



A Community Vision for Albany's Waterfront

EXCERPT

April 5, 2010

Fern Tiger Associates

**Complete Report and Appendix available afternoon
April 6, 2010 at www.voicestovision.com**



April 5, 2010

Mayor Joanne Wile
Vice Mayor Farid Javandel
Councilmembers Marge Atkinson, Robert Lieber, Peggy Thomsen
City of Albany
1000 San Pablo Avenue
Albany, CA 94706

Dear Mayor Wile and Members of the Albany City Council,

Enclosed find a copy of our final report and recommendations related to *Voices to Vision* - a unique community visioning process that brought together about one in every ten Albany adults to discuss the future of the waterfront.

In dozens of participatory group sessions, people shared their concerns and priorities, and learned about those of their neighbors. They considered their personal dreams and goals for the site, along with a host of environmental, land use, economic, and other considerations. Out of these spirited discussions, a vision for the Albany waterfront emerged -- a vision that does not belong to any one person. Rather, it's a composite vision created from a range of community voices that we believe captures the most critical elements of this two-year conversation.

Fern Tiger Associates' (FTA) goal, in this report, is to present both the story of *Voices to Vision* (as the process came to be called) and the data and findings that led to the recommendations. The "story" is intended to provide a chronicle of the thinking that led to the design of the community process and to capture the challenges, frustrations, excitement, and successes of the last two years. The report is intended to document *Voices to Vision*, with sources and materials, so that current (and future) Albany residents will know what transpired from start to finish in this process. The "story" is important because it lays the groundwork for the relevance of the data gathered during nearly 50 community sessions -- each with unique opinions, ideas, and biases; each attended by people with varying degrees of history related to the waterfront; and each with a variety of people who make up the city of Albany.

Two years ago, FTA – together with the Albany community – embarked on the *Voices to Vision* process. From the start, FTA hoped to take an open-minded approach, free of preconceived ideas and expectations. To design the community process, FTA conducted intensive research and interviewed more than 80 stakeholders in order to understand everything from what residents

knew about the site to where they got their news and information; from their experiences with previous efforts to get community input on the waterfront to their sense of the key city players.

Even during the first round of community sessions (May and June 2009), it wasn't entirely clear how the process would unfold: How many residents would participate? How would they perceive *Voices to Vision*? In what direction would the process take the community?

In the end, nearly 1,200 Albany residents participated in *Voices to Vision*. And, despite the contentious nature of previous discussions about the waterfront, the *Voices to Vision* sessions were inclusive, civil, creative, and, above all, productive. The spirit with which Albany residents approached *Voices to Vision* reflects their tremendous pride in this city, as well as their commitment to ensuring a sustainable future.

Thank you for the opportunity to work on this process with the city and the community. We hope this final report, and community vision for the waterfront, will help guide decisionmaking in meaningful ways.

Sincerely,

Fern Tiger
President, Fern Tiger Associates

enc. *Voices to Vision* Final Report - April 5, 2010, with full appendices

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Executive Summary

Executive Summary

For four decades, the 190-acre Albany waterfront has been perceived as the focus of a bitter tug-of-war between those who hope to see commercial development at the 102-acre, privately-owned portion that is currently Golden Gate Fields Racetrack (to maintain and/or increase tax revenues to the city) and those who favor transforming that parcel into a public park (open space). Over the years, numerous proposals have been put forward by private developers and by the landowners -- seeking to "maximize" the use of the land, for what is sometimes defined as "highest and best use." Citywide discussions of these proposals, held over the years, neither eased tensions nor clarified what residents want for the site. Rather, they deepened the divide between the two "sides."

**"One generation plants
the trees; another gets the
shade"** - Chinese Proverb

The discord over the waterfront was intensified in 2005-06 when, in the wake of the most recent developer-driven proposal for the site, a slate of "pro-park/anti-commercial development" candidates was elected to the Albany City Council. To complicate the situation, the racetrack had experienced a significant decline in attendance over the years, as a result of off-track and Internet betting, which impacted its tax commitment to the city. Once widely considered the most important local business, the racetrack was beginning to be seen by many in a new light. Its potential closure appeared to some residents an opportunity to turn the property into a large public park; others felt the lack of public funds to purchase, transform, and maintain the land, and the need for replacement tax revenue, should guide decisions about the waterfront.

With the future of the site in question, and the contentious nature of the issue at a fever pitch, the newly-installed city council decided to take a proactive stance. Rather than wait to react to a proposal from yet another developer, the city would find out what Albany residents really wanted at the waterfront. After all, a vote of residents was required in order to make any use changes to the site, as a result of a ballot initiative passed in 1990 that froze the restrictive zoning.

