendations presented here will reduce the support costs to operate and manage advisory bodies, reduce the staff hours dedicated to advisory bodies, and reduce the workload for advisory body members, while increasing role clarity for members, increasing public participation in the advisory body system and increasing advisory body impact on public decisions in Albany. Recommendations for improvement to Albany's advisory body system are as follows:

**Recommendation #1: Eliminate use of staff for minute taking and implement "action minutes"**

Currently, staff liaisons are responsible recording and producing detailed or summary meeting minutes. Instead, advisory bodies should transition to a "self-help" method of recording and producing "action minutes." Implementing this measure represents an estimated cost savings to the City of \$7,029.03 annually.

**Recommendation #2: Limit agenda access and meet as needed**

Currently, commission, committee, or board member place an item of business on a meeting agenda, resulting in agendas congested with items of personal interest. These items, while well-intentioned and generally within the scope of each advisory body, appear to be of little interest to the public, as evidenced by low turnout and public comment. Business before the City's advisory bodies should come from: City Council referral; staff referral; or recommendation from the advisory body that has been authorized by the City Council. Members of the public or members of advisory bodies should request agenda items from the City Council. Eliminating items of personal interest from agendas will significantly lessen the need to meet monthly for most advisory bodies and will decrease workloads and time commitments for both staff and members.

**Recommendation #3: Adopt pro/con analysis and provide deadlines for input**

In order for advisory bodies to provide the City Council with more practical and actionable recommendations, the Council should refer well-defined topics or policy options to advisory bodies, along with strict deadlines in which members should provide pro/con analysis. Analysis that encompasses in-depth research and arguments for and against policy options will better serve the City Council when it is faced with making decisions.

**Recommendation #4: Provide public with direct access to advisory bodies**

The names of advisory body members, along with one City-provided email address for each advisory body should be posted on the City's website. This will increase the likelihood of residents participating in meetings and recommending agenda items.

**Recommendation #5: Evaluate advisory bodies and appointees bi-annually**

Bi-Annual evaluation of commissions, committees and boards is necessary in order to understand their impact on public decisions in Albany. This will allow the City Council to effectively modify or redefine aspects of each body. The City Council should also seek bi-annual feedback on appointee performance from staff liaisons. Evaluations should include feedback on appointee performance from staff liaisons and an evaluation of appointee demographics with the goal of making advisory body appointees more demographically representative of Albany.

**Recommendation #6: Organize advisory body-sponsored forums**

The City should attempt to build on the Voices to Vision process by sectoring the City into zones for five advisory body-sponsored neighborhood forums that will allow residents to discuss items of neighborhood concern.

**Recommendation #7: Update advisory body handbook and practices**

A survey of advisory body practices from cities across California revealed several policies and practices missing in Albany. These include the mandated use of and training in parliamentary procedure, the use of time limits for meetings and agenda items, public swearing-in ceremonies, new member orientation, and explicitly stated roles and duties for staff liaisons and members. Recommended changes to Albany's Commission, Committee and Board Handbook can be found in the appendix.

## Background and Scope of Review

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The purpose of this report is to provide a review of the City of Albany's commissions, committees, and boards, evaluate staff resources dedicated to supporting these advisory bodies and provide recommendations for improved efficiency and effectiveness. An organizational study completed in 2009 revealed that Albany has a larger than average number of advisory bodies for a city of its size. The study concluded that staff members feels "stretched thin" in providing support to these bodies.

For the purposes of this report, the following twelve (12) advisory bodies were evaluated:

- Albany Arts Committee
- Albany Library Board
- Charter Review Committee
- Civil Service Board
- Community Media Access Committee
- Parks and Recreation Commission
- Planning and Zoning Commission
- Police and Fire Pension Board
- Social and Economic Justice Commission
- Sustainability Committee
- Traffic and Safety Commission
- Waterfront Committee

## Work Plan Process and Data Collection

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The five tasks outlined in this section were completed for the purposes of research, review and analysis. Within these tasks, a consistent framework was applied to ensure that all analysis focused on the same variables.

1. Review and analyze advisory bodies for:
  - Purpose, Authority, Scope and Duties
  - Advisory Body Composition and Organization

- Meetings, Process and Public Interface
- Areas of Substantial Overlap with other Advisory Bodies

2. Interview and collect data from staff:

The following sixteen City staff members were interviewed concerning their experiences as staff liaison and/or working with the City’s commissions, committees or boards.

Charles Adams	Eileen Harrington
Jeremy Allen	Anne Hsu
Nicole Almaguer	Penelope Leach
Aleida Andrino-Chavez	Isabelle Leduc
Jeff Bond	Judy Lieberman
Jacqueline Bucholz	Robin Mariona
Ann Chaney	Beth Pollard
Kim Denton	Aaron Walker

In addition, Albany Library Branch Manager Ronnie Davis, who is an employee of Alameda County, was interviewed about her experience serving as a staff liaison for the Albany Library Board.

3. Survey commission, committee and board members:

Members of Albany’s advisory bodies were given the opportunity to participate in a survey regarding their experiences serving on a commission, committee, or board. With thirty-seven respondents, roughly half of Albany’s advisory body members participated in the survey.

4. Attend commission, committee and board meetings:

The following ten public meetings of Albany’s commissions, committees and boards were observed and evaluated.

3/10/10	Social and Economic Justice Commission
3/17/10	Sustainability Committee
3/23/10	Planning and Zoning Commission
3/25/10	Traffic and Safety Commission
4/8/10	Parks and Recreation Commission

- 4/12/10 Albany Arts Committee
- 4/12/10 Waterfront Committee
- 4/19/10 Community Media Access Committee
- 4/26/10 Charter Review Committee
- 4/28/10 Albany Library Board

5. Conduct best practices research and analysis:  
 A search of best practices, ideas and approaches to operating and managing advisory bodies was completed.

- Methods, policies and practices from the following comparably sized nearby cities were reviewed:

Danville          Hercules          Lafayette          Pinole          San Rafael

- In addition, policies and practices from the following California cities were reviewed:

Burbank                  Chico                  Cupertino                  Glendora  
 Hawaiian Gardens      Los Altos              Norwalk                  Redondo  
 Santa Cruz              Saratoga              San Juan Capistrano      Solana Beach  
 West Sacramento      Yuba City

## Criteria for Evaluating Recommendations

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This report presents recommendations for improvements to individual commissions, committees, and boards, as well as to the entire advisory body system. These recommendations have been selected by their potential to achieve the following outcomes:

- Reduction of workload and sharper role for advisory body members
- Increase of public participation in advisory body system
- Increase of advisory body impact on public decisions



- Reduction of support cost to operate and manage advisory bodies
- Reduction of staff hours dedicated to advisory bodies

## Findings

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The comprehensive organizational review of the City of Albany's municipal operations provided to the City Council in 2009 revealed that for a city of its size, Albany has more advisory bodies than almost any other city in the region. This is not surprising for a community such as Albany that values resident participation and citizen engagement. These groups provide a unique opportunity for residents to serve in an advisory capacity, providing valuable input on policies and programs. However, the organizational review found that the large number of advisory bodies is problematic for Albany's City staff.

