

# Green Albany

*This is an invitation to re-think how we might use what we already have, how we think about community, sustainability and what it means to grow and eat locally. This is a suggestion of how we might create a new model for living in an existing community in a temperate climate using resources available now, either privately or publicly owned within the one square mile boundary of Albany. Because of the size of the city (approximately one square mile) and its population, this is a perfect testing ground for what may eventually become a prototype for other cities.*

Walking around the neighborhood the variety of plants and the choices each house represents is amazing. However, imagine how much better, how much more efficient and how much more productive they could be. If every home (owner or renter) was given the opportunity to meet with a team of garden professionals (landscape architects, garden designers, water usage professionals) without charge and design a plan to create their own unique garden incorporating excellent design, minimal water usage (possible grey water systems) and then also included the component of edible crops think what that might look like.

Each new garden once designed would be like a barn raising, with the community coming together house by house to remove the weeds, put in the irrigation systems, bring in new soil and compost, lay the hardscape and plant new gardens. Most importantly then they would be covered then with a fresh thick, water conserving, weed choking, mulch. Like the autumn city tree planting ritual, supplies would be delivered to the neighborhood and the task force would distribute the materials where needed.

## **Imagine:**

...if much of our food was raised here, in our gardens; charted, organized, shared, and sold with proceeds going back into a fund to sustain and grow the project.

...if all the parking strips in the city had irrigation installed and if they were planted with dahlia tubers, daffodil bulbs, Japanese anemones, cosmos and poppies and if each fall they were sowed with fava seed, or red clover to fix the nitrogen in the soil.

...all the flowers that could be enjoyed where they grow, and also harvested to be shared at a farmer's market stand

...if we identified the existing mature fruit trees, many of which are un-harvested or under harvested and harvest them and distributed the fruit either to a stand at a farmer's market, or gave them to others who need them.

...if we designed gardens around those trees and added tomatoes, broccoli, lettuces etc. to our roses and other existing perennials

...if instead of privets, we chose high bush blueberries as foundation plants

...a city compost pile and the machinery to turn it with the compost delivered back to the neighborhoods

... if Golden Gate Fields contributed manure and soiled hay and the use of what machinery they already own

... if we built a green house in which to raise seedlings for our gardens near the compost

...if we employed our young people to grow seedlings, harvest crops and deliver them to the farmer's market booth and to seniors who have trouble getting out

... if we raised a flock of city ducks which could be borrowed to eradicate the snails and slugs from our gardens!

... if we purchased electric vehicles to transport compost to our gardens from the compost pile

...if a bonus of residence in Albany included a weekly chit to be redeemed at the Albany Grown booth at our own Albany farmers market and that that chit entitled the resident to free (or greatly reduced) produce and flowers from that booth

... if the irrigation components were purchased in bulk and the savings were passed directly to each home

...if drum composters were purchased in bulk

...if American Soil Products gave us bulk discounts for rock and soil.

...the cache' and what that would mean for our property values, if Albany was not only sought out as a destination community for the schools, but as a destination for anyone looking to live in a truly Green and modern city.

... if 10 houses began this project in spring of 2009 and imagine if by late summer we had our first Albany Farmer's Market on Wednesday evenings.

...if this summer the trees were harvested and the fruit available for distribution, donation or sale at a table that would be the first Albany Grown booth

...if the response was so great that 100 or more homes wanted to participate in the next years "garden raisings"

... if in 10 years time the streets were overflowing with flowers and fruit trees and along with that, the streams were day-lighted and paths meandered between the blocks all the way down to the bay.

... how differently we would traverse Albany, on foot, stroller and bicycle safe from cars and street noise.

... how we might know our neighbors more and feel more at home, more grounded, more connected to our truly green community

Imagine that within this new century, in a new kind of political administration we could create a new way of living in and existing community. It might be a green solution that could give us far more than fruit, vegetables and flowers. It might give us the common ground to be a more unified community.

**We have the land, we have the climate and with organization we might be able to marshal the resources and create something unique.**

### What we have:

A climate in which almost anything will grow

Mature fruit trees which are un-harvested or under-harvested

A need to conserve water

Rising energy costs

A desire to eat locally

A desire to live in a “green” city

An excellent school district

The bulb

The sustainability club at Albany High

UC Berkeley with the Landscape Architecture and Urban Planning departments

Merritt College Horticulture department

The Edible School Yard and Alice Waters

A wealth of talent and expertise and a huge marketplace

Golden Gate Fields and a steady source of horse manure and straw and heavy machinery

And of course where we are, straight on from the GG Bridge with easy access to points in any direction, and all the diversity of peoples and economy and education in the bay area.

