



City of Albany

2035 General Plan



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Adopted
April 18, 2016

CHAPTER

10

WATERFRONT
ELEMENT

A. INTRODUCTION

The waterfront is one of Albany’s defining physical features and has been the focus of several high-profile planning initiatives over the past five decades. The purpose of the Waterfront Element is to summarize the policies that have resulted from those initiatives, and to provide a foundation for the planning and implementation work that will take place in the future.

The Waterfront Element carries forward Albany’s vision of creating a spectacular new park along the eastern shore of San Francisco Bay. It also acknowledges the need for continued discussion about the future of Golden Gate Fields.

The Element builds on and incorporates existing plans and programs, most of which address publicly owned land. Foremost among these plans is the (McLaughlin) Eastshore State Park Master Plan, which was adopted by the East Bay Regional Park District in 2002. The Element also references more recent initiatives, including a community visioning process for the waterfront in 2008-2010 and a 2016 Transition Plan for future waterfront improvements.

In addition, the Element draws on plans which pre-date the 2002 State Park Master Plan, including a 1995 City proposal to the East Bay Regional Park District and the 1992 General Plan.

This Element carries forward existing City policy for Golden Gate Fields. Pursuant to a 1990 voter initiative known as Measure C, any change to the existing land use and zoning regulations on the waterfront would be subject to approval by Albany voters. The 2015 General Plan does not propose such changes, and concludes that a subsequent planning process (and citywide vote) would be required if and when they are proposed. This Plan retains the “Commercial Recreation” General Plan Map designation for Golden Gate Fields established by the prior (1992) Plan, as well as the policy direction for the site.

The Waterfront Element begins with a history of the Albany waterfront, providing the context for the goals and policies in this document. It also discusses issues related to planned park and recreation improvements, shoreline access, natural resource management, and sea level rise.

B. HISTORY OF THE ALBANY WATERFRONT

At the start of the 19th century, the Albany waterfront consisted of a large salt marsh, fed by Cerrito and Codornices Creeks. The area was used for cattle ranching from the 1850s to the 1870s, and dynamite and chemical factories from the 1870s through the early 20th Century. Little thought was given to the concept of environmental protection during these years; in fact, the area was regarded as a dumping ground.

By the early 1900s, the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railroad Company had acquired most of the land along the waterfront. A variety of schemes for the area's development were considered, but none materialized. In 1939, the Railroad leased about 130 acres to the Golden Gate Turf Club to create Golden Gate Fields Racetrack. The Turf Club graded Fleming Point from its original height of 105 feet to 60 feet, using the earth and rock as fill for the track and grandstand.

Following a very brief opening season in 1941, the track was converted to military use during World War II. It was returned to civilian use in 1946, and began operating as a racetrack again in 1947.

In 1963, the City entered into a 10-year contract to permit the dumping of construction debris and garden waste into the Bay at the end of Buchanan Street just north of the racetrack. At the same time, an emerging coalition of environmental groups began an effort to protect the Bay from landfill, ultimately leading to the creation of the Bay Conservation and Development Commission (BCDC). In 1966, BCDC unsuccessfully sued the City of Albany to stop the landfill operation. The fill continued until 1983. By that time, the areas known today as the Plateau, the Neck, and the Bulb had been created.



Photo: Doug Davidson

View of the Albany Plateau, Neck, and Bulb from Albany Hill

As the Bay was filled, the possibility of shoreline development also was explored. In 1969, the City adopted the “Albany Isles” plan for the waterfront, calling for a marina, a 350-room hotel, and a restaurant and shopping complex on several artificial islands. The engineering and fiscal feasibility of the plan were called into question and there were objections from State agencies. Subsequent plans were developed in the 1970s, including the 1977 “Environ” Plan which called for a 490-berth marina, restaurants, a motel, a boat ramp, and a fishing pier. The City was unable to secure financing for the Environ Plan and it too did not move forward.

Santa Fe Pacific Realty Corporation continued to control a large portion of the waterfront, including Golden Gate Fields and about 40 acres of dry land immediately to the north. In 1985, Santa Fe filed plans for housing and commercial development on its Albany landholdings. An Environmental Impact Report was completed in 1986, but the application was denied based on incomplete information. Several amended EIRs were prepared in the years that followed, and a variety of alternatives to the project were proposed and evaluated.

Opposition to the project grew more intense, with Citizens for East Shore State Parks (CESP) formed to advocate for the preservation of the waterfront and creation of a state park along the shoreline between Oakland and Richmond. In 1988, bond measures sponsored by the California Department of Parks and Recreation and the East Bay Regional Park District were approved, including funds for acquisition of shoreline parkland. In 1992, state legislation (AB 754) directed the East Bay Regional Park District to acquire and develop a state park by acquiring land along the 8.5-mile shoreline. It would be another decade before the park, including 260 acres of dry land and over 2,000 acres of tidelands, was formerly established, and more than 20 years before sufficient funds were provided to substantially complete land acquisition.

In 1990, voters passed Measure C, the Citizens Waterfront Approval Initiative (see text box). Measure C significantly altered all future discussion of the waterfront by mandating a majority vote of Albany residents to change land use and zoning regulations in the area west of the freeway.

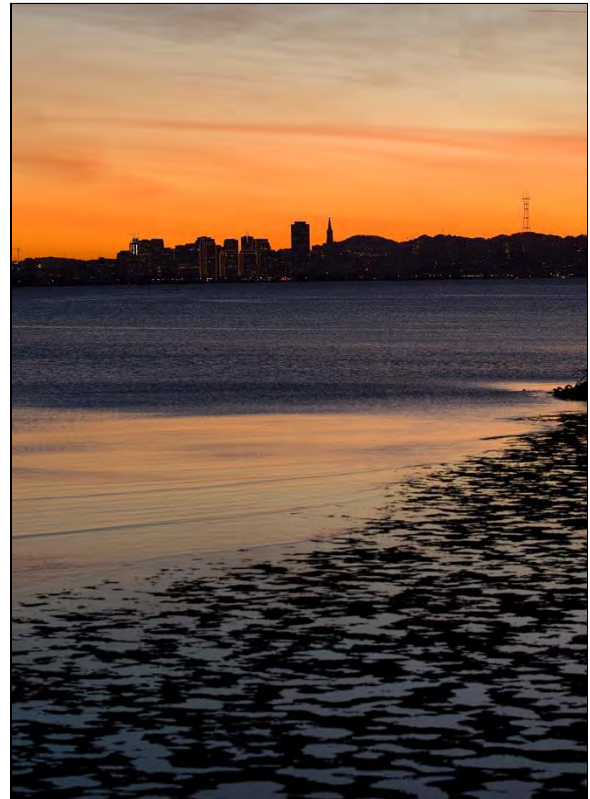


Photo: Doug Davidson

Measure C

Albany’s Measure C (1990) stipulates that: “The following actions, if they authorize any use not authorized by the zoning ordinance for the Waterfront District as of the effective date of this ordinance, shall only be taken by passage of a ballot measure approved by a majority of voters voting: (1) Any amendment to the land use designations for the Waterfront Area in the City’s General Plan; (2) The establishment of, or any material amendment to, the Waterfront Master Plan or other specific plan for the Waterfront area.... (3) Any amendment to the zoning ordinance for the Waterfront area including changes to the text and changes to the map of the Waterfront area; (4) The entry into any development agreement and/or any material amendment to a development agreement for the Waterfront area....”



