

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR

STARTING A BUSINESS ON ALBANY WEBSITE

The website as it stands has many strengths. It provides a clear statement of what steps and permits are needed to start a business in Albany; links conveniently to contact departments, documents and reference materials; and also links conveniently to outside-of-City Hall websites such as for utilities.

There remains room to make it easier and more inviting for people to get a rough picture of what is required before digging into full detail; to add to the resources available at or accessible through the site; and to correct a few pieces of information and technical problems.

An overall notion that Darlene particularly has wisely underlined is to make the material itself be more welcoming to businesses. Included could be an opening statement emphasizing the desire to bring businesses into the City. *Start off with an introduction that says, "Albany gladly welcomes entrepreneurs. The City of Albany is committed to helping you navigate through our process if you would like to make us the place you call home for your new business."*

A good edit throughout from the point of view of improving friendliness could be worthwhile. Darlene illustrated this with a modest re-write of a Plan Check section which nonetheless provides a quite substantial change in tone and sense of welcoming (see immediately below for her recommended text and contrast to the web location cited). Some of the current material reads a bit like what an exasperated City staff member would say to an applicant who'd proved stubborn about following the rules, rather than what one would want to say to a businessperson with whom the City wishes to nurture a relationship. Darlene's more affirmative rewrite reads:

Example taken from the page on "PLAN CHECK"

<http://www.albanyca.org/index.aspx?page=411>:

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- Please be sure to provide all of the required information at the time of application in order to avoid a processing delay
 - Be sure all your documents are final since documents marked "preliminary" or "not for construction" will not be accepted

- Building plans, as required by State Licensing Boards, shall bear the seal and signature of the architect or engineer responsible for their design
- Be sure all requested information has been provided, and the required plan check fees have been paid. Otherwise, applications cannot be processed or routed for any reviews
- It is possible that additional plans, calculations, supporting data, or other information may be required as a part of Plan Review to confirm compliance with all applicable Codes
- Contact the Fire Prevention Bureau at 528-5775 as soon as possible (prior to finalizing your plans) to find out the Albany Fire Department requirements specific to your project or improvement

All building permit plans are reviewed by a third-party consulting firm. The following companies provide this service for the City of Albany. They look forward to assisting you. Click on the following links to learn more about them:

- [The Phillips Group](#)
- [Building Department Services](#)

Other specific items for potential change are enumerated below.

1. I see that listing Judy as economic development and location-finding contact is already accomplished, as recommended. The next step would be to make the form on which businesspeople seeking to locate their firms in Albany indicate their space needs available on the website. Although Judy can even without that also send it to people who contact her, it would be good to provide both options.
2. It would be useful to give a businessperson (or property owner/representative) two routes for quickly obtaining at least a rough outline of their zoning situation at one or multiple possible sites for their businesses. Currently, they are directed to the Community Development Department for information on zoning, from the Starting a Business page. If one stays with the website options, a person can go to brief descriptions of various units of the Department, of permitting processes, and of documents. But to take even the first step on understanding Albany zoning on one's own, you have to go to the zoning ordinance and read through its appropriate sections.

We recommend two routes for getting a businessperson or broker a better first picture of the zoning situation. One is adding the name or names of Planning

staff people (or at least categories of titles) with whom one could have a preliminary conversation about the nature of zoning categories (and their location) and the primary zoning requirements and concerns that could be relevant to a particular use (is it allowed in an area or on a site, whether a use permit is required and likely primary permit issues/questions, parking requirements, FAR if a development is proposed, and other basics). In the Redevelopment area, one is immediately directed to Jeff and Judy by the website (assuming one finds his/her way to Redevelopment). Specific names for staff for people interested in the other commercial streets and for those who don't get to the "Redevelopment" page would be good.

A second route would be a narrative about zoning for commercial uses, available from the CD web page. To illustrate in concept:

Albany has ___ commercial zoning designations. Designation A___ applies mainly to Solano Avenue. It allows uses principally in the ___ categories and prohibits___. There is a parking requirement of ___ for restaurants and ___ for others. Another major consideration is often ___.

Designation B.....

With a LOUD caveat that if you are interested, contact _____ re: your specific situation.

This might save City staff and the businesses some time and effort, while simultaneously allowing somebody from the outside to include Albany in an easy first-level review of possible locations.

3. We want to add to the set of business resources available to existing and incoming firms. The East Bay Economic Development Alliance website provides a good set of links to assistance on financing a business, technical assistance and education on elements of successful businesses, etc. The only way I see to get to EBEDA from the Albany website is by going from "Doing Business in Albany" to "Business Associations" and then seeing that EBEDA is an option and selecting it. That's an improbable path for someone seeking financing, for example: they won't know to go to business associations. I went there because I was interested in that topic, not EBEDA. A couple of sentences about using EBEDA to identify

sources of the types of assistance they reference, at the initial point of "Doing Business," would get people there more easily.

If the City wants to pursue that, I'll have my assistant follow the multiple EBEDA web-page tracks to enumerate the kinds of services one can find described (with links) there. We would also check whether there are categories of assistance on which the EBEDA site is weak and, if so, identify other links to assistance.

4. Three items concern timing of processes.
 - a. The Plan Check page at <http://www.albanyca.org/index.aspx?page=411>, accessed through Building Department and then Plan Check, says that most plan check processes through to building permit take 3 months. That could be discouraging for a business wanting to make some modest tenant improvements and be open in a timely way. Only if you make it to the Flow Chart for plan check do you learn that the 3 months is an estimate for major projects involving building additions and new construction and that for most projects approval is much faster. A clarification on the Plan Check page would be helpful.
 - b. The page on Use permit process also estimates a three-month period. Is that a solid estimate or are there categories of matters of limited complexity that move faster which could be noted?
 - c. The page describing the Business License Application tells you that you need sign-off from a series of departments/people. It does not indicate whether you can carry your application around to them and accomplish what is needed in one visit or what the process is. It would help to clarify.

