

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

Agenda Date: February 17, 2009
Reviewed by: BP

SUBJECT: Expansion of the Waterfront Visioning Public Engagement Process to Include City-wide Values and Visions to support the upcoming General Plan

**REPORT BY: Jeff Bond, Planning & Building Manager
Ann Chaney, Community Development Director**

WATERFRONT COMMITTEE, PLANNING AND ZONING COMMISSION AND STAFF RECOMMENDATION

That the City Council modify the Waterfront Visioning Process to include citywide values and visions to support the upcoming General Plan.

BACKGROUND

In April 2008, the City Council authorized Fern Tiger Associates (FTA) to begin work on the Waterfront Visioning process. As part of that visioning process, FTA will be undertaking an extensive public outreach to engage the community on land use and related issues at the waterfront. This comprehensive outreach and participatory effort is an innovative and unique approach intended to inform and engage a broad spectrum of Albany residents on the possibilities of the waterfront. Every resident in the city will be mailed a publication containing extensive background information and an invitation to participate in a small neighborhood meeting where they will have the opportunity to better understand options and tradeoffs related to waterfront development and to express ideas about the future of the waterfront.

DISCUSSION

FTA anticipates that inevitably some of the neighborhood discussions will blend over into a broad-spectrum of city planning issues. The cost of replicating the series of small neighborhood meetings for other land use planning initiatives, most particularly the 2010 General Plan update effort, may be prohibitive. Thus, staff has discussed with FTA the feasibility of anticipating this broader discussion, incorporating information about the General Plan into the publication; and expanding the facilitated sessions to purposefully include discussion about land use and other General Plan related "values and visions" into these neighborhood meetings. Thus, the "Voices to Vision" process – while focusing heavily on the waterfront – will contain some components that look beyond the waterfront.

The results would help form the foundation of the upcoming update to the 2010 General Plan.

The primary emphasis of the FTA work in general, as well as the neighborhood sessions themselves, will remain focused on the waterfront visioning (approximately 90 minutes). The meetings would be extended by approximately 30 minutes to allow for the broader discussion. The proposal would not have a major impact on the schedule of completion of the waterfront planning process.

On February 9, 2009, after extensive discussion, the Waterfront Committee, on a vote of 6-1, approved a recommendation that “the Waterfront Visioning Process be modified to include City-wide values and visions to support the upcoming General Plan, with the understanding that the discussion will be limited to an approximately 30 minute element of the first meeting; that adequate funds will remain in the project accounts to cover the other incidental expenses; and that the Waterfront Committee will continue to be the guiding body of this effort, and will not be sharing that responsibility with the Planning and Zoning Commission.”

On Tuesday, February 10, 2009, the Planning and Zoning Commission voted 4-1 to support a recommendation to the City Council to modify the waterfront visioning public engagement process to include citywide values and visions. In the Commission discussion, it was understood that the City might not have another opportunity for a small group community engagement process. The Commission agreed that the waterfront visioning process would benefit from starting with a common ground of broad citywide values and context. Further, the Commission believes that the discussion of citywide values and vision will not dilute the waterfront process. The Commission discussed that it is important that the work product have value to the upcoming preparation of a General Plan. The principal concern with the proposal is that with the addition other difficult citywide issues, the waterfront vision discussion may stray from the issues associated with the waterfront. The Commission also noted that it is important that General Plan process be discussed under the Commission’s venue.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

If values and visions beyond the waterfront are incorporated into the FTA community outreach effort, there will be an additional cost to the City of approximately \$45,000. The additional funds would cover the cost of researching and preparing information to be distributed to all households in the City, before the start of the sessions and in conjunction with the publication related to the waterfront. The costs also include designing the appropriate process for the broader discussion and having it move seamlessly into the waterfront portion. The length of each neighborhood meeting would be extended, and the information from the sessions would be analyzed, requiring additional professional time for facilitators, for analysis, and for the creation of the final report and presentations. It is anticipated that this additional cost can be absorbed within the current waterfront visioning budget. For example, the budget included a \$40,000 community survey and allocated \$75,000 for consultants, some of which is currently not anticipated to be spent.