In Albany, as in most municipalities, staff liaisons are assigned to advisory bodies to serve in an administrative capacity, providing support and coordination, as well as attending meetings, directing agenda topics, and providing general background and education to advisory body members. While this staff liaison model is a common feature in local government, most small cities tend to have fewer groups than Albany does, for two reasons: each group requires many hours of ongoing, dedicated staff resources, and smaller cities have fewer staff members to share in the responsibility of serving as liaison.

Staff members in smaller cities also tend to have a wider range of responsibilities. For staff liaisons in this position, it is particularly difficult to dedicate the time needed to provide support, education and coordination to their assigned advisory bodies. Two characteristics of Albany's advisory body system compound this problem. In Albany, individual advisory body members may contribute their own items to public meeting agendas, which results in longer meetings. It is also standard practice in Albany for advisory body members to request, and staff liaisons to provide background, research and education on these member-added items. In such situations in cities, staff can experience fatigue, and other work duties may be neglected in favor of completing work requested by advisory body members.

For staff liaisons in Albany, these ongoing and expanding duties, coupled with attending long evening meetings create tension. This imbalance is amplified when staff liaison duties do not fit within in the framework of their regular duties, or when advisory body members request additional research work during a particularly busy time. Such requests can put staff in uncomfortable position of either neglecting their other assigned duties or not meeting the desires of the advisory body members.

This review provided an opportunity to survey commission, committee, and board members regarding their experiences serving on advisory bodies. The survey revealed that members exhibit a passion for Albany and demonstrate a solid understanding of issues pertaining to their specific advisory body. While responses were mostly positive, the survey revealed some problematic outcomes for members. A majority of respondents reported feeling one or more of the following:

- Underused or overlooked by the City Council
- Frustrated at the lack of public participation at meetings
- Unclear about their roles or desiring great clarity
- The time commitment and/or workload is too large

While members reported that there is room for improvement in these areas, it should be noted that members generally reported that Albany's advisory bodies operate in a positive and collegial atmosphere.

This report presents a review of Albany's current commissions, committees, and boards, recommendations for each of those bodies. It also provides seven recommendations for improving the effectiveness and efficiency of Albany's advisory body system. Implementing these recommendations will improve outcomes for City staff, advisory body members, and Albany as a whole.

# Reviews and Recommendations for Albany's Commissions, Committees and Boards

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The section below provides a systematic review of Albany's currently operating commissions, committees, and boards. Each body was reviewed for purpose, authority, member composition, meeting process and areas of significant overlap with other advisory bodies. This section also provides individual recommendations for improvements. Implementing these recommendations will likely result in reduced advisory support costs, staff hours, and/or member workloads, and will likely increase the advisory bodies' impact on public decisions and/or public participation.

## Albany Arts Committee

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### **Purpose, Authority, Scope and Duties**

Established in 1974 by City Council Resolution, the Albany Arts Committee promotes art and urban beautification in Albany. It also serves in an advisory capacity to the City Council, making recommendations related to the development and preservation of art, and to the City's art activities and programs.

Specifically, the Committee makes spending recommendations for the Art in Public Places Fund, which is used for the acquisition, installation, improvement, and maintenance of Albany's public art. In addition, the introduction of the Art in Public Places Program, the Committee's role has recently been expanded to make recommendations to the Planning and Zoning Commission on public art features.

The Committee exercises full discretion over Albany's Postcard program and the art displayed in the Albany Community Center Foyer Art Gallery. The Committee also supports in the planning and coordinating of an annual City-sponsored art event.

According to the staff liaison, the Committee has "struggled" with its scope and authority, unsure of how it fits into the public process or how it is supposed to advise the City Council. Consequently, the Committee spent a significant amount of time last year creating a new mission statement and purpose, which was presented to and approved by the City Council in July 2009.

### **Committee Composition and Organization**

The Committee is comprised of twelve members. Each City Council member appoints two members, and the Albany Unified School District Board of Education appoints two members.

In order to complete the time-consuming work associated with the numerous projects and programs, a large number of Committee members is required. Each member is

expected to participate in ongoing projects through annually established subcommittees. This past year, the Committee created 12 subcommittees to work on programs such as the Albany Arts Gallery, Poet Laureate Program, Public Art Master Plan, Street Pole Banners and Mural Program. Subcommittees provide organization and strict deadlines for the Committee's work.

### **Meetings, Process and Public Interface**

The Committee meets monthly and meetings typically last two hours. The Committee uses a loose parliamentary procedure for moving through the agenda. Time limits are not assigned to meeting duration, agenda items or public comment. With such a large body, discussions often run off track and side conversations among members are common.

Staff liaison and Recreation Supervisor Isabelle Leduc attends each meeting, prepares the agenda and meeting packets, and provides additional assistance to Committee members for projects as needed. Recreation and Community Services Department staff member Robin Mariona also attends each meeting and she spends an additional .75 hours preparing detailed minutes.

Although the City Council refers very few items to the Committee, meeting agendas are always full, due to the number of ongoing Committee projects. Individual members may also identify items of personal interest for the agenda.

According to Committee members, very few members of the public attend meetings.

### **Areas of Substantial Overlap with other Advisory Bodies**

- This year, the annual art event was merged with the City's annual "green" education event. As a result, the Arts Committee worked with the Sustainability Committee to plan and create the Arts and Green Festival.
- The Art in Public Places Program requires all public art features to come to the Arts Committee for review. The Committee then makes recommendations to the Planning and Zoning Commission for a final decision.
- Non-City sanctioned public art at the Albany Bulb falls within the purview of the Waterfront Committee. However, Arts Committee members have expressed an appreciation of this art. Potential overlap exists in this area.

### **Recommendations for the Albany Arts Committee**

1. The City Council should provide more direction to the Albany Arts Committee on its scope of duties and oversight of programs and activities. Currently, the Committee is operating without direction, as evidenced by the redrafting of its mission and purpose. Some members believe the Committee should operate more as an advisory board that directs funds and makes recommendations on specific projects, and less as a working committee that oversees numerous time-consuming projects and programs. Other members believe this body should do

both. If the City Council determines that the Arts Committee should operate more as an advisory board, shedding oversight of programs, the number of Committee seats should be reduced to five. If the City Council determines the Committee should do both, more Council direction is required on which projects the Committee should maintain.

2. Updated Committee information should be published. The newly adopted Committee mission statement and duties should be posted on the City's website, as well as updated in the Board, Commission and Committee Handbook.

## **Albany Library Board**

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### **Purpose, Authority, Scope and Duties**

Established by City Council resolution in 1994, the Albany Library Board was created to advise the City Council on matters related to the Albany branch of the Alameda County Library.

While the Board does not have independent authority, it monitors how parcel tax revenues from Measure N, the Library Services Act of 1994, and Measure G, the Supplemental Library Services Act of 2006, are used. Board discussions center on library operations and programs, and how library funds are allocated.