Photo: Doug Davidson

Albany State Marine Reserve with Mount Tamalpais on the horizon.

As the likelihood of a waterfront park became more certain, the future of Golden Gate Fields became less so. In 1997, Ladbroke Racing Corporation purchased the racetrack from Catellus Corporation (formerly Santa Fe Pacific). Two years later, Ladbroke sold Golden Gate Fields to Magna Entertainment Corporation, a horse racing group founded by Canadian auto parts entrepreneur Frank Stronach. In 2001, Magna proposed Rancho San Antonio, a project that preserved the racetrack, but added 650,000 square feet of new retail, commercial, and entertainment uses. The plan was withdrawn in 2004.

Another plan for the racetrack was put forward in 2005 by Magna with Caruso Affiliated of Southern California. It too preserved the racetrack and added new commercial development, including upscale retail establishments and related mixed use development. Like the preceding plan, it was also withdrawn.

With the advent of on-line gaming, there were concerns about the long-term economic viability of the racetrack itself. Attendance was declining, as were the crucial City revenues generated by activities at the track. In response, the City embarked on a community engagement process that came to be known as “Voices to Vision.”

The Voices to Vision process, which took place from 2008 to 2010, included one-on-one interviews, focus groups and group discussions, large community workshops, and surveys to gauge public opinion and build consensus about what uses might be appropriate in the event the racetrack site was redeveloped. The intent was not to produce a “plan” for the site, but rather to create a broad and inclusive forum for public input. At its core, Voices to Vision was an attempt to address the highly contentious and polarized nature of discussion around the future of Golden Gate Fields.

The process led to 11 conceptual alternative scenarios for the site's reuse, most of which included a hotel, structured parking, retail and cultural uses, and open space. One of the key criteria for evaluating these scenarios was the potential to generate tax revenue for the City of Albany, given the loss in revenue that would result if the racetrack closed. There was also a strong interest in reuse options that incorporated sustainable development principles, such as prioritizing access for bicycles and pedestrians and using alternative energy sources.

In 2011, Golden Gate Fields was presented as a candidate site for the new 2 million square foot campus of Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory. More than 20 other sites in the East Bay also were considered. In January 2012, the University of California announced the selection of the Richmond Field Station as their preferred site. As of 2015, the racetrack is continuing to operate and remains an important revenue source for the City of Albany.

Since 2012, the focus of waterfront planning in Albany has been on implementing the McLaughlin Eastshore State Park Plan. This included the relocation of approximately 60 homeless individuals living in encampments on the Albany Bulb in 2013, and the launch of a park transition planning process in 2014. The Transition Plan is providing conceptual recommendations for recreation, habitat restoration, and shoreline resiliency. The current planning process also includes discussion of the transfer of waterfront area properties owned by the City of Albany to the East Bay Regional Park District.

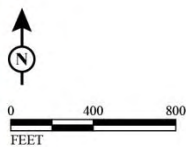
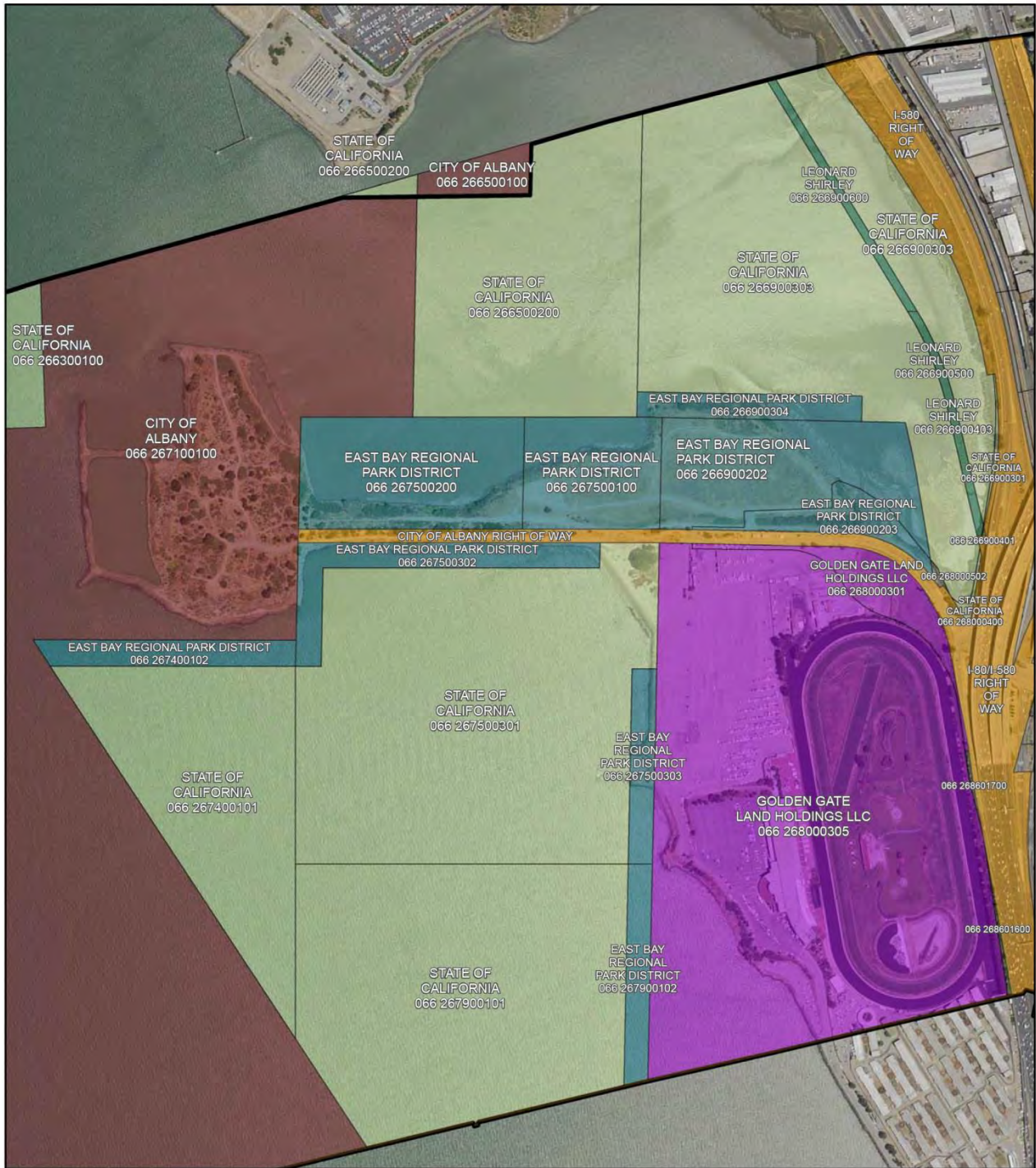
C. PHYSICAL CHARACTER

The Albany waterfront includes approximately 175 acres of non-tidal land. Of this total, about 107 acres is associated with Golden Gate Fields, while 68 acres is publicly owned.¹ As shown in Figure 10-1, the public landowners are East Bay Regional Park District, the City of Albany, and the State Lands Commission.