In March of 2008, the city of Albany hired Fern Tiger Associates (FTA) to conceive, design, and facilitate an appropriate process to educate and engage residents in a process to develop a shared vision for the future of the waterfront. By selecting a firm that specialized in public engagement work (rather than land use planning), the city signaled its commitment to community participation. This was to be a process in which people would provide their perspectives, ideas, and goals, rather than react to a fully-formed plan or proposal.

In response, FTA set out to design a process that responded to the concerns, issues, and perceptions of the community, and that offered opportunities for residents to provide meaningful input. Based on the complex history of waterfront

planning in Albany, FTA knew it needed to convince residents of the objectivity and neutrality of a new process; to build trust in the open and inclusive nature of *Voices to Vision* (as the process came to be named); to educate the broad community with facts related to the waterfront; and to establish the reliability of the information presented.

Thus, after nine months of research and strategizing, FTA began the outreach process in earnest. Several weeks before the launch of the first round of community sessions, FTA mailed, first class, a 20-page tabloid-sized publication to every Albany address. Filled with rich text, photographs, maps, and graphics, the newsletter covered the environmental, land use, economic, historic, and regulatory issues relevant to waterfront development. A comprehensive list of frequently asked questions was organized by topic area to allow easy access to specific facts, and a glossary of commonly used 'planning terms' was also included.

In May and June of 2009, FTA facilitated nearly 40 identical sessions, which ranged in size from 10 to 50 participants. The centerpiece of the sessions was the Albany Waterfront Game. Small groups of up to five residents sat together at

tables to discuss their desires for, and concerns about, the site. They had a site map (scaled at 1":200'), and plastic chips color-coded by land use, (e.g. hotel, museum, retail, open space, etc.), tax revenue information based on "use," and data about the height of any potential building. Working together, each table group determined which uses to include, and where to place the chips

(commercial and/or open space and/or public benefit) on the site, by considering and discussing the desired amount of open space, tax revenue generated, community benefits, and site concerns.

FTA organized the sessions by neighborhood, and held them in public spaces like the library/community center and senior center, in order to make the process feel open and inviting. By limiting participation at these sessions to Albany residents, and allowing individuals to attend just one session, FTA sought to address two common complaints about earlier citywide processes – that people who lived outside of Albany dominated the discussion and that sequential meetings attract a small core of repeat attendees who are fixated on the waterfront rather than "everyday residents" who care about the waterfront as well as other local issues, and do not have the time to invest in multiple meetings.

To gather as wide a range of participants as possible, additional sessions were offered for non-English speakers (Spanish and Chinese) and those needing child

BY THE NUMBERS

- more than **5,000 pages** of documents reviewed
- more than **80 interviews**
- **10 people** researching and fact checking publication
- 20-page tabloid size publication sent to **9,356 Albany addresses**
- more than **1,000 Albany adults** participated, at least once
- **1,257 adults** RSVPed
- **114 Albany adults** participated at all three opportunities (community session one, online survey, community session two)
- about **100 Albany youth** participated in phase one workshops
- sessions took place at **6 locations**
- **26 presentations** made to Albany commissions and city council
- process took almost **two years**
- phase one included **38 community sessions** over six weeks; phase two included **11 sessions** in one week
- sessions offered in **three languages**
- **1,276 game pieces** created for phase one "waterfront game"
- over **45,000 pieces of data** analyzed
- **21,114 attribute** cards collected in phase two sessions
- **9,094 postcards** with individual pass codes mailed for survey; **9,094 postcards** delivered as reminders for phase one; **9,094 postcards** mailed prior to phase two.
- **143 questions** answered in the publication and on the website

care. Separate sessions were held for regional stakeholders who lived outside of Albany, and for students at Albany High School.

At the conclusion of the first round of sessions, FTA had 199 detailed, annotated site maps. To clarify some terms (for example, the definition of “open space”), and to reach an even wider audience, FTA created a questionnaire that was available online in November. Then, over one weekend in January 2010, FTA held ten newly-designed, phase two community sessions for Albany residents (and one identical session for non-residents). The focal point for these final sessions was a series of six “conceptual” site plans (specifically related to the 102-acre portion of the property), which were developed out of the ideas and thinking generated by the community in the first round of 38 sessions, combined with additional information from the questionnaire. The scenarios were vetted by experts (economists, planners, architects, geotechnical engineers, transportation planners, environmentalists, public safety officials, cost estimators, etc.) and represented a range of options – from a 98-acre park to a mix of open space and development to a concept that included a good deal of commercial development to one that retained the racetrack. Residents were encouraged to discuss the conceptual site plans at their tables of six, and then to weigh in as individuals on the various attributes of the plans. Feedback gathered throughout *Voices to Vision* was used to inform the development of a set of guidelines for Albany’s waterfront (which are included in the full report - *A Community Vision for Albany’s Waterfront: April 5, 2010*).