This list will grow. Right now I’m beginning to sound this idea out with various pieces of the puzzle and then I think if we set a target date and a finite group of houses as a testing ground we could begin.

**If at the same time if the farmer’s market which has been discussed for many years was put into reality we would create the destination for the crops from those test gardens and have a place from which to disseminate information and generate interest and participation in the project.**

The goal would be to grow the project exponentially each year and eventually to include the entire city. Not a mandatory program, but one that hopefully many people would want to be part of.

### Some thoughts about development at GG Fields:

4<sup>th</sup> St. worked as a development because it began slowly and grew one building at a time. What GG Fields has is a **drop dead gorgeous VIEW. There is no competition on this side of the bay for a world class restaurant with a view. At this point there isn't one.**

- 1). If like 4<sup>th</sup> St. the racetrack began with one restaurant and worked with David Trachtenberg or another local architect who is highly thought of and that restaurant became the anchor tenant then a development could evolve from that point.
- 2.) If that restaurant had the cachet of a chef/concept endorsed by Alice Waters or another local food guru it would begin as a destination.
- 3.) If part of the design was to include equine art, like a sculpture by Deborah Butterfield then it would tie into the racetrack.
- 4.) If in keeping with the concept of local, sustainable, and green, using local food, prepared and presented beautifully in the style of the California cuisine that Alice Waters is known for it would quickly become a destination and create demand around itself.

**The key is to use local people who have unimpeachable reputations and then to meld it with what the racetrack is and what the community would get excited about.**

Perhaps the 2<sup>nd</sup> **shop** would be an independent bookstore like Mrs. Dalloway's on College Ave. or an off-shoot of The Book Passage in Corte Madera, with an emphasis on gardens, garden design and animals and art and the bay. Envision a whole section on all things horses, mystery's with horses, novels with horses, art with horses...and dogs, landscape design and all things about the bay, and all the trails around it (like the bookstore at Crissey Fields only more so)

3<sup>rd</sup>: a dog/walker store with umbrellas, hot tea and coffee, snacks for 2 and four legged walkers, leashes and other dog stuff as well as things for bicyclists, like air and spare tires and someone to change them.

A café.

A garden store, like Smith and Hawkin's was when they began. (There's a wonderful shop at the Ferry Building in SF which has that style and competes directly with The Gardener on 4<sup>th</sup> St. and has prices at the level of impulse buys.)

A second restaurant! Maybe something along the lines of Delfina Pizzeria.

For development to fly here it has to be organic, not only in the pace of growth, but in the content of the shops. There doesn't need to be a department store as an anchor, there isn't one at the Ferry Building, the anchor would be the restaurant. Here, the whole theme should be consistent with Green Albany, use what you have, cater to the sensibilities of our community.

### **Make the track more transparent:**

My understanding is that GG Fields has one of the most sophisticated equine hospitals on the western seaboard if that's true, the community needs to understand that and take pride in the fact that it's here, in Albany.

Invite schools to bring students on annual field trips to see what goes on behind the scenes.  
Invite the public to do the same

My understanding too, is that some 1200 horses are boarded at GG Fields most of the time and that some 350 people work and bunk there. What most people see is simply a racetrack without understanding what else that entails.

Create a sense of the history and beauty of horses and racing and educate the public so we can appreciate more what GG Fields represents beyond simply being a racetrack.

This could be a model not only for Albany, but for any existing environment to rethink what they already have and how it might be recreated.

If GG Fields was an active participant in designing and implementing this idea, it would change the entire perception how GG Fields is thought of as a neighbor and would buy immeasurable PR.

There is an opportunity to create a new kind of partnership in which the GG Fields helps author in and integrates itself into a new kind of community which might just trump anything the "green" Albany City Council has ever imagined!

**The pieces of this puzzle:**

Identify, design and create the first 10 gardens using 10 individual homes.

Enlist the enthusiasm and participation of Landscape designers, horticulturists and students

Purchase irrigation components, drum composters, rock and soil, plants and mulch

Organize garden parties to create the gardens, with lots of food.

Begin to identify existing fruit trees that need harvesting within Albany

Create a farmers market in Albany on Key Route

Identify a location for a compost pile

Create neighborhood tool libraries

Begin process to gain approval for the first restaurant with a view on GG Fields property.

**Begin one step at a time and gain momentum before turning this idea over to decisions by committee!**