There are six major subareas along the waterfront (see photo illustration on P. 10-7):

- The Albany Plateau is an area of approximately 20 acres owned by the East Bay Regional Park District (EBRPD). This is a relatively flat, sparsely vegetated area north of the racetrack property. Buchanan Street runs along the southern edge of the Plateau, and the Albany Mudflats State Marine Reserve lies to the north.
- The Albany Neck is a peninsula extending roughly 2,000 feet from the Plateau area west into San Francisco Bay. The Neck is about 250 feet wide at its narrowest point and occupies about 15 acres. Most of the Neck is owned by EBRPD, but a narrow strip extending the length of the peninsula is owned by the City of Albany. The Albany Neck and Bulb were both created by building dikes with slag waste and then backfilling the cells with construction debris. An extensive amount of concrete rubble and imported fill was deposited in the area during the 1960s, 70s, and early 80s.

¹ The acreages here are based on aerial photographs. Other sources may indicate slightly different totals. Some of the discrepancy relates to how tidal areas and ponds are counted, or how parcels that are partially submerged are measured.



LEGEND
 Albany City Limit

FIGURE 10-1
 Waterfront Land Ownership

SOURCE: City of Albany (2014).

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Major subareas along the Albany waterfront

- The Albany Bulb is located at the west end of the Neck and covers about 30 acres. Partially submerged rock breakwaters create lagoons off the eastern and western shores. The bulb rises to an elevation of almost 50 feet above sea level and includes exposed construction debris and scattered pieces of informal folk art. Much of the area is covered with non-native plant species, along with wildlife that has adapted to this habitat.
- Albany Beach is a small area of less than 2 acres south of the Buchanan Street right-of-way and west of the Golden Gate Fields parking lot. The Beach is one of the few examples of a sandy beach and dune complex in the Central Bay. It has formed over the past 60 years due to the orientation of the Albany Neck, sending waves of bay sand on to the shoreline. Portions of the area experience ponding during high tides and heavy storms.
- Golden Gate Fields racetrack is the single largest parcel in Albany, and occupies most of the land south of Buchanan Street. The racetrack property extends across the City limits into Berkeley, where the horse stables are located. This area includes Fleming Point, which at 60 feet above sea level is the highest point along the shoreline.
- Albany State Marine Reserve includes the area west of Interstate 580 between Buchanan Street and the Richmond City limits. This area consists of salt marshes and tidal mudflats and is mostly submerged. Most of this area is owned by the State Lands Commission.

The remainder of the area consists of open water. From the Albany bulb, the city limits of Albany extend approximately two miles west into San Francisco Bay, and include over 2,300 acres of open water.

D. McLAUGHLIN EASTSHORE STATE PARK

Park Planning and Design

In 1995, the Albany City Council adopted the following six objectives for the Eastshore State Park:

- Protect and enhance land and water habitats
- Promote the appreciation of the natural features and beauty of San Francisco Bay
- Provide a safe and secure environment for children and adults
- Complete Albany's segment of the Bay Trail
- Provide adequate access to the waterfront for people of all ages and physical abilities
- Provide a variety of recreational opportunities, including organized and informal amateur sports, observation of nature, hiking, bicycling, and water-related activities

These objectives were carried forward in the Eastshore State Park Plan adopted by the East Bay Regional Park District (EBRPD) in 2002. The State Park Plan created a system of management zones within the park, using classifications of "Recreation", "Conservation", and "Preservation." The designation of a given area depended on such factors as habitat value, access, aesthetics, and natural features. The 2002 Plan designated the Albany Plateau for Recreation, and the Neck and Bulb for Conservation. Aquatic areas were similarly classified, with the Mudflats north of the Albany Neck and Plateau designated for Preservation and the remaining off-shore waters designated for Recreation.

The 2002 Plan also provides overarching policies for the entire park system. The policies and actions in this Element largely reflect those directives.



Mudflats along the north side of the Albany Neck

Photo: Doug Davidson

The original vision for the Albany Plateau, expressed in both the City's 1995 proposal and the 2002 Master Plan, was to develop the eastern portion for active recreation, including sports fields. The subsequent decision to locate the Tom Bates Regional Sports Complex at the west end of Gilman Street in Berkeley made it impractical to locate large-scale athletic facilities just a mile north in Albany. Additionally, development of the Berkeley Sports Complex included a mitigation measure which dedicated almost half of the Albany Plateau as a burrowing owl habitat area.

A future planning program should address the desired future uses in this area, as well as the future of the Burrowing Owl Preserve. If a "Recreation" designation is retained, a more passive program is likely, with an emphasis on activities such as bird watching, hiking/ walking, picnicking, and informal recreation. Other uses could be considered based on public input and direction from EBRPD, who owns the land. Protection of the wetlands below the northern edge of the Plateau remains a priority.

The "Conservation" designation for the Albany Neck and Bulb remains appropriate. As noted earlier, a transition planning process is underway for these areas. The overall concept is to retain the semi-wild and undeveloped character. Improvements that involve mass grading and the wholesale removal of vegetation would be considered inappropriate. While some remediation of rubble piles and protruding rebar is needed, much of the concrete debris and exposed landfill materials will remain. These materials provide a reminder of the site's history and in some cases contribute to its habitat value.

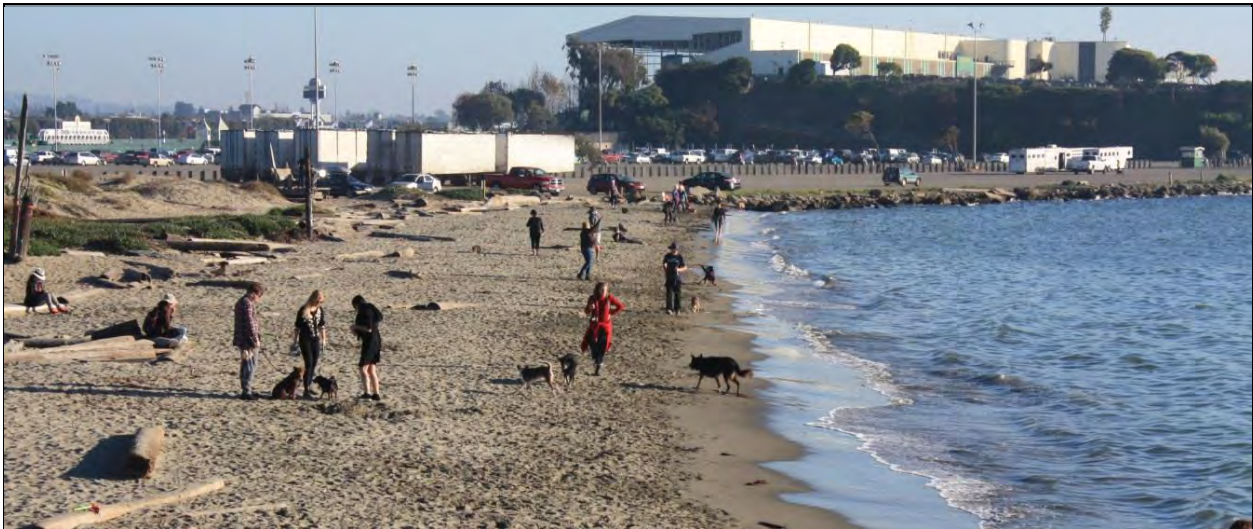
Trails and other amenities are being designed to maximize views, taking advantage of vista points such as Fleming Point and the west end of the Bulb. Only minimal lighting improvements are planned for the park, primarily at the entrance near the parking area.

