City of Albany
2012-13
Capacity Limitations

The following is a summary of areas of responsibilities and activities, either necessary or desired, for which the City lacks sufficient staffing and/or funding capacity.   It is not all inclusive, but provides some examples.

Code enforcement.   The City does not have a dedicated position for code enforcement and lacks the capacity to address the complaints that arise. Community requests for enforcement are prioritized against other enforcement requests and other workload demands.   Among the examples that frequently arise are:

- Dilapidated properties.   The City has been increasing its capacity in this area over the past two years, but it cannot keep up with demand. The City – working in partnership with neighbors in some cases – has been successful in the turnaround of some properties.   (e.g. Jackson Street, Key Route Blvd.).   Yet, the number of properties that generate complaints exceed the city's capacity for active follow up.

- Public right-of-way. A-frame signs and other private property in the public right-of-way; uneven sidewalks, which is the responsibility of property owners but not all owners maintain them in good condition; mobile vendors; smoking on Solano Avenue and other locations restricted by local ordinance. When Council adopted the ordinance that prohibited smoking on Solano Avenue and other locations, it was with the understanding that the City did not have the capacity for active enforcement. Concern about lack of enforcement arises from time to time, as does interest in expanding prohibitions.

- Other. Neighbor-to-neighbor disputes; noise; animals; commercial signs; etc.

Cost for one code enforcement officer and legal costs associated with follow up actions is estimated at $100,000+.

Homelessness in the city, including the Albany Bulb. There has been a rise in the number of persons camping on the Bulb, and also a more noticeable presence of panhandling, recycling pilfering, and shopping cart collections in other parts of the city.   Community reaction to both situations has been mixed, ranging from "let be" or that camping on the Bulb "is a solution, not a problem;" to "something needs to be

done"; the "something needs to be done" ranges from finding ways to have people "move along" to other locations, improving the conditions to assist them in staying, or investing in human/social services and housing resources.

Human/social services in Albany are offered through agencies and organizations other than the city; these include City of Berkeley, Alameda County, faith-based organizations, and non-profits.

Staff is recommending that the City's objectives for 2012-13 include addressing homelessness. What existing staff can accomplish is identifying contacts and resources. However, direct outreach to homeless individuals, continual follow up, and providing services or facilities exceeds the City's ongoing capacity.

Costs for caseworkers is estimated at $50,000+ each.

Technology. Government tends to lag behind the commercial sector in the use of technology, and Albany has tended to lag even further behind. This puts the city at a disadvantage in meeting community expectations about transacting business, obtaining information, participating, and communicating.

Albany needs to invest more funds in technology staff, training, software, hardware, and other equipment in order to meet the public's needs and expectations, and to be efficient, effective, and productive.   Examples include electronic permits and payments, electronic records, and keeping current with public safety requirements. Other examples are contained in the recently adopted Information Technology Master Plan.

In February 2012, the city entered into an agreement to purchase eight hours/week of the City of Emeryville's Information Technology Director's time to serve as Albany's Information Technology Manager.   Funding for the position through the end of the current fiscal year is available with unanticipated salary savings. Continuation beyond June 30 is uncertain at this time.

Most of the items in the Information Technology Master Plan will require costing on an individual and priority basis. It would not be imprudent to estimate an additional $50,000 - $100,000 a year to adequately fund the city's IT needs and continual evolution to keep in pace with changing technology.

Communications.   There is probably no such thing as "too much" when it comes to communicating between and amongst city officials and the community.   City employees continually look for ways to expand efforts through the City's website, KALB, written materials, etc., while keeping an eye on costs; recent examples of new initiatives include use of social media, the "Around the Block" e-notifications for neighborhoods, and the Albany Civics Academy for community leadership

development. Additional ideas are included in the objectives. More investment in technology, training, and staff time would enhance communication capacity.

Public Safety. Safety is a paramount issue in the community. Like communications, there is probably no such thing as having too much police presence throughout the community or too quick a response to a call for police, fire, or paramedics. When an accident or crime occurs, a common reaction is to request a stronger law enforcement presence in that neighborhood or location. The fact of the matter is there are a limited number of officers on duty, and they generally need to prioritize their locations to what is currently underway. Increased presence in one area can come at the expense of less presence in another area unless staffing is expanded. Additionally, there is follow up work that is not necessarily apparent to solve crimes and inspect buildings for fire safety, in addition to prevention measures.

Police staffing has experienced cuts in the past few years, as vacant dispatch and patrol positions have been frozen and gone unfilled.   As workload stretches to fewer employees, there is higher risk for compromise in public safety response.

Traffic enforcement is one of the specialized duties typically assigned in Albany as a collateral duty rather than primary due to the staffing constraints, and is sometimes funded with grants for overtime and saturation patrols. More enforcement for speeding, running of red lights and stop signs, and other vehicle code violations are commonly requested on arterials and neighborhood streets throughout the city.

The Police Department has also identified a Youth & Family Resource Officer as a pivotal position for reaching at-risk youth who are on the threshold of becoming involved in crime or have ventured into criminal activity.   The Albany Police Activities League works to reach as many youth as possible, but there are limited opportunities for interaction with the family to resolve ongoing conflict and crisis.

A safer and safer community requires investment in capacity.

Each police officer position costs $110,000 at entry level in salary and benefits. Each public safety dispatcher costs $90,000 at entry level in salary and benefits.

Employee compensation: Rising cost of health care and pension benefits, and attracting & retaining talented employees. City employees have contributed to controlling the City's expense of compensation by picking up pension costs, going without salary increases, reducing pension benefits for future hires, and taking on additional workload with the reduction in staff positions. As the premium rates for health care and pensions continue to rise, the City will continue to be challenged to

remain both fiscally prudent as well as competitive for talented employees capable of delivering excellent services.