About one in 10 adult residents participated in one or more ways to voice their ideas about the future of the waterfront. Residents appear to have a newfound sense of hope about the site, with more than half of those who participated saying they believe that *Voices to Vision* will lead to a coherent vision for the future of the waterfront; and an additional 35% reporting that they “hope it will.” Moreover, residents who were known to have had extremely different opinions about the future of the site worked together to establish shared concerns and desires. Out of these discussions, and out of the “common ground” that residents found with one another, a vision for the future of the Albany waterfront was articulated. It recognizes the importance of the entire site and of the extended impact the Albany waterfront has on the region. In summary, the Albany community envisions:

*a 190-acre waterfront that is a model
of environmental and economic sustainability;
that supports a multi-generational community,
small-scale, independently-owned businesses, and
local arts, culture, and cuisine.*

“It was fun to think like a planner and work with “building blocks” to best use this precious space. I thought it would be boring, but it was fun.”

“This was a creative take on the ‘town meeting.’ I think all ideas were expressed and considered. No one dominated and no one ‘zoned out.’ I spend a lot of time in meetings and this was a wonderful approach.”

“I liked the balanced approach, particularly in light of the absurd polarization that pro-environmental and pro-development camps adopted, when really, most people want to consider options on both sides.”

In addition to the detailed, recommended site design guidelines which are a major component of this report and which grew from *Voices to Vision*, “*A Community Vision for Albany’s Waterfront*” includes:

- **The Story of a Process** provides a brief history of the waterfront site, as well as insight into the city’s decision to engage the community in a discussion about the future of its waterfront. Along with a description of how the city selected Fern Tiger Associates (FTA) to design and facilitate a community process, this section describes the research and interviews that informed the development of the process, and the decision to organize community participation with a “block-by-block” approach.
- **Voices to Vision Phase One** describes the first phase of engagement, including outreach efforts to encourage participation and the design of the two-hour interactive community sessions. The session tools and activities, including exercises to explore a vision for both the city and the waterfront, are described. This section concludes with an analysis of the findings from the nearly 40 community sessions and participation of 650 people.
- **Surveying Albany Residents** discusses the online questionnaire, which was created to provide residents with another means to participate in *Voices to Vision*, and as a way to gain clarity about key terms and concepts. This section includes results of the online questionnaire.
- **Voices to Vision: Phase Two** explores the second phase of engagement, including how 10 sessions held over one weekend in January 2010 were publicized, designed, and facilitated. The format and activities of the community sessions are described, along with an analysis of findings.
- **Reflections** offers observations about the Albany community, the process by which nearly one in every ten residents came together to participate in *Voices to Vision*, and the collective vision that those voices helped to create.
- **Appendix** is a comprehensive collection of tools and materials relevant to each of the above-listed sections. It includes the nearly 200 community-generated maps from the May/June 2009 sessions; comments from the community through e-mail and other communiques; a sampling of photographs taken to document the *Voices to Vision* process; presentations made over the two-year period to the city council and various city commissions; reduced versions of all publications, handouts, the *Voices to Vision* website - www.voicestovision.com; the original request for qualifications (RFQ) issues by the city of Albany to identify a firm to engage with the city; FTA’s proposal; and detailed quantitative data generated through the *Voices to Vision* process.

Recommended Guidelines

RECOMMENDED GUIDELINES¹

1. Built Area and Dedicated Open Space

“Built” footprint (including associated circulation, roads, and parking) of any commercial or public structures (excluding amenities related directly to park activities) should not exceed a total of 27 acres (26% of the total land area of the site).

The minimum amount of new dedicated public open space shall be 75 acres (74% of the total land area of the site). Public open space includes:

- wetlands (minimum of 10 acres, intended to be restored)
- roads/parking to support public access to new/existing open space/park at the waterfront
- public restrooms
- Bay Trail sited near shoreline plus additional trails, bike paths, and related bike parking
- boardwalk at wetlands
- shuttle stop to downtown Albany
- areas for athletic activities (e.g., soccer, tennis, basketball, etc.)