### **Board Composition and Organization**

The Board is comprised of seven members. Each member of the City Council appoints one member, and the Friends of the Albany Library recommends one member for appointment by the City Council. The remaining Board member is a member of the City Council. The Library Board is the only advisory body to have a member representative from a community organization. The Friends of the Albany Library is a 501(c) (3) non-profit organization that provides supplemental funds for library programs, services and materials.

Each year the Board creates a work plan. The plan is organized by the Committee's ideological goals, but includes concrete tasks. Work plan items include participating in library and community events, performing advocacy, participating in a regional workshops, and reviewing County reports.

### **Meetings, Process and Public Interface**

The Board meets every other month. Meetings typically last for one and a half hours. The Board Chairperson utilizes parliamentary procedure for voting, but not during discussions. The Board does not use time limits for comment periods, agenda items or meeting duration.

The Albany Library Manager serves as the primary staff liaison. Unlike other advisory bodies in Albany, the staff liaison to the Library Board is not a City staff person, but an Alameda County employee. Davis creates the agenda and packet for each meeting. Finance and Administrative Services Director Charles Adams attends meetings to provide financial information to the Board, and is the primary City liaison to the Board, but leaves when his agenda item has concluded. Recreation and Community Services Department staff member Robin Mariona also attends each meeting and she spends an additional .75 hours for preparing detailed minutes.

Most of the Board's discussions center on how the County is using Albany's special library parcel taxes. Some members express difficulty in understanding financial information. This difficulty is further complicated by the fact that the County's fiscal processes are not transparent. As a result, some members are not able to serve effectively in all aspects of their role on the Board.

According to Committee members, very few members of the public attend meetings.

#### **Areas of Substantial Overlap with other Advisory Bodies**

None

#### **Recommendations for the Albany Library Board**

1. Assign a new staff liaison to the Board. Having a non-City employee serve as staff liaison presents a conflict of interest for both the City and the Library Branch Manager. As a County employee, the Branch Manager does not and should not provide Board members with necessary information and background from the City's perspective. Nor should she be tasked with coordinating a City advisory body. However, she should continue to attend meetings, participating as a non-voting member.
2. The City Council should appoint members to the Board who have a background in public financing, government contracts, accounting, and/or fiscal oversight. Knowledge in these areas is essential for the Board members to be effective in understanding how Albany's library taxes are being used.
3. The City Council should amend the Council representative seat from a voting member to a non-voting, ex-officio seat. Currently, this seat includes full voting privileges, providing one Council member with a disproportionate input on matters related to the library.
4. The City Council should eliminate the Friends of the Library seat. Advisory body members are directed to represent the interests of Albany as a whole. Members from community organizations represent narrower viewpoints, focused on their organization's mission. For that reason, advisory body seats should not be apportioned to community organizations, regardless of that organization's mission.

## **Charter Review Committee**

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### **Purpose, Authority, Scope and Duties**

Established in 1974 by City Council action, the Charter Review Committee advises the Council on proposed changes to the Albany City Charter. The Committee discusses, researches, and analyzes proposed changes, identified either by the Committee or by referral from the Council.

While the Committee's stated purpose is restricted to the City's charter, issues identified by the Committee for research and discussion often venture beyond the charter, into issues relating to the City's municipal code and/or proposed ordinances.

### **Committee Composition and Organization**

The Committee is comprised of seven members. Each City Council member appoints one Committee member and the Council as a whole appoints two "at-large" members.

This past June, the Committee created a work plan of operational goals for the year. This increased the Committee's efficiency in identifying, prioritizing and reaching resolution on its issues. Though the Committee did not assign target dates or deadlines for work plan issues it identified, the City Council recently began assigning deadlines along with its referred issues. These deadlines have further improved the Committee's efficiency, enabling members to focus and reach resolution in a timely manner.

### **Meetings, Process and Public Interface**

The Committee meets monthly. Historically, meetings have lasted in excess of two hours, but the Committee recently began assigning time limits to agenda items and limiting meeting duration to ninety minutes. The Committee uses parliamentary procedure during voting, but discussions often dissolve into animated debates that allow the fastest and loudest talking members to be heard from most often.

Staff liaison and City Clerk Jacqueline Bucholz attends meetings, prepares agendas and packets, and records summary minutes for the Committee. Bucholz estimates the production of the agenda, meeting packet, and summary minutes takes 1.5 hours per month.

Agenda items come by way of both City Council referral and by member identification. Each agenda item requires thorough research, deep analysis and thoughtful consideration. There are no "quick" agenda items for this Committee. Each item undertaken is quite time consuming.

According to Committee members, it is rare for members of the public to attend meetings.

## **Areas of Substantial Overlap with other Advisory Bodies**

None

## **Recommendations for the Charter Committee**

1. The Committee should be directed to limit its activities to those that fall within its stated purpose of reviewing changes to the City Charter. The potential changes should be upon referral by or authorization of the City Council. Discussions related to the municipal code or proposed ordinances are outside of the Committee's scope.
2. Eliminate the "at-large" members positions. At-large members are appointed by the City Council as a whole and only amplify the perspectives of the majority of the members of the City Council.

## **Civil Service Board**

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### **Purpose, Authority, Scope and Duties**

Codified in the Albany City Charter, the Civil Service Board formulates rules and regulations governing the selection, promotion, reinstatement, reemployment, and transfer of employees in the City's Classified Service. According to the Charter, the Civil Service Board oversees the necessary examination for the selection and promotion of the "Classified Service," which comprises the City's employees in the Police and Fire Departments.

However, the Board does not currently conduct examinations or establish rules governing the employment of Classified Service personnel. Instead, rules and regulations for Albany's Classified Service personnel are currently governed by: the Meyers-Milias-Brown Act, the City Charter, City personnel policies, and memoranda of understanding between the City and the Albany Peace Officers' Association, and between the City and the Albany Fire Fighters' Association. Additionally, *Skelly* and *Weingarten* Rights, the Public Safety Officers Procedural Bill of Rights Act, and the California Public Employees' Retirement System's Administrative Procedures Act govern labor-management relations between Classified Service Personnel and local governments in California.

While it is likely that, prior to the enactment of these laws and the establishment of the City's Human Resources Division, the Board's authority extended to conducting examinations and establishing rules governing employment. The City's Human Resources Manager now fulfills these responsibilities. As per the current practice, however, the Board meets as needed to endorse the Human Resources Manager's decisions and certify eligibility lists based on his recommendation.



### **Board Composition and Organization**

The Board is comprised of five members, each appointed by a member of the City Council.

### **Meetings, Process and Public Interface**

The Board meets on an as-needed basis, as staff vacancies arise in Albany's Classified Service, which is typically 1-3 times per year. Meetings usually take less than ten minutes. Staff liaison and Human Resources Manager Aaron Walker attends each meeting, prepares the agenda and records action minutes.

According to board members, there has not been a member of the public in attendance at a Board meeting in at least eight years.

### **Areas of Substantial Overlap with other Advisory Bodies**

None

### **Recommendation for the Civil Service Board**

1. Dissolve the Civil Service Board. This Board is unnecessary and the City Charter should be amended to allow for its dissolution. The rules and regulations related to the Classified Service personnel are governed by statute, case law and contracts, and the Board has little actual discretion to enact rules. Further, the process by which employees are recruited and hired has been professionalized and is overseen by trained and competent City staff. The Board adds an unnecessary layer of oversight and has the potential to hamper the speed and efficiency of staff action in the hiring process.