5. At least on November 12th, there are some links within Starting a Business that do not function and need repair. Two links to further pages in particular with problems are the connection from Community Development Department to some of its sub-units and the link to the general plan from CD documents. They come up as "invalid host name."

6. At least some of the forms available on the website list Judy's address or some department location as 1000 San Pablo (including the zoning application). It may be worth combing through them. Also Judy's address as listed with EBEDA needs an update (that is, on EBEDA's website).

7. Finally, EBEDA has a very strange Latin (yes) narrative at its link to "Local Business Financing," although there are other ways to get to financing sources on the site. When I inquired, they said they haven't gotten to that page yet. But there is an alternative route into the appropriate material and we can specify it in 3. Above.

Attachment 2

SIGNAGE

REDEVELOPMENT AREA

Both Cleveland Avenue and Eastshore Highway are very much in need of improved signage.

There is currently no way to know how to find Cleveland Avenue without a map at either Buchanan or Central Avenue ends. At Central, the only sign is a standard street sign at the corner saying Jacuzzi Blvd. Nothing whatever makes mention of the fact that Jacuzzi becomes—and is the only north-end access to—Cleveland. A sign indicating “to Cleveland Avenue” and of more prominent size and type would be good. Even the Jacuzzi sign is buried at the extreme west corner and hard to identify even from the intersection, and to cars just emerging from the freeway exits.

At the south end of Cleveland, entrance involves avoiding the Buchanan overpass and proceeding west to its right, and then turning right. Again there is no sign to direct one there. A sign further east on Buchanan—before the overpass— should direct drivers to keep right for Cleveland, a further sign just as the overpass heads upward might be helpful, and then a sign indicating Cleveland to the right. That’s probably overkill, but it illustrates what should be accomplished.

The entrance to Eastshore Highway from Buchanan from the east deserves signs to get people into the left turn lane. That might mean a sign saying keep left for Eastshore. It definitely means a sign before the left turning lane appears with posts separating it from the ordinary left lane. At present, the only sign near the actual Eastshore roadway is the normal street sign on the west side of the turn onto Eastshore. It is difficult—for many drivers impossible-- to see it soon enough to get into that left-turn lane.

From the west on Buchanan, which includes the people coming from the freeway, there is again no sign for Eastshore except the ordinary street sign at the actual turn intersection. Some advance indication, or at least a larger sign at the intersection, would definitely help.

SIGNAGE ON SOLANO AVE & SAN PABLO AVENUE

There are excellent opportunities to brand Albany's shopping possibilities through targeted gateway signage. Hiring a firm to create the design and branding is one option. Another is to commission its resident through a contest to come up with catchy, colorful ideas.

SOLANO

OBSERVATIONS

- A "Welcome to Albany" an austere and bland sign at Neilson next to Safeway greets drivers and pedestrians. Albany starts, four blocks earlier on one side only (the north side), earlier at Tulare, to include not only residential, but also Albany One Hour Photo, AT&T . Law Offices, Solano Cellars, Nana, Cugini's, and Solano Cyclery. Consider placing a sign there instead.
- There is inconsistent streetscape:
 - upgraded street signs at west end closer to San Pablo
 - the banners depict Solano Stroll on the upper end and 100th anniversary on the lower end.

SAN PABLO

- Non-descript Cal Tran Signs are in place at Dartmouth and Brighton on San Pablo Avenue at the Albany borders. Replace these signs with customized signs.
- There is a "Welcome" to Albany" Sign at San Pablo Ave and Marin next to its community organizations. Unfortunately the welcome sign faces the West end as you leave Albany.
- Solano and San Pablo is the "Heart". Add distinctive pavement treatment at the four corners and/or an archway or outstanding marker.
- The banners are sporadically placed on SPA with no continuity. They are small. They could be more colorful to make them easier to distinguish.

@ Dartmouth and @ Brighton

- The existing signs are "Cal- Tranny". They are easy to miss and graffitied. They do not give you a sense of pride and place.

BUCHANAN

Signage is needed on 80 freeway to indicate the exit for Albany's Solano Shopping district. Once off Buchanan, wayfinding signage towards Albany's heart, Solano, is also needed. When driving up Buchanan, you dead end at San Pablo Avenue and Buchanan. Signage is needed to indicate to turn left to Solano Avenue.

Attachment 3

County Certified Green Businesses in Albany

Company	Address
Albany Community Center (City of Albany)	1249 Marin Avenue
Albany YMCA	924 Kains Avenue
Berkeley Motor Works	736 San Pablo Avenue
BZBdesigns.com	846 Santa Fe Avenue
Dana Meyer Auto Care	660 San Pablo Av.
European Motor Works	618 San Pablo Ave
In Motion Center	813 San Pablo Avenue
Innate Chiropractic & Wellness Studio	916A San Pablo Ave
Nina Homisak Hair Design	1580 Solano Avenue, Suite C
Nippon European Motors	730 San Pablo Ave
R.A.W. Concepts Architecture and Interiors	1650 A Solano Avenue
Serves You Right Catering	1249 Marin Avenue
Solano Community Church	1249 Marin Avenue
Steve's Auto Care	744 San Pablo Avenue
Sue Oda Landscape Architect	617 Evelyn Ave.
Five Little Monkeys	1230 Solano Avenue
I Song Orthodontics	1183 Solano Avenue