It is recommended that all built structures conform to the following standards:

- minimum 300’ setback from shoreline at Fleming Point
- minimum 100’ setback from shoreline north and south of Fleming Point
- No buildings (or associated circulation, roads, parking) should extend beyond the “building area” limits (indicated on the diagram to the right of this page), with the exception of any necessary access roads as determined by public safety officials.
- No retail development on Fleming Point.

2. Height Limitations

- No structure shall exceed three stories (or 40’, whichever is smaller) in height.

3. Allowable Uses within Built Area

- Hotel (minimum 100 rooms; maximum 300 rooms, except as noted below)²
- Restaurants, Bars, and Cafes³
- Conference Center, Meeting Facilities, and Related Support Structures
- Retail (which could include non-hotel-related restaurants, bars, and cafes) (maximum of 250,000 net SF space⁴)

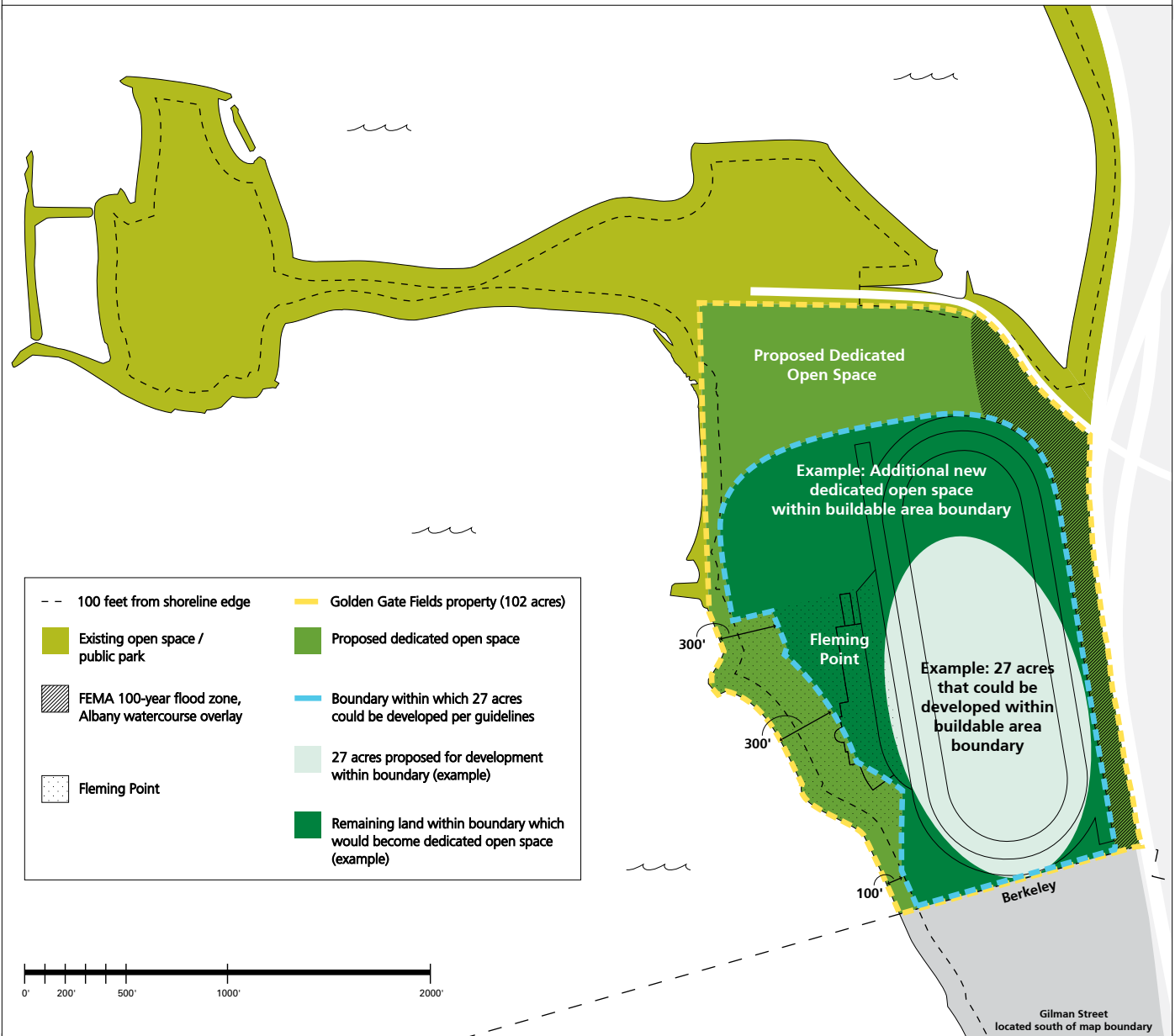
1. These guidelines focus on the 102 acres currently used by GGF. Beyond any guidelines set by the city of Albany, it is understood that numerous public agencies have regulatory responsibility for the site. These guidelines are not intended to override those regulations.