## **Community Media Access Committee**

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### **Purpose, Authority, Scope and Duties**

Established by City Council Resolution in 2008, the Community Media Access Committee was created to provide advice and guidance to the City Council regarding the planning and operations of KALB, Albany's public access cable channel.

The Committee is charged with a wide variety of duties related to KALB, which includes preparing a five-year operations plan, creating programming and publicity for KALB, recruiting volunteers and providing training opportunities, advising the City Council on cable policies and use of KALB, locating and recommending funding alternatives, and recommending funding allocations. The Committee's authority extends to KALB program selection and schedule creation. Typically, in other jurisdictions, a separate non-profit entity would perform the duties assigned to the Committee.

### **Committee Composition and Organization**

The Committee is comprised of five members, each appointed by a member of the City Council. The current Committee is made up of long-standing members who worked together previously as an ad hoc body.

The Committee's work is organized and directed by annual goals established by the members, but these goals are not organized into a formal work plan. Members utilize subcommittees to accomplish much of its work. Subcommittees and tasks are delegated according to member interest.

### **Meetings, Process and Public Interface**

Meetings are held once a month and are limited to one hour. While the Chairperson utilizes parliamentary procedure to move through agenda items, the meetings are very informal in nature and allow for members to exchange ideas freely. This works, in part, because of the small size of the Committee, the non-contentious discussion topics and the time restrictions imposed on the meeting.

Meeting agendas are prepared by Recreation Supervisor Jeremy Allen and the Committee's Chairperson or Vice Chairperson. Minutes are recorded and prepared by the Vice Chairperson. The delegation of agenda and minute preparation to Committee members significantly reduces the amount of staff time dedicated to operating the committee.

Items on meeting agendas typically relate directly to KALB operations, programming, or updates. According to Committee members, it is rare for a member of the public to attend meetings.

### **Areas of Substantial Overlap with other Advisory Bodies**

None

### **Recommendation for the Community Media Access Committee**

1. Committee membership should be expanded by two seats. The Committee has many responsibilities, including creating volunteer opportunities for members of the community and creating programming. Adding more appointees will decrease the workload for each individual member. More members will allow the Committee to focus on volunteer recruitment and training opportunities, which are central to the sustainability of KALB. The City Council should consider two Albany Unified School District Board of Education appointees who work with Albany's high school students through existing media programs.

## **Parks and Recreation Commission**

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### **Purpose, Authority, Scope and Duties**

Authorized by City Council ordinance, the Parks and Recreation Commission advises the City Council and the Parks and Recreation Department on all matters of public recreation, public park facilities and public landscaping. The Commission makes recommendations regarding the acquisition, maintenance, and operation of Albany's parks, playgrounds, and recreation centers. The Commission also aids in the promotion of recreation, and encourages public and private partnerships that will develop recreational facilities and programs in Albany.

While the Commission serves mostly in an advisory role, it has authority to grant City Tree Removal Permits.

### **Commission Composition and Organization**

The Commission is comprised of seven members. Each member of the City Council appoints one member and the Albany Unified School District Board of Education appoints two members.

The Commission occasionally forms subcommittees for the purposes of collecting community input. While subcommittees are chaired by Commissioners, subcommittees typically include non-Commission members. Residents who demonstrate an interest in the subcommittee's topic are asked to serve as subcommittee members.

The Commission uses an annual work plan to organize and direct its work. However, the Commission does not assign target dates or deadlines for issues identified in the work plan.

### **Meetings, Process and Public Interface**

Meetings are held once a month, and last, on average, two and a half hours. The Commission Chairperson utilizes parliamentary procedure for voting, but does not typically use time limits for comment periods, agenda items or meeting duration.

Staff liaison and Recreation & Community Services Director Penelope Leach attends each meeting, and prepares the agenda and meeting packets. Recreation & Community Services Department staff member Robin Mariona also attends each meeting and she spends an additional .75 hours for preparing detailed minutes.

The City Council refers very few items to the Commission. The Parks and Recreation Director usually identifies items for meeting agendas, but individual Commissioners may also identify items of personal interest for the agenda.

According to the Commissioners, public attendance at meetings ranges from very small to large, depending on the agenda items. Commissioners express a disappointment in the lack of resident participation in ideas put forth by the Commission.

#### **Areas of Substantial Overlap with other Advisory Bodies**

- The Parks and Recreation Commission created a subcommittee to explore and discuss issues related to dog management in City parks. Currently, the Waterfront Committee also has a dog management subcommittee.
- Measure WW provides funding to cities for park and open space improvements. Both the Parks and Recreation Commission and Waterfront Committee make recommendations for the use of Measure WW funds in Albany and may feel in competition for these limited funds.

#### **Recommendation for the Parks and Recreation Commission**

1. The Parks and Recreation Commission should collect data from the public in order to identify topics to recommend for discussion at Commission meetings. Albany's parks and recreational activities are well utilized by the public, but the Commission is frustrated by the seeming disinterest of residents in Commission-identified topics. In order for topics to be community-driven, Commission members should engage the public directly. Information can be gathered periodically through informal, person-to-person questionnaires in City parks.

## **Police and Fire Pension Board**

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#### **Purpose, Authority, Scope and Duties**

Codified in the Albany City Charter, the Police and Fire Pension Board has oversight over the pension system the City utilized for Classified Personnel employed prior to February 4, 1971. The Board provides approval of payments to pensioners, and all necessary expenses for the operation of the pension.

The Charter provides that the Board may compel witnesses to testify before it on issues related to the operation of the pension. In years past, the Board heard testimony from pensioners on issues of disability retirement versus regular retirement. However, this need is no longer applicable because the pension system is closed to new participants and is in wind up.

#### **Board Composition and Organization**

The Board is comprised of five members: the Mayor, the City Treasurer, the City Clerk, one pensioner from the Police Department and one pensioner from the Fire Department.

### **Meetings, Process and Public Interface**

As outlined in the Charter, the Pension Board meets on one of the last five business days of each month. Expenses to and payments from the pension are routine and regular. Meetings generally last only 10-15 minutes. However, longer quarterly meetings occur when the pension's financial advisor provides investment performance reviews to the Board.

The pension is now in wind up, and a natural reduction in membership through attrition is occurring. Eventually the pension will no longer exist and the need for this Board will be eliminated.

The City Treasurer Kim Denton serves as the staff liaison and creates monthly meeting agendas. Eileen Harrington, Secretary to the City Administrator, attends each meeting for the purposes of recording and producing detailed minutes.

According to Denton, there has not been a member of the public in attendance at a Board meeting for at least the past six years, though it is likely it has been much longer than six years.