While the predominant activity at the shoreline park will be passive recreation, new amenities are planned in strategic locations. These include restrooms, picnic tables, trash receptacles, and access ramps for non-motorized watercraft near Albany Beach (see text box). Interpretive signage also is planned, with an emphasis on the history and evolution of the shoreline, the role of landfill in creating the park, and the shoreline ecosystem. Wayfinding signage also is planned, including directional and entry signs.

The Neck and Bulb areas have a history of folk art, including paintings on rocks and concrete, and sculpture made from landfill debris. The art is one of the more memorable elements of the landscape, although much of it is deteriorating due to exposure to wind and weather. There are also two pieces of "sanctioned" public art, both located near the parking area at the west end of Buchanan Street.

The Eastshore State Park Plan proposes that art pieces be evaluated for retention or removal as the park is developed. There is interest in retaining some of the works, although the issue of whether these works should be actively maintained, or recognized as temporal (e.g., allowed to deteriorate with the elements) continues to be discussed. Public art is seen by many as an important aspect of placemaking along the waterfront, and something to be incorporated in future plans.

The park is also a popular dog walking destination. The State Park Plan calls for managing dog activity in a way that protects habitat values and enhances public safety. Both the State of California and the EBRPD have developed policies on this issue. The General Plan proposes no changes to dog policy for the waterfront, nor changes to current enforcement practices. Changes may be considered in the future.



Restoring Albany Beach

Albany Beach and the southern shoreline of the Albany Neck are currently the focus of an extensive improvement effort known as the Albany Beach Restoration and Public Access Project. The project is being led by the East Bay Regional Park District.

At Albany Beach, the project includes clean-up of creosote-treated wood and other debris, construction of a parking lot, water access, picnic facilities, trash receptacles, a new restroom, informational signs, wetland restoration, and dune enhancement and expansion. The new parking lot will include bicycle racks and a staging area for non-motorized watercraft. Trail access also is planned, including an accessible ramp. The dunes and seasonal wetlands in this area will be planted with native species, and many of the hazardous non-native species will be pruned or removed.

To the south of Albany Beach, a new 4,200-foot segment of the Bay Trail is planned, linking Buchanan Street to Gilman Street. The southern portion of the trail will follow the existing Golden Gate Fields access road. Further north, the trail will be constructed along Fleming Point west of the racetrack parking lot. Retaining walls and slope stabilization are proposed, in addition to drainage improvements, fencing, signs and pavement striping.

The project also includes reconstruction of the shoreline along the south side of the Albany Neck. This will improve habitat value, prevent erosion, and increase resilience against rising sea level. Some of the concrete and metal rubble in this area will be removed, and the shoreline will be re-contoured to create intertidal and submerged habitat. Native grasses and shrubs will be planted on the upland slopes nearby.

The existing Spur Trail along the Neck is being resurfaced as part of this process, with stormwater drainage improvements added. The project also includes removal of non-native invasive species in key areas, fencing to limit access to sensitive areas, and grading and rock revetments to stabilize the shoreline and prepare for rising sea levels. Rock clusters, artificial reefs, roosting islands, and small pocket beaches may be used to enhance habitat in this area.

Waterfront Access

There are three primary objectives relating to waterfront access in Albany. First, the City seeks to connect its neighborhoods and business districts to the waterfront, overcoming barriers such as Interstate 80 and the Union Pacific Railroad. Second, the City seeks to improve lateral access along the waterfront itself, including completion of the Bay Trail and the development of spur trails along the Albany Neck, Bulb, and Plateau. Third, the City seeks to improve recreational water access in appropriate locations.

A key part of the first objective is an emphasis on non-motorized access. While some increase in vehicle parking is planned to meet local and regional demand at McLaughlin Eastshore State Park, the priority is on making it safer, easier, and more convenient to reach the Albany waterfront on foot, by bicycle, or via public transit. With the exception of emergency and maintenance vehicles, auto access beyond the current terminus of Buchanan Street will continue to be prohibited.

The Buchanan Street bicycle and pedestrian path is an important milestone in connecting Albany to the shoreline. There may be opportunities for additional links. The City's Active Transportation Plan calls for a possible crossing of the Union Pacific Railroad in the vicinity of University Village (east of Target). Crossing Interstate 80 (or 580), in a manner similar to the Berkeley pedestrian and bicycle bridge south of University Avenue, would be more challenging, but could be considered in the future. A collaborative project with several cities could be considered to address the high cost of such a crossing.

Planned improvements to lateral access along the shoreline include completion of the Bay Trail between Buchanan Street and Gilman Street. The Bay Trail is a 400-mile pathway system that encircles San Francisco Bay, including numerous spur trails. The proposed 4,200' trail extension along the Albany shoreline will close a major gap in the system and connect Albany to Berkeley and points south.



Spur trail on the south side of the Albany Neck

Photo: Doug Donahue

As part of EBRPD's Albany Beach project, the upper trail along the Albany Neck has been widened and the lower trail has been reconstructed as an ADA accessible trail. Although the lower trail has been reduced in width, it remains wide enough to accommodate emergency and maintenance vehicles. Other planned improvements for Albany Beach include an access ramp for non-motorized boats, a parking lot, improved access from the parking area to the beach, a restroom, and a graded surface area for non-motorized watercraft.

As part of the Transition Plan and Eastshore State Park General Plan, a system of trails also is planned at the Albany Bulb and on the northern edge of the Albany Plateau. New trails will be sited and designed to provide a range of experiences for the pedestrian and bicyclist. Some trails may be designed for dual use by both modes of travel, while some of the secondary trails may be designed for pedestrians only. Trails will also be designed to minimize conflicts with sensitive habitat areas, reduce the risk of injury to hikers and cyclists, and maximize scenic views and vistas for park visitors. Trail design will also incorporate principles of universal access, so that persons of all mobility levels may enjoy the park. Wayfinding signs and other amenities that enhance the visitor experience will be included.

Opportunities for non-motorized watercraft access, and for activities such as fishing and swimming, will continue to be explored. Albany Beach and the south side of the Albany Neck are presently popular locations for windsurfing and kayaking. There are no designated locations for fishing, boating, or aquatic sports.

Future plans for the Neck and Bulb areas may also include soft shoreline improvements. Recreational water access will continue to be limited in environmentally sensitive areas such as the State Marine Reserve.