2. In order for a developer to be permitted to construct retail uses at the site, a hotel must be constructed; eco-hotel preferred. Hotel could increase to 400 rooms, but any increase beyond 300, triggers the reduction of the amount of allowable retail.

3. Albany desires restaurants/cafes featuring locally-grown, organic foods (ideally grown at on-site community gardens); mix of restaurant types encouraged (e.g., high end, casual, family focus, cafes, view, etc.)

4. Community preference to limit retail area to minimum required for economic viability; “big box” prohibited; locally-owned retail encouraged, especially those not adversely affecting other Albany retail; outdoor/water recreation retail/rentals desired

DIAGRAM: NEW OPEN SPACE AND BUILDABLE AREAS OF SITE



This diagram is intended to illustrate the proportion of potential built area (27 acres out of 190 acres) within the total waterfront property. As indicated, the guidelines restrict "development" from 163 acres (86%) of the current waterfront property (including 75 acres or 74% of the current GGF property); allowing "development" on only 27 acres (14% of the total waterfront zone or 26% of the current GGF property) within particular boundaries that exclude any buildings from areas adjacent to the shore, at the northern end of GGF property, or in the FEMA 100-year flood area. This diagram is for illustrative purposes only.

RECOMMENDED GUIDELINES continued

Within the 27 acres where built development is permitted (per above), a minimum of three acres shall be dedicated to the community for the creation of one or more of the following public educational amenities:

- museum
- aquarium
- interpretive center
- amphitheater (or other performance/arts venues)
- other educational, cultural, environmental, or similar purpose uses

4. Site Design and Architectural Quality

- All buildings to be LEED-certified and/or GreenPoint Rated.
- All built structures to have photovoltaics and/or native plant landscaping on roofs.
- Potential for cogeneration and tri-generation to be developed.
- Development of open space and buildings to take into account potential rise in sea level.
- All parking areas and roads to be pervious pavement, draining toward Bay; runoff to be directed toward drainage swales for natural filtration.
- Gray water recovery systems to store and distribute reclaimed water for landscape irrigation where possible; native/other naturally drought-resistant plants in other areas.
- Transportation and access improvement to be addressed, including shuttle service to Solano and San Pablo avenues and BART, as appropriate.
- Existing fishing pier to be renovated.
- Creation of alternative energy (wind, solar, etc.) throughout site required, as appropriate.
- Water recreation to be supported through opportunities for equipment rentals, storage, restrooms, etc.
- Buildings to be designed to respect the site, with contextually-appropriate materials and colors; to preserve views; to restore and improve natural features; to respond to solar orientation; and prevailing winds for natural ventilation
- Site development should support the primary objective of open space, preservation, and outdoor recreation, while enhancing the unique qualities of the waterfront
- Award-winning architectural and landscape design

5. Financial Implications

- Developer will be expected to provide funds for the acquisition, development, and ongoing maintenance of new dedicated public open space at the waterfront, in direct proportion to the amount of building (sq. ft) approved by the city
- Developer expected to provide funds dedicated to the creation of a public education amenity (described above), in addition to the set-aside of three acres for this purpose
- Every effort will be made by the developer to assist the city in replacing its temporary loss of tax revenues during demolition and construction of new uses at the site.

Illustrative Site Concept Maps

Eleven illustrative site concept maps were created and included in this report (see pages 22-43) to illustrate how the 190-acre Albany waterfront site might be organized and/or developed as a result of the constraints of the recommended guidelines. Each map, and corresponding text box, indicates the type, amount, and placement of a program (uses) that falls within the recommended guidelines, and which meets the criteria of the full set of guidelines (see pages 18 - 20); i.e. the guidelines include numerous standards that are not noted in each map, but which are critical to the intentions of the recommendations. The 11 maps differ in several ways:

- location of potential built development is shown in several different areas of the site; all within the buildable boundary line
- number of potential hotel rooms and potential amount of retail space
- amount of acreage required for different building types (e.g. three-story hotel in one structure vs. multiple structures scattered on site)
- amenities for public use (three acres of dedicated community use)
- projected tax revenues¹

1. Tax revenue information noted on these maps are estimates based on current knowledge and data; does not reflect land or development costs, nor market feasibility analysis.