### **Areas of Substantial Overlap with other Advisory Bodies**

None

### **Recommendation for the Police and Fire Pension Board**

1. Reduce Police and Fire Pension Board regular meetings from monthly to quarterly, with additional meetings held if needed. Monthly expenses and payments can be approved prospectively. Fewer meetings will reduce the occasional conflict between Board meetings, City business and staff schedules. Fewer meetings will reduce the need for pensioner Board members to drive to Albany from out of the area. This change would likely require an amendment to the Charter. However, as provided in the Charter, the Board members may enact needful rules and regulations for the operation of the Board, which may provide another means of changing the meeting schedule.

## **Planning and Zoning Commission**

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### **Purpose, Authority, Scope and Duties**

Codified in the Albany City Charter, the Planning and Zoning Commission makes recommendations to the City Council regarding all provisions of the General Plan, advises the City Council regarding the physical development of the City, and exercises functions with respect to land subdivisions, planning, and zoning as specified by the Planning and Zoning Code. The Commission serves in a quasi-judicial decision-making role over items such as design review, conditional use permits, parking reductions/exemptions and parcel subdivisions, after conducting public hearings.

While Planning Department staff provide professional expertise, the Commission provides guidance on non-technical issues, such as policy guidelines and criteria.

### **Commission Member Composition and Organization**

The Commission is comprised of five members, each appointed by a member of the City Council, but ratified by the Council as a whole.

The Commission is made up of individuals who generally possess expertise in areas of architecture, planning, contracting or engineering. This expertise aids the Commissioners in providing substantive recommendations to the City Council and staff, as well as providing meaningful feedback to applicants during hearings.

### **Meetings, Process and Public Interface**

Meetings are held twice monthly and last, on average, over three hours. As prescribed in the City Code, the Commission utilizes parliamentary procedure set by Robert's Rules of Order during meetings. Though lengthy public comment is a typical characteristic of Commission meetings, the Chairperson does not apply time limits. Assigning time limits and limiting meeting duration would not make sense in the public hearing context.

Staff liaison Jeff Bond prepares meeting agendas and packets. A professional transcriber attends meetings and produces detailed minutes necessary for this body acting in its quasi-judicial role.

Commission meetings are long in part because each agenda typically includes 3-4 design review hearings. The design review process can be complicated and normally involves two hearings at the Commission. Each hearing typically requires applicants and Commissioners to comment, sometimes at length. Many times, neighbors adjacent to the project being reviewed will testify before the Commission. Design review hearings are time consuming, and each item requires 5-6 hours of staff preparatory work.

Occasionally, the planning staff seek Commission input on policy matters. Two recent examples include revising the Planning and Zoning Ordinance and providing criteria for evaluating conditional use permit applications for a medical marijuana dispensary. In both of these cases, the Commission opted to act in less of an advisory role and more in a hands-on, technical fashion. Revising the Planning and Zoning Ordinance required intensive, detailed work, all of which took place during Commission meetings. This process took place during 13 meetings over the course of one year. At each meeting, the topic was discussed for at least one hour. Instead of providing criteria to staff for evaluating medical marijuana dispensary applications, the Commissioners opted to have all the applications reviewed by the Commission at a future meeting. This is a time consuming proposition. It will increase staff preparatory workload by an estimated 15 hours and will considerably lengthen the Commission meeting.

### **Areas of Substantial Overlap with other Advisory Bodies**

- The Art in Public Places Program requires all public art features to come to the Arts Committee for comment before proceeding to the Planning and Zoning Commission for a final decision.

### **Recommendations for the Planning and Zoning Commission**

1. Staff should not cede authority to the Commission on technical issues. The Planning and Zoning Commission's duties do not extend to providing technical input or doing the work of staff. Planning staff exists to provide professional expertise and perform planning functions, while the Commission exists to ensure and provide community input on values. This boundary may be hazier for staff and Commissioners to observe in the context of a quasi-judicial Commission where decision-making is a normal duty. However, the Commissioners and staff should continually raise this question when dealing with policy matters. Failure to do so has and will continue to result in great inefficiencies.
2. The Planning and Zoning Commissioners should utilize subcommittees for prolonged and detailed matters, such as revising the Planning and Zoning Ordinance. This entire process took place during Commission meetings, but should have taken place during a series of dedicated subcommittee meetings. In the future, the Commission should convene a time-limited subcommittee that allows for more in-depth work to be completed. Drafts should be presented to the Commission as a whole, where public review and comment follows.
3. Public comment should be limited to three minutes during hearings. Commissioners may be reluctant to limit public input during hearings, but, Commissioners may ask follow up questions of members from the public, if necessary.

## **Social and Economic Justice Commission**

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### **Purpose, Authority, Scope and Duties**

Established by City Council Resolution in 2005, the Social and Economic Justice Commission is charged with researching, analyzing, discussing and evaluating data and opinions on social and environmental issues affecting the welfare of Albany's residents. The Commission also serves as a recommending body to the Council on ideological positions and/or actions to be taken in addressing identified issues of concern. Issues of concern may be local or global.

Given the broad scope of the Commission's purpose, recommendations to the City Council must be accompanied by a statement of relevance and impact the issue has on Albany's residents.

### **Committee Composition and Organization**

The Commission is comprised of seven members. Each member of the City Council appoints one member and the Albany Unified School District Board of Education appoints two members, one of which must be a youth member.

Occasionally the Commission convenes subcommittees for research purposes, though subcommittee participation is voluntary.

### **Meetings, Process and Public Interface**

Commission meetings occur monthly and last, on average, two hours. The Commission utilizes a loose parliamentary procedure to move through the agenda, but relies heavily on staff liaison and Assistant City Administrator Judy Lieberman for motion language, points of order and general guidance. Time limits are not used for comment periods, agenda items or meeting duration.

Lieberman attends Commission meetings, prepares the agenda and meeting packet and produces summary minutes for each meeting. Including attending meetings, Lieberman estimates that Commission work takes 7-8 hours per month.

Occasionally the City Council refers an item to the Commission for analysis and recommendation. One such issue, a living wage ordinance, was referred without a deadline and after two years, continues to be a recurring item of discussion on the Commissions meeting agendas.

As intended, the purview of this Commission is very broad. Any Commissioner may bring an item of personal interest to the Commission's agenda. Most of these topics include a presentation to the Commission, but typically do not extend to deep research and analysis. Topics discussed by the Commission include police/community relations, endorsement of State legislation, U.C. Village and Gill Tract development, the economic downturn, waterfront planning and building community in Albany. Commission reports to the City Council sometimes fail to provide a statement of relevance, importance and/or particular impact on the welfare of Albany's residents.

According to Commissioners, few members of the public attend Commission meetings.

### **Areas of Substantial Overlap with other Advisory Bodies**

- The Commission's purview is quite broad and can overlap into areas covered by many other advisory bodies.
- The Commission's stated purpose encompasses environmental issues, which is also the purview of the Sustainability Committee.

