

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

Agenda Date: March 2, 2009

Reviewed by: BP

SUBJECT: Preliminary Discussion Regarding Acquisition of Property at 842
Masonic Avenue for Expansion of the Senior Center

REPORT BY: Jeff Bond, Planning & Building Manager

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Authorize staff to:

1. Ask the Parks and Recreation Commission to advise on acquisition of the property and expansion of the senior center; and
2. Submit an application for a conditional use permit to the Planning and Zoning Commission.

BACKGROUND

In January 2009, the single family home located at 842 Masonic, adjacent to the Senior Center, was listed for sale. The home is a 3-bedroom one-bath home built in 1930 with 1,365 square feet, as well as a one-car garage and laundry area. The property is owned by a family trust, and has been vacant for a number of months.

The City Council met in executive session on February 2, 2009 and provided negotiating parameters to the City Administrator regarding the exploration of acquisition of the home as a site for expansion of the senior center. The discussions led to the seller accepting a contingent offer from the City to purchase the property, subject to inspections and various city approvals including financing and land use approval.

DISCUSSION

In the 2000 Census, the City of Albany had 1,819 residents 65 years or older. The Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG) prepares forecasts of population growth by age group for Alameda County. Applying county-wide growth rates to the Albany population, results in an estimated increase in senior population to 4,804 citizens by the year 2030.

The senior center is the City's primary facility for serving the growing senior population. It is ideally located in the center of the City and close to transit and services on Solano

Avenue. In addition, there is relatively ample street parking on Masonic Avenue next to the BART tracks. The existing senior center consists of a classroom, a multi-purpose room with a kitchen, a library in the lobby area, and workstations for staff and volunteers. Total building area is approximately 4,000 square feet. The existing facility is heavily used, and additional programs could be provided if space was available.

The acquisition of the adjacent 3,800 square foot property would allow for expansion of the facility with a modest disruption of the existing facility. There are a wide range of potential programmatic objectives for the senior center, several of which could be accomplished with an expansion, including:

- New activity room/class room;
- Parking for the new van
- New entry area
- New kitchen
- New restrooms
- Upgrade mechanical equipment spaces/storage
- New volunteer and staff work stations

Detailed facility planning will be needed in order to fully evaluate the best alternatives. One approach to the additional space would be to create a new activity room in the expansion area, along with one or two of the other programmatic objectives. Care would be taken in this process to make sure that an expansion is compatible with neighboring residences and the Solano Avenue business district. In general, in an R-1 district, a single family home could be built to 28 feet in height with 2,062 square feet of building area. Staff's initial assessment is that a single story addition with standard R-1 district setbacks would be most cost efficient. Cost of an addition could be in the range of \$500,000.

In lieu of meeting senior center needs with this expansion, other alternatives to meeting programmatic needs include:

1. Add second story to existing facility – It appears that the existing buildings were not designed in a manner that would comply with current building structural codes. Thus, a two story building on the existing parcel would require demolition of the existing facility and construction of an entirely new building. Construction would involve a 12 to 18 month disruption to senior center activities. Cost of a new two-story building on the existing City parcel could be in the \$1,000,000 to \$2,000,000 range.
2. Purchase new facility – Staff is not aware of any existing property in the City with 4,000 to 6,000 square feet of space that would be adequate to serve the City's needs. If such a property were to become available, it is assumed that at current market conditions, cost would be in the \$2,000,000 to \$3,000,000 range.
3. Interim Use – Preliminary results of inspections is that the existing home needs substantial work in order to be safely used as a rental. The foundation is in poor

condition, windows are deteriorated, and the electrical system is antiquated. Cost of upgrades could exceed \$100,000. Rather than invest funds into the property for an interim use, staff would propose to maintain the building in its current vacant state until the City is ready to proceed with the expansion project.

4. Re-sale - In the event that the City acquires the property, but then decides not to proceed with expansion of the facility, the City retains the ability to sell the property in its present condition. The relative gain or loss from this alternative depends on real estate market conditions.

SUSTAINABILITY IMPACT

One of the key principles of sustainable development is to utilize existing construction as much as practical. The existing senior center is functional, and its functional life can be extended and its energy efficiency could be improved by incorporating new energy efficient mechanical systems in the new area that would serve the new expansion area as well as the existing building. The center is accessible by public transit and is adjacent to the Ohlone Greenway bicycle/pedestrian path and the Solano Avenue business district.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

Purchase of the property and the expansion project can be funded by the City's annual allocation of funds from the Community Development Block Grant program. Other potential sources of funds include the City's Landscaping & Lighting Assessment District, Measure F 2002, parkland in-lieu dedication fees, East Bay Regional Park District Measure WW allocation, grants, and fundraising.

CONCLUSION

The actions by the Parks & Recreation Commission and the Planning & Zoning Commission and a financing plan would be brought to the City Council for action regarding purchase of the property in April.