

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

Agenda Date: May 16, 2011
Reviewed by: BP

SUBJECT: Staff Presentation on the “Sustainable Communities Strategy” Regional Planning Initiative

REPORT BY: Jeff Bond, Planning & Building Manager

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

For information.

BACKGROUND

In recent years, the State of California has adopted several major legislative efforts to address climate change. In particular, AB 32 established statewide goals to reduce greenhouse gas production to 1990 levels by 2020. In addition, SB 375 was passed in 2008, which established a new framework for regional land use planning and transportation funding.

As a part of SB 375, regional planning agencies such as Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG) and Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC) are required to prepare a Sustainable Communities Strategy (SCS) in all metropolitan regions in California. The SCS initiative is an effort to integrate demographic & economic projections with the Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) and affordable housing mandates. The end product will be a regional plan that identifies where housing and employment growth should occur to meet greenhouse gas reduction targets, and insures that investments in transportation are targeted to these areas.

DISCUSSION

The Initial Vision Scenario released in March was the first work product of the SCS that provided information at a city-by-city level of detail. For Albany, for the period 2010 to 2025, the projections show an increase in more than 2,100 housing units, generating an increase in population of more than 4,600 residents. In addition, employment is projected to increase by almost 500 jobs.

Many communities have proactively designated “priority development areas” (PDA) where they are actively seeking infill development. The challenge of the SCS is that PDA areas do not accommodate all of the anticipated growth in the region. Thus, as part of the

SCS, locations for additional development beyond PDAs will need to be established. ABAG and MTC planners have identified potential areas for additional growth as “growth opportunity areas” (GOA). Table 1 and Table 2 detail the PDA and GOA projections for Albany. Information for the cities of El Cerrito and Berkeley are also provided for context. Note for example, that household growth in El Cerrito is expected to increase dramatically.

In addition to the information at the PDA and GOA area level of detail, detailed transportation modeling is being prepared at the Census tract level of detail. Table 3 highlights the household and employment projections by Census tract within Albany. For Albany, the detailed Census tract assumptions place a large amount of housing in the Albany Hill area. Transportation models have evolved over many years, and thus the basis of underlying assumption is not clear. From staff’s perspective, this is an appropriate time to work with regional planners to refine these assumptions.

This information is useful both for refining the City’s land use policies and for anticipating long-term demand for public services. Regardless of the specific details of amount and location of growth within the City, it is clear that there will be some degree of growth within the City all areas of the City. It also is clear that significant growth will occur in neighboring communities.

The Planning and Zoning Commission discussed the Initial Vision Scenario at its May 10, 2011 meeting. Commissioners noted that it may be worthwhile to explore whether establishment of priority development areas would improve the City’s ability to secure grant funds. In addition, the Commission noted that absorption of this amount of growth raises many policy issues that will need to be addressed in the future general plan update.

Next Steps

ABAG has asked city planners in the Bay Area to provide feedback on the Initial Vision Scenario for the Regional Sustainable Communities Strategy. ABAG will assemble comments into a series of alternative scenarios. The following are the general themes that staff would recommend be brought forth as the planning effort evolves:

- As a matter of policy, the City supports regional sustainable development policies and growth patterns;
- Future growth within Albany should be distributed throughout the community consistent with current land use designations and policies wherever possible;
- Staff will evaluate the pros and cons of establishing priority development areas in order to be more competitive for state and regional transportation funding;
- Future requirements to accommodate growth should reflect presence of large government-owned parcels such as University Village and USDA properties that are outside the City’s jurisdiction; and
- Projections for growth in Albany should be moderated to reflect historic trends, relatively small parcels, existing density, fragmented ownership, and limited City financial resources to support affordable housing.

SUSTAINABILITY IMPACT

Successful implementation of the SCS will lead to reduction in greenhouse gas production in the Bay Area, and will compliment local policy initiatives established in the City's Climate Action Plan.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

Staff is actively participating in regional planning efforts. No direct expenses are anticipated as part of the SCS process.

Attachments:

1. Initial Vision Scenario Overview
2. Initial Vision Scenario Report
3. Summary Tables 1-3