### **Recommendations for the Social and Economic Justice Commission**

1. The name of the Commission should be changed to the Social, Economic and Environmental Justice Commission. The broad nature of the Commission



- encompasses environmental issues and sustainability. Members of the Commission should form time-limited subcommittees to hold public study sessions on proposed environmental policies and ordinances as needed.
2. The Commission should hold occasional forums, modeled after the National Issues Forum, in order to hear from the residents of Albany on issues affecting their welfare. After each forum, the Commission chair should send a summary report of the results to the City Council. The summary report should include the number of participants and discussion points.
  3. Eliminate the Youth Commissioner seat. According to staff, designating a seat for a youth member has not been successful, leaving the Commission shorthanded.
  4. The Commission should convene only to meet on issues referred by the City Council or upon staff request for community input. Currently, individual Commissioners choose agenda items that are of personal interest. Very few members of the public attend meetings. Therefore, opinions collected on topics are extremely narrow. The City Council should refer items for in-depth research and analysis, requiring arguments for and against action on all matters. Referrals should include a deadline.

## **Sustainability Committee**

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### **Purpose, Authority, Scope and Duties**

Established by City Council Resolution in 2007, the Sustainability Committee advises the Council on policies, programs and issues that promote environmental sustainability in Albany. The Committee is to provide leadership, technical assistance, education and outreach to City agencies, local businesses, the Albany Unified School District and residents.

The Committee was created from the City's Clean and Green Taskforce, which focused on making recommendations to the City Council that aimed to reduce the City's greenhouse gas emissions. The main activity of the Committee since its inception has been to provide input on the drafting of Albany's Climate Action Plan (CAP). The Council recently adopted the CAP, and now the Committee has shifted its focus to making recommendations to staff on prioritizing CAP items for implementation.

### **Committee Composition and Organization**

The Committee is comprised of seven members. Each member of the City Council appoints one member, the Council as a whole appoints one "at-large" member, and the Albany Unified School District Board of Education appoints one youth member.

The current Committee is made up of individuals who possess expertise in differing areas of environmental sustainability.

This Committee favors a less formal approach to their work than other City advisory bodies. Members opt to stay in regular touch with one another outside of meetings. The Committee regularly uses subcommittees, which are organized by topics of the CAP.

### **Meetings, Process and Public Interface**

Meetings are held once a month and typically last 3 hours. The Committee Chairperson utilizes a loose version of parliamentary procedure to move through agenda business. The Committee does not use time limits for comment periods, agenda items or meeting duration.

Meetings are attended by staff liaison and Environmental Specialist Nicole Almaguer, who also prepares the agenda, meeting packet and detailed minutes of each meeting. Almaguer reports that the Committee takes up a significant amount of her work time, estimating 16 hours per month for meeting, agenda and packet preparation and minute production.

The City Council refers very few items to the Committee. Individual members may identify items of personal interest for the agenda.

According to Committee members, few members of the public attend meetings.

### **Areas of Substantial Overlap with other Advisory Bodies**

- The Committee exists to advise the Council on policies, programs and issues of environmental sustainability. However, the Committee's purpose is duplicative of the Social and Economic Justice Commission, whose purview encompasses all environmental issues.
- This year, the annual art event was merged with the annual "green" education event. As a result, the Arts Committee worked with the Sustainability Committee to plan and create the Arts and Green Festival.

### **Recommendation for the Sustainability Committee**

1. The Sustainability Committee should be merged with the Social and Economic Justice Commission, whose scope covers all environmental issues. The issue of sustainability is systematically recognized, discussed, and analyzed with every action taken by City Council and City staff. This process of evaluating sustainability has been integrated into the City's standard operating procedure. Further, the Sustainability Committee's activities since its inception have centered on the Climate Action Plan. Now that the Plan has been adopted, staff is focused on its implementation. Currently, the Committee is working on a prioritization list for staff implementation, which should be finished by the fall of 2010. The Sustainability Committee should sunset at the end of the year.

With this merge, the Social and Economic Justice Commission should be renamed the Social, Economic and Environmental Justice Commission and should be directed to create limited tenure subcommittees to develop and/or comment on environmental policy topics as needed.

## **Traffic and Safety Commission**

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### **Purpose, Authority, Scope and Duties**

Authorized by City Council ordinance, the Traffic and Safety Commission advises the City Council on matters related to traffic flow, traffic safety, and transportation policy. While the Commission does not have independent authority, it reviews and makes recommendations to the Council on applications for permit parking zones, traffic calming and curb designations, as well as all transportation projects.

### **Commission Composition and Organization**

The Commission is comprised of five members, each appointed by a member of the City Council. The Chief of Police, the Fire Chief and the City Engineer serve as non-voting Ex-officio members of the Commission.

Recently the Commission began developing a work plan in order to identify issues its members would like to research and analyze. However, it has been difficult for the members to adhere to the plan because meeting agendas tend to consist of time sensitive matters, such as resident concerns and applications.

### **Meetings, Process and Public Interface**

The Commission meets monthly, lasting, on average, two and a half hours. The Chairperson utilizes strict parliamentary procedure during meetings and enforces time limits during public comment.

The staff liaison, Transportation Planner Aleida Andrino-Chavez, prepares the agenda, meeting packet, and detailed minutes. Including attending meetings, Andrino-Chavez estimates that Commission work takes 10 hours per month.

Commissioners are able to place items of personal interest on meeting agendas for discussion. Members of the public may also request items and propose policies for discussion on the agenda. Some Commissioners have reported having difficulty in analyzing policy issues during regular meetings without in-depth research. For this reason, discussion items can sometimes remain on the Commission's agenda for months without resolution.

Public comment is a regular occurrence at the Commission. Residents frequently attend meetings to speak about neighborhood or safety issues. Representatives from a local

bicycle and pedestrian safety organization also frequently speak during public comment. The strict use of timed public comment allows meetings to be organized and efficient.

### **Areas of Substantial Overlap with other Advisory Bodies**

None

### **Recommendation for the Traffic and Safety Commission**

1. The Commission should organize time-limited subcommittees, as needed, to research and study issues in depth. Subcommittee findings should be reported back to the Commission within three months.

## **Waterfront Committee**

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### **Purpose, Authority, Scope and Duties**

Established in 1974 by City Council action, the Waterfront Committee advises the Council on issues related to the preservation and enhancement of the Albany waterfront. The Committee must review any City plan, lease or concession prior to Council action. The Committee also provides input to City staff regarding funding opportunities for improvements at the Waterfront.

Albany's waterfront is owned and maintained by three separate parties: the City of Albany, the State of California/East Bay Regional Park District, and Golden Gate Fields/Magna International Development. The Committee regularly reviews studies, plans, and policies of the East Bay Regional Park District and news regarding Golden Gate Fields.

### **Committee Composition and Organization**

The Committee is comprised of seven members. Each member of the City Council appoints one member and the Council as a whole appoints two "at-large" members.

The Committee organizes subcommittees to study and research issues, including the collection of community input. However, subcommittee members do not assign deadlines or target dates for their work. This has led to items reoccurring on the agenda without resolution and causes subcommittee work to take place during Committee meetings. This has significantly lengthened meeting duration.

Members recently began using a work plan in order to guide the Committee's work.

### **Meetings, Process and Public Interface**

The Committee meets monthly, with meetings lasting, on average, two and a half hours. The Chairperson uses strict parliamentary procedure during the meetings.