Habitat Management

Protection and enhancement of land and water habitat has been a longstanding goal for the Albany waterfront. The mudflats and Bay waters support abundant water birds and aquatic life and the upland areas support birds and small mammals that have adapted to the areas's vegetation and topography. Activities such as bird watching and nature observation are popular activities at the waterfront and the "untamed" setting is one of the area's major draws. The city's waterfront provides an excellent example of the relationship between natural systems and human intervention, and the ability of disturbed land to support diverse plant and animal life.

Opportunities for habitat enhancement and restoration are being pursued as the area transitions to a state park. This includes the introduction of native plant species and the control of invasive and non-native vegetation. The approach to habitat management is not to entirely remove all non-native species and create a "pristine" environment. This would require levels of grading and landscape modification that would be inconsistent with the vision for the park. Rather the approach is to recognize the co-existence of native and non-native plant communities, promote good stewardship, and increase the percentage of the area that supports native plants.

Some of the habitat restoration measures will be aimed at specific areas. For example, breaching of the lagoon at the western end of the Bulb has been discussed to reduce human and dog intrusion in this area and to provide additional roosting areas for shorebirds. Restoration of Albany Beach and an adjacent wetland area also is proposed to enhance the unique habitat in that area, taking into consideration the long-term effects of sea level rise.

Substantial portions of the shoreline consist of sensitive tidal mudflats and salt marshes. Actions to improve water quality and protect special status species in these areas may be taken in the future. Public access in such areas, which include the northern shoreline of the Albany Plateau and Neck, will continue to be limited. Interpretive signs and exhibits along nearby trails can enhance the visitor experience and increase the public's awareness of its wildlife value.

Responding to Sea Level Rise and Other Hazards

Over the next century, the Albany waterfront will be impacted by the effects of climate change, particularly rising sea levels. As noted in the Environmental Hazards Element, sea levels are rising in response to thermal expansion of the oceans and the melting of land ice in the polar regions. This could lead to increased inundation, flooding, erosion, wave heights, and groundwater salinity along the shoreline. The Bay Conservation and Development Commission indicates possible increases in mean sea level of 55 to 65 inches by 2100.

Future waterfront trails and other shoreline improvements are being designed to anticipate the possible effects of rising sea levels. At the same time, engineered revetments (armored stone) and other measures are being considered to make the shoreline more resilient. These improvements provide the added benefit of stabilizing landfill and protecting water quality.

Measures are also underway to remediate hazardous materials on the Albany Neck and Bulb. Between 1963 and 1983, an estimated 2,000,000 cubic yards of landfill material was placed on the waterfront, including concrete, steel, asphalt, bricks, wood, vegetation, street sweepings, and dredge spoils. In recent years, soil and groundwater testing has been performed to determine the presence of contaminants such as petroleum hydrocarbons, heavy metals, and pesticides. Methane gas and chloroform levels also have been evaluated. Overall, risks to public health and water quality are low.



Burrowing Owl Protection

The burrowing owl was once common along the San Francisco Bay shoreline. The owl is considered a California Species of Special Concern due to its dwindling population and the loss of its habitat.

In 2007, an area of almost nine acres on the Albany Plateau was designated as a burrowing owl preserve as part of the mitigation program for the Tom Bates Regional Sports Complex in Berkeley. Artificial burrows were created to simulate the abandoned ground squirrel burrows where the owls typically live.

Regular monitoring of the owl preserve has taken place since 2007. As of 2015, no owls had been observed. Alternatives to the current use may be considered in the future.

A review of remediation needs was conducted as part of the 2015-16 transition planning process. It relied primarily on prior studies. As noted earlier, removal of physical hazards such as protruding rebar and sharp concrete edges is part of the park improvement process.

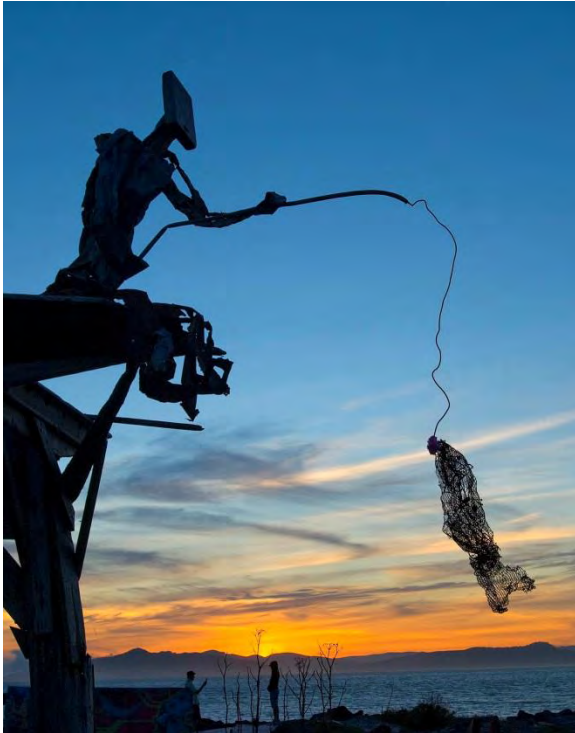


Photo: Doug Davidson

Folk art on the Albany Bulb

E. GOLDEN GATE FIELDS

This General Plan carries forward the 1992 “Commercial Recreation” map designation for Golden Gate Fields. The designation presumes a continuation of the current (racetrack) use for the immediate future. The City recognizes that future planning and environmental review for the site will be needed—either proactively, in anticipation of potential change or reactively, in response to a specific proposal. If the owners of the land wish to develop their property with uses other than those allowed by the Commercial Recreation designation, one or more General Plan Amendments must be submitted, considered, and approved by the City and the voters of Albany prior to adoption.

The 2008-2010 Voices to Vision process provides a starting point for future discussions on the site. It established the basic premise that the redevelopment of the racetrack, if pursued, should set aside a substantial portion of the site as open space. Such open space would be integrated into the shoreline park system, providing additional amenities for Albany residents.

The Voices to Vision Final Report concluded that future activities on the site should retain—and possibly increase—the tax revenues currently generated by activities on the site. The report further recommended that any future use on the site be relatively low in scale and designed according to green and sustainable building principles. Finally, it suggested that any future development recognize the significance of this property to the entire East Bay shoreline. Its size and aesthetic context make it a truly exceptional site that requires outstanding design and planning.

F. GOALS, POLICIES, AND ACTIONS

GOAL W-1: SHORELINE PARK

Transform the Albany shoreline into a great waterfront park that provides opportunities for recreation, inspiration, environmental education, habitat protection, and enjoyment.

POLICIES

Policy W-1.1: Preservation, Conservation, and Recreation Areas

Utilize the Eastshore State Park General Plan designations of **Preservation Areas**, **Conservation Areas**, and **Recreation Areas** as a framework for the planning and design of the Albany portion of the proposed McLaughlin Eastshore State Park.