Economic Development. This is a particularly challenging area for all cities because of the loss of Redevelopment Agencies, the decreased availability of commercial financing along with increased requirements, and the economic recession.

In Albany, the City Council took an important step in early 2012 when it conceptually approved the University of California, Berkeley's development proposal to construct a senior housing, grocery store, and retail project on San Pablo Avenue at the edge of University Village. Upon completion of construction, the development is estimated to net the General Fund a revenue of more than $200,000, will revitalize an underutilized stretch of south Albany, and could be a catalyst for nearby commercial redevelopment.

An area the City has particularly focused for redevelopment is Cleveland Avenue. Albany is a member of the East Bay Green Corridor in order to explore potential re-use possibilities for this zone, which was in Albany's now-dissolved redevelopment district. The City has set a goal of moving its maintenance center out of this district to make room for larger-scale endeavors such as light industrial or manufacturing, research and development, or retail.

The City has made progress on some of the improvements identified in the city's economic development strategy and plan, such as directional signage from the freeway, reduction and replacement of newspaper racks, new trash receptacles, landscaped planter boxes, and branding.

More ongoing, focused, and active economic development efforts for all of Albany's commercial areas is beyond the City's current capacity and will require additional funding.

The cost to employ a full-time economic development manager is estimated at $110,000 + materials, supplies, and associated improvements.

Planning. There are various types of planning responsibilities of cities that often get short-shrift when finances are tight, but are nonetheless critical for meeting future needs. These include:

General Plan. The City must begin work on an update to the 20-year General Plan, which was last done in 1990. The update has not seemed that critical in Albany because it is essentially a built-out city. However, it is necessary to be in compliance with State law as well as to ensure that the city has goals and policies

in place that are internally consistent and that properly foresee Albany's future needs.

The estimated cost is $350,000 to $500,000 over two to three fiscal years.

Policy planning. New issues, ideas, case law, or political perspectives continually arise that call for new ordinances, policies, or plans, modifications to existing ones, or other analysis and evaluation.   Recent examples in Albany include parking requirements and paid parking; parking permit program; cell/wireless antenna towers; personal services zoning regulations; technology; medical marijuana dispensaries; and Albany Hill.

There is insufficient staffing capacity to launch and manage the update to the General Plan AND much, if any, other new policy planning initiatives at the same time.

The salary and benefits costs to employ an associate planner to undertake additional policy initiatives is approximately $90,000.

Strategic planning.   It is important that periodically, particularly with the turnover of City Councils and department directors, the City Council and key staff engage in strategic planning to ensure that strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats or trends are identified, that goals are clearly framed, and reasonable objectives are established.   This item is on the list of objectives for 2013.

Plan Implementation.   Plans that the city adopts provide a roadmap to pursue policies, projects and programs as funds are available. It is rare for a plan to have full funding upon adoption. City plans that will require appropriations of General Fund, special revenue fund, and capital funds include the Climate Action Plan, Active Transportation Plan, Technology Master Plan, Albany Hill Master Plan, and Traffic Management Plan.   Other agencies' plans and mandates will call for appropriations for waste water and storm water projects and programs to reach clean water goals and requirements.

Climate Action Plan and Sustainability. As referenced above, the City has adopted a Climate Action Plan (CAP) with a primary goal of reducing local carbon emissions. Climate change is a worldwide problem that should be handled and funded at the national level. The failure of the federal government to provide policy leadership and funding has shifted the burden to interested cities at the very time cities are the most stretched for funds. The City is focusing on the CAP as the primary guidance for sustainability priorities.   There is also local interest for other sustainability measures in addition to the CAP. Albany has been successful at obtaining grant funds for some initiatives, and partnering on others, but lacks capacity for full-scale

CAP implementation and meeting all the community sustainability interests and objectives.

Costs are noted in the Climate Action Plan. The Sustainability Committee recommended consideration of a special energy user tax that would generate approximately $200,000 per year for CAP implementation.

Staff support to advisory bodies. The City Council reviewed staff support for advisory bodies in 2010, and directed that there be a revisit of the review in two years. That review will be scheduled prior to December 2012, when the Council will make their next set of appointments. The City is fortunate to have interested and talented volunteers to work on policy advice, program review, and project development. Capacity problems arise when the number of advisory bodies exceeds the number of staff members that can attend their meetings - which is currently the case. Other capacity issues relate to the availability, willingness, and ability of committee members to perform research, make contacts, draft documents, or perform other tasks. Staff will continue to work with Council to consider alternate arrangements – such as task forces/ad-hoc groups in lieu of standing committees/commissions – and defining appointment expectations, where feasible.

Buildings, grounds, and other facility maintenance. Older facilities, such as the Community Center/Library, have maintenance demands as utility systems and the infrastructure wear out. Newer facilities, such as the Civic Center, have sophisticated utility systems that are complex to repair. Lighting, heating, plumbing, irrigation, turf, landscaping, and roofing are examples of common systems that require ongoing attention and repair funds. The current dollars allocated to these demands are not keeping pace with the wear and tear and needs.

Based on the condition of the facilities and the complexity of the systems, it would not be imprudent to budget an additional $250,000 annual for ongoing repair and upkeep.

Vehicle and equipment replacement. The city endeavors to reserve sufficient funds for vehicle replacement, but under the principle of stretching their useful life as long as possible. Sometimes the vehicles and equipment do not make the extended lifetime goals, as is currently the case with one of the city's ambulances.