Staff liaison and Community Development Director Ann Chaney attends each Committee meeting and prepares meeting agendas and packets, upon consultation with the Chairperson. Including attending meetings, Chaney estimates that Commission work takes approximately 8 hours per month. City staff member Nicole Almaguer does not attend Committee meetings, but prepares detailed minutes by listening to audio recordings of each meeting. The production of detailed minutes takes, on average, 4 hours per month.

In years past, the Committee had been a more hands-on group, organizing clean-up days and providing trail maintenance at the waterfront. Activities of stewardship have largely been abandoned and are no longer a focus of the current Committee. The Community Development Director often identifies items for meeting agendas, but individual Commissioners may also identify items of personal interest for the agenda. Recent agenda items include discussing dog management issues, reviewing East Bay Regional Park studies and reviewing the progress of Measure WW projects.

Waterfront planning has been of great interest to Albany's residents. At times, these issues have been viewed as controversial, leading to somewhat acrimonious Committee meetings. The recent visioning process led by consultants hired by the City seems to have diffused this contentious atmosphere. Now, according to members, few members of the public attend Committee meetings.

#### **Areas of Substantial Overlap with other Advisory Bodies**

- The Waterfront Committee has created a subcommittee to explore and discuss issues related to dog management at the waterfront. Currently, the Parks and Recreation Commission also has a dog management subcommittee.
- Measure WW provides funding to cities for park and open space improvements. Both the Waterfront Committee and the Parks and Recreation Commission make recommendations for the use of Measure WW funds in Albany and may feel in competition for these limited funds.
- The Albany Bulb is home to found-object art sculptures and paintings. While it is not City sanctioned and not typically within the scope of items discussed at the Albany Arts Committee, potential overlap exists.
- Proposed development of Albany's waterfront is ultimately under the authority of the Planning and Zoning Commission.

#### **Recommendations for the Waterfront Committee**

1. The Council should consider moving the Waterfront Committee's scope and duties to the Parks and Recreation Commission. The waterfront is an important center of recreation for Albany's residents and is included in Albany's Parks, Recreation and Open Space Master Plan. A main responsibility of the Parks and Recreation Commission is to oversee and review this master plan. Existing efforts related to dog management and Measure WW projects are duplicative and should be under the authority of one advisory body. This consolidation will

make it easier for residents to stay attuned to open space and park issues. As waterfront-specific issues arise, the Parks and Recreation Commission should be directed to create limited tenure waterfront issue subcommittees for research, collecting community input and/or reviewing City plans, leases, or concessions as needed.

2. Alternatively, the Council should consider re-defining the purpose of the Waterfront Committee in order to create a waterfront stewardship taskforce. This taskforce could create opportunities for members of the public to organize clean up events, perform trail maintenance, help in maintaining signs and displays, and educate the public about Albany's waterfront.
3. If the Waterfront Committee is to remain intact, the "at-large" members positions should be eliminated. At-large members are appointed by the City Council as a whole and only amplify the perspectives of the majority of the members of the City Council.

# Seven Recommendations for Albany’s Advisory Body System

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Although advisory bodies may seem like the obvious choice when considering ways to collect input on a plan, issue or policy, the City Council should hesitate to create any new advisory bodies without first considering alternative ways of obtaining public feedback and balancing the costs associated with maintaining and operating a new group. If and when the City Council determines an advisory body is the optimal manner of obtaining feedback on a particular issue, the Council must adopt every reasonable measure to assure Albany’s residents that these un-elected advisory bodies operate effectively and efficiently.

The section below provides recommendations for improving the operations of Albany’s advisory body system. Implementing these recommendations will likely result in reduced advisory supports costs, staff hours, and member workloads, while likely increasing the advisory bodies’ impact on public decisions and public participation in the advisory body system.

## Recommendation #1

### Eliminate Staff Minute Taking and Implement “Action Minutes”

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Each advisory body is assigned a staff liaison who is generally responsible for recording and producing detailed or summary meeting minutes. Currently, only the Community Media Access Committee opts to use members, instead of staff, to record and produce minutes. These members report that this approach is quite feasible and not at all onerous. Transitioning all advisory bodies, except the Planning & Zoning Commission, to this “self-help” method of recording and producing minutes will significantly reduce staff time dedicated to Albany’s advisory bodies and represents an estimated cost savings to the City of **\$7,199.49** annually. Cost savings calculations can be found in the appendix.

## Recommendation #2

### Limit Agenda Access and Meet as Needed

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Currently, any commission, committee, or board member may place an item of business on a meeting agenda, subject to availability of time. As a result, agendas tend to be congested with items of personal interest from advisory body members that do not necessarily represent a mandate from Albany’s residents. This approach to conducting

advisory body business has led meetings to become forums for members to express and explore personal views. These topics, while well-intentioned and generally within the scope of each advisory body, appear to be of little interest to the public, as evidenced by low turnout and public comment. The ability to place an item of personal interest on an agenda serves the personal goals of that member, and not the City or the public. Therefore, business before the City's advisory bodies should come from: City Council referral; staff referral; or recommendation from the advisory body that has been authorized by the City Council. Procedures would need to be developed to provide avenues for issues of concern to receive appropriate attention.

Given the limits of a small City staff, Albany's advisory bodies should meet only as needed. Members have expressed frustration with not being used effectively by the City Council. However, if the City's advisory bodies were "activated" only by mandated business, and used more thoughtfully, it is likely these feelings of being ignored or underused would diminish. Eliminating items of personal interest from agendas will significantly lessen the need to meet monthly for most advisory bodies. Accordingly, this will decrease workloads and time commitments for both staff and members. This approach provides respite to advisory body members, but leaves the City with an organized arsenal of valuable community volunteers who are ready to serve.

### Recommendation # 3

#### Adopt Pro/Con Analysis and Provide Deadlines for Input

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A review of recent recommendations to the City Council provided by Albany's advisory bodies reveals that recommendations tend to be made on ideological grounds and contain few data sources or alternatives. In order to be practical and actionable, recommendations require detailed research, construction of policy alternatives, evaluation of intended and unintended consequences, and a confrontation of tradeoffs. Advisory body recommendations typically lack one or more of these features; therefore, the City Council does not have all the necessary information to take action. As a result, advisory body members often feel ignored or underused when Council does not act on their recommendations.

As an alternative, advisory bodies should be used for researching best practices, assuring adequate consideration of Albany's values and goals, brainstorming policy options and considering all sides of an issue. Council should refer well-defined topics or policy options to advisory bodies along with strict deadlines by which the members should provide pro/con analysis. Analysis that encompasses in-depth research and arguments for and against policy options will better serve the City Council when they are faced with making decisions.



## Recommendation #4

### Provide Public with Direct Access to Advisory Bodies

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Names of advisory body members, along with one City-provided email address for each advisory body should be posted on the City's website. Alternately, the chairperson should be required to provide an email address to be posted on the City's website. Allowing the public to email the chairperson of an advisory body directly may increase the likelihood of more residents participating at meetings and requesting agenda items. The public should be directed to contact the Chairperson for questions or information relating to issues specific to each advisory body, public meetings or to request an agenda item. Members of the public should be advised that the Brown Act precludes members of the advisory body from responding as a group.