Pursuant to the Eastshore State Park General Plan, these designations are applied as follows:

- *The Albany State Marine Reserve (Albany mudflats) is designated as a Preservation Area. This area has unique habitat resource values that require protection and preservation. Public access to the mudflats is restricted to safety, scientific, maintenance and controlled interpretive and educational activities.*
- *Albany Beach, Albany Neck and Bulb, and part of the Albany Plateau are designated as Conservation Areas. These are areas where natural habitat values will be protected and enhanced while accommodating lower intensity recreation that is compatible with and dependent on those values.*
- *The remainder of the Albany Plateau was designated as a Recreation Area in the Eastshore State Park Plan. Subsequent decisions resulted in the development of the Tom Bates Regional Sports Complex in Berkeley and the dedication of a large portion of the Plateau as Burrowing Owl Habitat. Future assessments of the Burrowing Owl Habitat may be used to determine if the area should retain its Recreation Area designation or should be re-designated as a Conservation Area.*

Policy W-1.2: Site Planning Principles

Locate visitor-serving facilities in areas that have convenient access, lower habitat value, and more suitability for higher intensity uses.

Policy W-1.3: Education Mission

Ensure that the planning and design of the shoreline park expands public awareness and education about the environmental, cultural, and historical significance of the waterfront. Park exhibits should explore changing attitudes about the Bay, demonstrate the way the shoreline has changed in response to human settlement, explain the role of refuse and landfill in creating the current shoreline, and provide opportunities for visitors to learn about the park's natural and cultural resources.

Policy W-1.4: Archaeological Resources

Protect and preserve archaeological resources in the event such resources are identified as shoreline park improvements are completed.

Policy W-1.5: Support Facilities

Include plans for appropriate visitor support facilities such as restrooms, water fountains, benches, and picnic tables in the design of the park's recreation areas.

The visitor support facilities listed above are currently planned for the Albany Beach area and could be considered in additional areas in the long-term future.

Policy W-1.6: Design Identity

Encourage a clear design identity for the Albany's waterfront parklands which helps to unify its different subareas and create a stronger sense of place.

Policy W-1.7: Landscaping

Emphasize the use of drought-tolerant plant species that are native to the East Bay shoreline in park landscaping plans.

Policy W-1.8: View Protection

Locate future facilities to be sensitive to scenic views from and through the park area. Buildings and structures in the park should generally be one story in height.

Policy W-1.9: Hazard Remediation

Remediate environmental hazards which may be present as park areas are improved for public access and use. This could include mitigation of geologic hazards, such as settlement, slope stability, and erosion. Additional testing and geotechnical studies may be warranted prior to excavation, grading, removal or reuse of filled soils, and other construction activities.

Policy W-1.10: Operating Costs

Ensure that new waterfront park improvements consider the long-term costs of operations and maintenance, and potential impacts on Albany's municipal budget.

IMPLEMENTING ACTIONS**Action W-1.A: Transition Plan**

Actively participate in the development of a park transition plan for the public lands along the Albany shoreline to be incorporated into McLaughlin Eastshore State Park.

Action W-1.B: Management Unit Plans

Support the future preparation of more detailed plans for the various management units in the Albany portion of the park. Such plans should establish the nature, scale, and location of new visitor facilities and associated services.

Management unit plans would include more detailed surveys of existing conditions and would more precisely identify where new improvements will be located. They would also document the potential impacts of new facilities and activities on natural resources, traffic, access, views, and other factors. Such plans will also specify how and where utilities and other services will be provided.



Folk art on the Albany Bulb

Photo: Doug Donelson

Action W-1.C: Maintenance Plans

Participate in the development of maintenance plans for the shoreline park. Such plans should address topics such as pest management, training for staff, and procedures and techniques for managing different park ecosystems.

Action W-1.D: Design Themes

Participate in the development of design guidelines or standards that can be used for facilities throughout the park, including buildings, signage and landscaping. The intent is not to design all facilities to look the same, but rather to ensure they share enough similarity in style and materials to have a perceivable association with one another.

Action W-1.E: Public Art Installations

Explore the feasibility of a formal program of waterfront public art consistent with the Albany Public Arts Master Plan, the mission of State Parks, and the goals for the Eastshore State Park project. Such a program would include guidelines for art that is not formally authorized, such as the installations and structures on the Albany Bulb.

The mission of a formal arts program would be to: (a) provide a forum for exploring the relationship between arts and the natural environment; (b) promote understanding of the environmental, historical, cultural, and sociological context of the park through art; (c) foster expressions of art which reflect the unique setting of the Albany waterfront; and (d) foster work that reflects the ethnic and cultural diversity of the Bay Area. Prior to launching a formal art program, the shoreline's artistic values should be identified and documented. The public should be engaged in discussions about how best to preserve, rehabilitate and further invest in those values.

See the Community Services and Facilities Element for additional policies on public art.

Action W-1.F: Removal of Safety Hazards

Work with appropriate regional and state agencies to reduce safety hazards associated with construction debris (rubble piles, protruding rebar, glass, etc.) on the surface of the Neck and Bulb areas. Clean-up programs should minimize disturbance of wildlife habitat and avoid wholesale removal of vegetation.

Action W-1.G: Eastshore State Park General Plan Update

Support an update to the Eastshore State Park General Plan to reflect changes since the Plan was adopted in 2002. The City should be an active participant in this process and will strive for a constructive dialogue among interest groups and stakeholders regarding the future of its shoreline parklands.



View east to Gateview Towers from the Albany Bulb

GOAL W-2: WATERFRONT RECREATION

Plan for a wide range of recreational activities at the waterfront, expanding the recreational options currently available to Albany residents and residents of surrounding communities.

POLICIES

Policy W-2.1: Recreational Diversity

Work with appropriate local, regional, and state agencies to provide recreational opportunities for visitors of all ages, ethnicities, incomes, education levels, and physical abilities. Such opportunities should be provided in a manner that is compatible with the park's natural and cultural resources.

Policy W-2.2: Hiking and Picnicking

Improve opportunities for hiking and picnicking at the Albany waterfront, building on the existing network of trails and activity patterns.

Policy W-2.3: Swimming

Permit swimming at Albany Beach to the extent consistent with water quality objectives, public safety concerns, and aquatic habitat protection goals. Ancillary support facilities such as a restroom and changing room should be developed nearby but not on the beach itself.

Policy W-2.4: Dogs

Ensure that policies for allowing dogs in the park provide adequate protection for wildlife and are consistent with the ecological restoration and public safety goals for the park.

Policy W-2.5: Night-time Use

Design and program the Albany shoreline park for daytime uses only. The area should generally be closed during designated evening hours. Any outdoor lighting should be of low intensity and shielded to prevent glare.

See also Policy CON-5.6 on reducing light pollution and glare.

Policy W-2.6: Water Activities

Ensure that boating, wind-surfing, and other water-oriented activities are managed to reflect the varying levels of sensitivity of the local marine environment, consistent with the Eastshore State Park Plan.

The Eastshore State Park Plan includes guidelines for recreational activities in the waters off of Albany, including various forms of non-motorized boating. Watercraft are prohibited in the Albany State Marine Reserve, which lies between the Albany Plateau and Neck on the south and Point Isabel on the north. Motorized boats and motorized personal watercraft are generally prohibited in the entire park, and non-motorized craft such as sailboards and kayaks are permitted in the waters south of the Albany Neck. Fishing is permitted in designated Recreation and Conservation areas, primarily on piers and structurally protected shoreline areas on the south side of the Albany Neck. The collection of invertebrates for food or bait in the park's tidal mudflats, marshes, and rocky shoreline areas is prohibited.

