

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

Agenda Date: September 18, 2012
Reviewed by: BP

SUBJECT: General Plan Update

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SUMMARY

This agenda item provides the Council an opportunity to provide direction on the consultant selection process associated with the preparation of an update to the General Plan. In addition, the Council could authorize a request for extension of time to meet One Bay Area Grant Program requirements to have a certified housing element.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

That Council:

- a) Authorize the release of a Request for Proposals for consulting services related to preparation of the General Plan; and
- b) Authorize staff to apply to the Association of Bay Area Governments for an extension of time to meet One Bay Area Grant Program requirements to adopt a certified housing element.

BACKGROUND

The General Plan is the central document for prioritizing future land use related city projects, and the legal foundation for all city planning approvals and building permits. The current Albany General Plan was adopted in 1992, and encompasses a time frame from 1990 – 2010. The General Plan includes five elements: Land Use; Circulation; Housing; Conservation, Recreation and Open Space; and Community Health and Safety

DISCUSSION

General Plan Consultant RFP

General plans are typically prepared by either by consultants, by City staff, or by a person hired under a consulting agreement, but essentially functioning as an extension of City staff. The advantage of using a larger consulting firm is that firms have broader experience preparing general plans and greater variety of technical expertise. The advantage of using smaller consulting firm or an individual is that the cost will be lower and there would be

more personalized attention to the project. On balance, staff recommends that the RFP be crafted with a preference for a smaller firm/individual consultant approach. As part of this approach, sub-consultants may be required to assist with various technical studies that are required as part of the preparation of the general plan.

Following release of the RFP, staff will organize a review panel to advise in a recommendation to the City Council on the selection of a consultant. Because of the size of the project, City Council approval of the contract will be required.

Planning and Zoning Commission Serving as Steering Committee

The City Council and the Planning and Zoning Commission have formal responsibility under the Municipal Code and State Law to review the General Plan. It is recommended that the Planning and Zoning Commission act as a “steering committee” to guide the process. One regular Commission meeting each month will be designated to start with work on the General Plan. With each meeting, policy memos and/or a draft section would be reviewed by the Commission. Staff will work with the consultant to facilitate the meeting and review process. Staff also will attend other city commission and committee meeting in order to provide regular updates and an opportunity to provide input on key policy issues.

To the extent possible, staff seeks to incorporate into the initial drafts, the City’s recent policy and/or planning initiatives, including:

- Voices to Vision Waterfront Planning
- Existing Parks and Recreation Plans
- Active Transportation Plan
- Eastshore State Park General Plan
- Climate Action Plan
- Albany Hill Master Plan
- Arts Master Plan
- San Pablo Avenue Complete Streets study
- Economic Development Strategy

Staff has also discussed a page on the City’s website including the following items as part of the update process:

- “What I like about Albany”- opportunity for citizens to share places and activities that they like most about Albany. This may include text and photos and would contribute to establishing a thematic vision for the General Plan process.
- An on-line “Briefing Book” page where commission and committees, organizations, and individuals can post detailed policy analyses to help the Commission and City Council evaluate issues.

- Create a two sided poster-sized document that graphically describes General Plan policies. This may also be used as a mailer.

One Bay Area Grant Program Extension

Currently, Albany is one of 23 cities in the Bay Area with a Housing Element that is no longer in compliance with State Housing and Community Development Department certification requirements. Staff has previously submitted a draft to HCD for review. The draft has been revised in response to HCD comments, and will be resubmitted in the near future. In the meantime, the Association of Bay Area Governments is recommending that municipalities seek an extension in time for housing element certification from ABAG in order to continue to qualify to apply for funds under the new consolidated “One Bay Area Grant” (OBAG) program. Attached is a memorandum describing the appeal process.

SUSTAINABILITY IMPACT

Adoption of the 2010 General Plan will strengthen City sustainability requirements. It is anticipated that many of the policies expected to emerge from the preparation of the Climate Action Plan.

CALIFORNIA ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY ACT

Before policies contained in a general plan are legally effective, the City must undertake an environmental review pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

It is difficult to anticipate the cost of the preparation of the General Plan and associated environmental impact report. As a starting point, in order to control project costs, staff recommends the scope of the general plan be limited to the areas mandated by state law. Assuming an 18-month process, a consulting firm could cost roughly in the range of \$250,000 to \$300,000 for the general plan itself and another \$150,000-\$200,000 for the environmental impact report. Using a consultant functioning as an extension of staff could reduce costs. The amount of cost savings is difficult to predict because the amount of outside technical assistance required will depend on the issues that are raised during the process.

Attachments

1. Draft RFP
2. Memorandum from Association of Bay Area Governments regarding One Bay Area Grant Program