## Recommendation #5

### Evaluate Advisory Bodies and Appointees Bi-Annually

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A bi-annual evaluation of commissions, committees and boards is necessary in order to understand their impact on public decisions in Albany. By reviewing the individual outcomes of each group, the City Council can effectively modify or redefine aspects of each body. Council members should determine how successful advisory bodies are in assessing and analyzing issues or policies by evaluating: the thoroughness of analysis; the timeliness of analysis and input; and how public opinion was collected. Through an annual review, the City Council may determine that collecting public input may be better achieved in a venue other than advisory bodies.

It is also essential that the City Council seek bi-annual feedback on appointee performance from staff liaisons. On the whole, current members are cooperative, energetic and fully participate in meetings. However, some appointees do not serve their advisory bodies well, showing up late for meetings, failing to prepare for meetings, or participating in a disruptive manner.

A careful annual evaluation should also include reviewing appointee demographics. Currently, there is a great lack of racial/ethnic diversity on Albany's advisory bodies. Albany's demographics are not represented in its advisory body appointees. The City Council should address efforts and methods of outreach to non-white residents with the goal of making advisory body appointees more demographically representative.

## Recommendation #6

### Organize Advisory Body-Sponsored Forums

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The City should attempt to build on the Voices to Vision process by recreating and extending it beyond waterfront planning to topics covered by the City's advisory body system.

The City of Albany has just concluded a rigorous waterfront planning process called Voices to Vision. This process included a series of city-wide, small group gatherings that allowed neighbors to brainstorm, talk about shared values, and build on one another's ideas. This invigorating process has left many City staff, advisory body members and residents wondering how to extend and expand this innovative civic participation model. In order to build on this, a new series of forums should be coordinated and produced by Albany's advisory bodies.

By sectoring Albany into five zones (similar to the street sweeping zones) and holding visioning and education forums, advisory bodies will give residents the chance to meet and participate with their neighbors in identifying common interests and items of concern. Zone forums will give the City's advisory body members an opportunity to advertise their commission, committee, or board, likely resulting in more resident participation at meetings. Zone forums can easily dovetail with current community building efforts, such as the Neighbor-2-Neighbor workshops, and would likely result in newly organized neighborhood groups. Information and issues collected through the zone forums should be detailed in a summary report by the chairpersons of each advisory body and reported to the City Council. It is essential that this undertaking is not staff driven, but an effort led by advisory body members. The City Council should evaluate the success of the forums by measuring attendance, participant satisfaction, and growth in organized neighborhood groups.

By extending the name of Voices to Vision beyond waterfront planning issues to include all of the City's advisory bodies and to all other activities performed by the Community Engagement Specialists, the City can build on this very recognizable brand. A location on the City's website should include linked pages from each of the advisory body's City web pages, and allow residents to post messages and thoughts on current topics. This will provide a unique identity for Albany's advisory bodies and provide an interactive space where residents can participate.

## Recommendation # 7

### Update Advisory Body Handbook and Practices

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A survey of advisory body practices from cities across California revealed several policies and practices missing in Albany. These include the mandated use of and training in parliamentary procedure, the use of time limits for meetings and agenda items, public swearing-in ceremonies, new member orientation, and explicitly stated roles and duties of staff liaisons and members.

Most of Albany's advisory bodies use some form of parliamentary procedure, enabling meetings to stay organized and focused. However, in general, Albany's members could use bi-annual training in preparing motions, how to stay on agenda topic and how to assign and utilize time limits. Crosstalk and meandering conversations are common during Albany's advisory body meetings, resulting in missed ideas, and creating inefficiencies. Parliamentary procedure and time limits during meetings should be the expectation and required. Other periodic trainings, new member orientations and explicitly stated roles will aid in increasing effectiveness and efficiency. Recommended changes to Albany's Commission, Committee and Board Handbook can be found in the appendix.

# Appendices

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## **Appendix 1: Definitions for Advisory Bodies**

Advisory bodies generally come with one of four designations: task force, committee, commission, or board. Below are recommended definitions for those designations.

**Task Force:** A temporary grouping of individuals in order to accomplish a single, defined task or activity.

**Committee:** A group of people officially designated by City Council resolution to perform a function, such as considering, investigating, taking action on, implementing, or reporting on a matter.

**Commission:** A group of people officially authorized by ordinance to perform certain duties or functions with certain powers or authority granted.

**Board:** A group of people having managerial, supervisory or advisory powers over the activities of a department or an organization.

**Appendix 2:  
Cost Savings Methodology**

As explained in the body of the report, eliminating the use of staff to produce detailed minutes, and opting instead for action minutes produced by advisory body members, represents an estimated cost savings to the City of **\$7,199.49** annually.

<b>Advisory Body</b>	<b>Calculation</b>	<b>Cost Savings</b>
Albany Arts Committee	\$17.77 x 2.75 hrs x 12 months	\$586.41
Albany Library Board	\$17.77 x 2.75 hrs x 12 months	\$586.41
Charter Review Committee	\$50.65 x 1 hr x 12 months	\$607.80
Civil Service Board	N/A	N/A
Community Media Access Committee	N/A	N/A
Parks and Recreation Commission	\$17.77 x 2.75 hrs x 12 months	\$586.41
Police and Fire Pension Board	\$28.41 x 0.5 x 12 months	\$170.46
Planning and Zoning Commission	N/A	N/A
Social and Economic Justice Commission	\$57.67 x 1.5 hrs x 12 months	\$1,038.00
Sustainability Committee	\$37.75 x 2 hrs x 12 months	\$906.00
Traffic and Safety Commission	\$37.75 x 2 hrs x 12 months	\$906.00
Waterfront Committee	\$37.75 x 4 hrs x 12 months	\$1,812.00
	<b>TOTAL:</b>	<b>\$7,199.49</b>

### **Appendix 3: Bi-Annual Training and New Member Orientation**

#### **Bi-Annual Training**

Bi-annual training for advisory bodies is necessary to educate and re-acquaint members with City policies, procedures, and roles, as well as with State law or other regulations as necessary. Bi-annual trainings should review the following:

Ralph M. Brown Act  
Parliamentary procedure  
Staff and member roles  
Conducting public deliberations  
Updates on City policies and procedures

Training sessions should be video recorded so that members appointed mid-term or who miss trainings can review the material.

#### **New Member Orientation**

All newly seated advisory body members should participate in an orientation process. The orientation process is intended to acquaint board, commissions, and committee members with city goals, advisory body responsibilities, current status of advisory body business, meeting schedules, meeting procedures and staff contacts. Shortly after appointment, the City Clerk will contact newly appointed commissioners to schedule orientation meetings with City staff or Council members, as follows:

- Appointing Council Member or Mayor – to discuss City goals
- Staff Liaison – to discuss current advisory bodies business, meeting schedule, agenda schedules; and schedule follow up trainings related to City policy and procedure as necessary
- City Clerk - Review handbook and answer questions

**Appendix 4:**  
**Proposed Changes to the Commission, Committee and Board Handbook**