See also Policy W-3.5 on water access.

Policy W-2.7: Intergovernmental Coordination

Coordinate with the East Bay Regional Park District, and the cities of Berkeley, Emeryville, and Richmond, to maximize the potential benefits of the Eastshore State Park, avoid redundancies and duplicative facilities in each city, and ensure that waterfront activities are compatible with the recreational activities currently available or planned in each community.

Recreational facilities should be planned within a regional context and should complement, rather than duplicate, existing facilities.

IMPLEMENTING ACTIONS

Action W-2.A: User Surveys

Conduct periodic user surveys to monitor how the park is used and determine the types of activities and services that could be supported by park visitors.

Action W-2.B: Consultation with Stakeholders

Consult with appropriate recreational, environmental, and other stakeholders as plans for the park are developed.

This should include bird watching groups, ecological groups, dog advocates, bicycle-related advocacy groups, water-related activity groups, historians, artists, and other groups with a stake in the outcome of plans for the waterfront.

GOAL W-3: SHORELINE ACCESS

Connect Albany residents to their waterfront, while facilitating pedestrian and bicycle access along the shoreline itself.

POLICIES

Policy W-3.1: Emphasis on Non-Motorized Access

In order to minimize increases in traffic and parking demand, create a shoreline circulation system in which walking and biking are the primary and preferred modes of transportation. Motorized vehicle access for purposes other than emergency response or maintenance should be prohibited west of the Buchanan Street turnaround.

Policy W-3.2: Trails

Provide a convenient and attractive system of multi-use trails that links all subareas along the waterfront. To the extent feasible, the trail system should be designed and constructed to provide universal access for persons with disabilities.

The trail system should be designed to ensure opportunities for visitors to enjoy the diverse topography, wildlife, and scenic views in the park.

Policy W-3.3: Pedestrian and Bicycle Connections to the Shoreline

Work with Caltrans, EBRPD, BART, the Alameda County Transportation Commission, and other agencies to complete a system of bikeway and pedestrian connections from the Ohlone Greenway and other parts of Albany to the Bay Trail. Connections should be considered as part of any future redevelopment of Golden Gate Fields.

Policy W-3.4: Parking

Provide a limited number of new motorized vehicle parking spaces as part of the State Park improvements, with spaces located in a way that minimizes the need for new interior roadways. Parking strategies should be based on actual use patterns, rather than “special event” or “worst case” scenarios. Bicycle parking should be a component of any future parking area.

Policy W-3.5: Water Access

Designate areas to provide water access for windsurfers, kayakers, and other non-motorized watercraft.



Photo: Doug Davidson

Yoga on the waterfront

IMPLEMENTING ACTIONS

Action W-3.A: Bay Trail Construction

Implement the Bay Trail Plan along the Albany Shoreline.

The Bay Trail will improve access through the park and connect the Albany waterfront to the shoreline in Berkeley, Richmond, and other bayfront communities. The trail is an important unifying element within the park as well as a means of improving access to and along the shoreline. The Albany portion of the trail includes a completed segment north of Buchanan Street, a section parallel to the north side of Buchanan, and a planned segment extending from the Albany Beach south approximately 4,200 feet along the west side of Golden Gate Fields (Fleming Point). Retaining walls, slope stabilization, drainage, fencing, signs, and pavement striping are planned for the Fleming Point segment. The new section of trail will be designed to minimize disturbance of wildlife and prevent access to the mudflats by people and dogs.

Action W-3.B: Spur Trail Improvements

Improve the spur trails extending from Albany Beach to the Albany Bulb and the Albany Plateau area.

Trail improvements are planned along what is now the lower road along the Albany Neck, terminating at the view point at the Bulb. A loop trail around the Bulb also is planned, with benches at key viewpoints.

Action W-3.C: Wayfinding

Work with Caltrans and EBRPD to develop and implement a coordinated wayfinding and signage program that provides clear direction to visitors on park access.

Action W-3.D: Albany Beach Parking

In conjunction with beach improvements and development of the Bay Trail, implement plans for a new parking lot and access drive serving Albany Beach. Consider the need for off-street parking as other sections of the shoreline park are improved.

GOAL W-4: WATERFRONT ECOLOGY

Preserve, enhance, and restore the unique ecology of the Albany waterfront.

POLICIES

Policy W-4.1: Native Plant Restoration

Support the preservation and enhancement of native plant communities in the waterfront area, while also encouraging the reduction of invasive and non-native species.

As specific park projects are planned and implemented, programs to remove invasive species should be developed, with a priority placed on removing the most noxious weeds. These areas should be replanted with native species to the greatest extent feasible.

Policy W-4.2: Upland Habitat

Support the long-term protection of existing upland areas along the waterfront, particularly in those areas designated for conservation by the Eastshore State Park Plan. Upland wildlife habitat should also be protected within active recreation areas, consistent with the design of planned facilities.

Policy W-4.3: Wetland Habitat

Support the conservation and restoration of wetlands as waterfront park improvements are constructed.

The City will support efforts by the East Bay Regional Park District and other agencies to restore wetlands along the Albany shoreline. This should include consultation with wetland scientists prior to grading or construction, as well as planning and designing improvements to minimize impacts to delineated wetlands. It further includes coordination with resource agencies, and provisions for monitoring to improve the long-term success of wetland restoration efforts. The City of Albany will be engaged in these efforts to the extent appropriate, and will work to ensure their successful implementation.

Policy W-4.4: Roosting Habitat

Support efforts by the East Bay Regional Park District and resource agencies to enhance roosting habitat for shorebirds, such as turning small peninsulas into islands, and adding rock or other material to raise existing roosts above higher tides.

Policy W-4.5: Buffers

Maintain or create buffer areas between trails and sensitive habitat areas where necessary to minimize wildlife disturbance.

Policy W-4.6: Access Restrictions

Minimize disruption of wildlife by restricting access by people and dogs in the most environmentally sensitive areas along the shoreline, and by siting trails and other facilities appropriate distances from these areas. Signs should be posted restricting access to the most sensitive areas.

Trails along the north and east side of the Albany Plateau and the north side of the Albany Neck should be designed to minimize disturbance of ducks, shorebirds, and other water birds on the Albany mudflats.

Policy W-4.7: Interpretive Signs and Exhibits

Encourage the use of interpretive signs and exhibits that discuss the value of tidal marshes, mudflats, wetlands, and sub-tidal habitats.

Policy W-4.8: Marine Habitat

Designate the most valuable marine habitat areas, including the Albany mudflats and the two sub-tidal areas at the west end of the Albany Bulb, as Aquatic Preservation or Conservation areas.

IMPLEMENTING ACTIONS

Action W-4.A: Botanic and Wildlife Surveys

Ensure that qualified botanists and wildlife biologists are engaged in the planning and design processes for waterfront improvements. Environmental professionals should be retained to identify potential habitat for special status plant and animal species, and to ensure that potential impacts to these species are avoided and minimized. If unavoidable impacts are possible, measures to offset those impacts should be identified and implemented.

Action W-4.B: Albany Beach Restoration

Continue to support implementation of the Albany Beach Restoration Project, including upper beach enhancement, expansion of the dune areas, seasonal wetland enhancement, landscaping with native plants and removal of invasive plants, new bioswales and stormwater management facilities, and removal of debris.

Action W-4.C: Lagoon Area Restoration

Support modifications to the levees that surround the lagoon at the west end of the Albany Bulb which enhance the habitat value of the area and reduce the likelihood of disturbance by humans and land animals.

Action W-4.D: New Interpretive Panels

Expand the number of interpretive panels at the park entrance that discuss the function of the mudflats in the Bay ecosystem and Pacific Flyway, in addition to identifying the birds and marine life that frequent the area.

Action W-4.E: Burrowing Owl Habitat Assessment

Support future assessments of the designated burrowing owl habitat area on the Albany Plateau. Such evaluations should be used to evaluate the degree of public access and range of future activities to be planned for this area.



Partial lagoon on the west end of the Albany Bulb

GOAL W-5: SUSTAINABLE SHORELINE

Create a safer, more resilient shoreline that is better integrated with the Bay's hydrologic and biological systems.

POLICIES

Policy W-5.1: Balanced Objectives

Strive for a balance between shoreline protection, waterfront access, environmental enhancement, recreation, education, and cost considerations in the planning and design of shoreline improvements.

Policies in other sections of the Waterfront Element reinforce this policy. Future park plans call for restoring native vegetation, limiting parking and paved surfaces, emphasizing pedestrian and bicycle access, improving transit to the waterfront, and siting facilities in a way that minimizes impacts on special status species and habitat.

Policy W-5.2: Carrying Capacity

Ensure that the level and character of park activities is managed in a way that does not exceed the carrying capacity of park resources.

Carrying capacity is defined by the Eastshore State Park Plan as "the land's inherent ability to sustain the integrity of natural systems and the land uses dependent on them over time. It implies that there is a point beyond which the ability to regenerate is exceeded by demands on the system, resulting in a loss in resource quality." This concept has been used by the Park District in its designation of "preservation," "conservation" and "recreation" areas and will continue to be used in future park planning.

Policy W-5.3: Green Construction

Ensure that any structural improvements on the waterfront are consistent with principles of green design and construction, including LEED certified construction, the use of photo-voltaics and other alternative energy sources, pervious pavement, low impact design, and site plans which respond to solar orientation and prevailing wind direction.

Policy W-5.4: Shoreline Protection

Replace portions of the shoreline that consist of construction debris, concrete, and slag material with materials and designs that improve their long-term function and enhance their appearance.

This could include structural reinforcement where greater public use is envisioned or "softening" where a more natural appearance is desired. The specific treatment in each location should be determined on a case by case basis. Higher priority should be given to shoreline protection projects in areas of high activity and areas vulnerable to erosion.

Policy W-5.5: Sea Level Rise and Tsunamis

Ensure that all structural and recreational improvements along the waterfront incorporate sea level rise and tsunamis as a design factor.

Policy W-5.6: Water Quality

Design all drainage, water, and wastewater systems to maximize the potential for environmental benefits. This should include minimizing the area of impervious surface, using drought-tolerant landscaping, and incorporating bio-swales and other features which minimize water runoff. In areas where landscape irrigation is required, water systems should be designed for the eventual delivery of reclaimed water.

Policy W-5.7: Life-Cycle Impacts

Minimize the life-cycle impact of park development by reducing material use, reusing existing materials, and using recycled materials wherever feasible.

IMPLEMENTING ACTIONS

Action W-5.A: Shoreline Improvement Projects

Support EBRPD in the implementation of future shoreline restoration and improvement projects.

The most recent project included stabilization of 1,800 feet of shoreline, replacing concrete rubble and debris with a stabilized rock toe and rock shoreline revetment. It is intended to prevent erosion, protect water quality, and enhance habitat. It also included upper slope landscaping and repair of trails from Buchanan Street to the Bulb. Off-shore habitat enhancement also may be considered.



Photo: Doug Davidson

Projected sea level rise will affect many parts of the Albany shoreline, including this area at the west end of the Bulb

GOAL W-6: GOLDEN GATE FIELDS

Ensure that any change of use at Golden Gate Fields is consistent with Albany’s values, protects the shoreline as a place of scenic beauty, and advances principles of economic and environmental sustainability.

POLICIES**Policy W-6.1: Measure C**

Require voter approval for any change of allowed use, zoning map change, General Plan Amendment, or development agreement, consistent with the provisions of Albany Measure C. The primary objectives of any future change in use should be the preservation of maximum feasible open space, public access to the shoreline, improvement of outdoor recreation activities, integration with the McLaughlin Eastshore State Park, and enhancement of the waterfront’s unique qualities. Any future development on the waterfront should be low in scale and height, allowing the waterfront itself to be the dominant visual feature.

Policy W-6.2: Voices to Vision

Consider the input provided during the 2009-2011 “Voices to Vision” process during future discussions regarding the Golden Gate Fields site. The Albany community should continue to be engaged in the waterfront planning process to the greatest extent possible.

Policy W-6.3: Aesthetic Quality

Protect the scenic and visual qualities of the waterfront in any future private or public development on the Golden Gate Fields site.

Policy W-6.4: Fiscal Impacts

Ensure that any decision regarding the future use of Golden Gate Fields considers the potential fiscal impacts on the City of Albany and the Albany Unified School District, and includes measures to achieve a positive fiscal outcome.

Policy W-6.5: Community Benefits

Ensure that any future reuse proposal for Golden Gate Fields provides community benefits, such as funding for affordable housing, parks, and shoreline access improvements, within the Albany city limits. Such benefits need not be on the site itself, and should be provided in a manner consistent with the goals and policies of this General Plan.

IMPLEMENTING ACTIONS

Action W-6.A: Shoreline Setback

Prohibit construction of any buildings within a 100-foot minimum of the shoreline, as defined by the Bay Conservation and Development Commission (BCDC). Consider larger setbacks where possible to expand the parkland area along the shoreline.

Following the BCDC definition, the Codornices Creek estuary west of Interstate 80 is considered to be part of the "shoreline."

Action W-6.B: General Plan and Zoning Map Amendment

Develop a strategy for changing the General Plan designation of publically-owned properties on the waterfront from "Commercial Recreation" to "Parks and Open Space," and changing the corresponding zoning designation from "Waterfront" to "Public Facilities" or a new "Open Space" zone, taking into consideration the requirements of Measure C.

The 1992 General Plan designated 137 acres along the Albany waterfront as "Commercial Recreation." Since that time, about 30 acres of this area, including the Albany Plateau and area around the west end of Buchanan Street, has been acquired by the East Bay Regional Park District. This area should be re-designated as "Parks and Open Space." However, this change could require a citywide vote under Measure C, which could have a substantial fiscal impact. Options for making this amendment should be evaluated.

Action W-6.C: Shoreline Park Consistency

Ensure that any reuse plans for the Golden Gate Fields properties are sensitive to and support or enhance the adjoining McLaughlin Eastshore State Park lands.

Action W-6.D: Communication

Support an ongoing dialogue with the owners of Golden Gate Fields regarding track operations, special events, and long-term plans for the site. Active engagement of the landowner in waterfront planning should be encouraged.