

Bringing Voices Together to Create a Waterfront Vision

Fern TIGER, University of Washington Tacoma

with Elizabeth NEWMAN, Senior Associate, Fern Tiger Associates



ABSTRACT

For decades, the small city of Albany, CA struggled with deeply divided opinions about its waterfront (107 acres of privately-owned, under-developed land, adjacent to 88 acres of public land). Proposals for private development, public funding, special elections, and zoning changes were some of the factors that swirled around the property that faces the San Francisco Bay.

Following a contentious local election that pitted “park devotees” against those intent on economic development, the Albany City Council decided to address the issue with a comprehensive and inclusive process intended to confront tensions, seek long-term solutions, and build a framework for shared decisionmaking. A critical component of the process would be the collection and analysis of quantifiable data as well as qualitative information that a skeptical community could trust.

The process — *Voices to Vision (V2V)* — included a multi-faceted approach to community education and engagement that ultimately involved one of every ten Albany adults. Along with standard public outreach methods — such as a widely-publicized website and on-line surveys — a 20-page, fact-filled magazine devoted to the waterfront was mailed first class to every Albany address, ensuring solid background information prior to participation. To design the most appropriate process for this particular city at this particular time, more than 80 one-on-one interviews with stakeholders/residents were conducted. The actual engagement included nearly 50 highly-interactive, facilitated community sessions (with one skilled facilitator for every 20 participants and activities that provided quantifiable data.)

Voices to Vision resulted in a clear community vision with recommendations for new zoning and land uses, and provided the city with development guidelines (height limits, preservation areas, expected revenues to support city services and schools). Less than a year later, an unexpected proposal was introduced by the landowner — one that stretched the boundaries of previous proposals and varied significantly from the community vision.

This paper will show how *Voices to Vision* prepared the community for new challenges, and guided the city through an education process. Thus, when residents of Albany were presented with yet another proposal for waterfront development, they demanded an innovative, inclusive, and informed process. This included structuring and facilitating a new kind of city-wide conversation — taking into account percentages of land available for income generation (taxes) and land devoted to the public — which most importantly moved the discourse from a framework of “parks vs. profits” to one of necessary trade-offs for the common good.

While the particular issues and nature of the engagement process were designed specifically for residents of Albany, the style of the education and engagement could have far reaching impact on how other cities tackle waterfront decisionmaking and participation — ensuring strong community involvement and a lasting vision.

Background

The city of Albany, California — home to about 17,000 residents — is situated on the eastern shore of the San Francisco Bay. Its presence on the Bay is framed by 190 acres (88 publicly-owned and 107 privately-owned), much of which is landfill and borders an interstate highway.

For four decades, the waterfront had been the focus of a bitter tug-of-war between those who hope to see commercial development at the privately-owned portion — currently used as a racetrack — to maintain and/or increase tax revenues to the city, and those who favor transforming the parcel into a public park (open space). Over the years, numerous proposals were put forward by both private developers and the landowners — who sought to maximize the use of the property and its breath-taking views.

The discord over the waterfront was intensified in 2005-6 when, in the wake of yet another developer-driven proposal for the site, a slate of “pro-park/anti-commercial development” candidates was elected to the City Council. To complicate the situation, the racetrack, Golden Gate Fields (GGF), had been experiencing a significant decline in attendance which decreased its tax liability to the city. Once widely considered the most important local business, the racetrack was now seen by many as an impediment to the potential for the property (for either park or commercial development). The possible closure of the track and subsequent bankruptcy in 2009 appeared, to some residents, as 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 be at the forefront of waterfront decisionmaking.

With the future of the site in question, and the contentious nature of the issue at a fever pitch, the new city council decided to be proactive. [As a result of a 1990 ballot measure, (Measure C), — the approval of Albany voters would be required for any plan that differed from the area’s 1990 zoning (allowing only: park and recreation facilities; utilities; commercial recreation; restaurants and bars; marinas; boat-launching ramps; non-residential parking; and waterfront- and sports- related commercial sales and services)].

In March 2008, the city of Albany hired Fern Tiger Associates (FTA) to conceive, design, and facilitate an appropriate process to educate and engage residents in the hope of developing a shared vision for the future of the waterfront (and possible next steps). By selecting a firm that specialized in public engagement (rather than land use planning), the City signaled its commitment to an authentic process of community participation where perspectives, ideas, and goals would be shared and analyzed as opposed to reacting to a fully-formed plan or proposal.

“There’s been a lot of grand-standing in Albany about this issue and not enough people being open and really listening to one another. We realized we needed someone to hold a mirror up to the community and say, ‘Here’s what we’re seeing,’” explained one council member.

Albany Decides to Engage the Community

To address the concerns of Albany residents, reflect their values, and acknowledge previous community processes, FTA began by conducting a comprehensive study of the city’s history and character, as well as the dynamics of earlier waterfront planning processes.

FTA staff reviewed a wide range of environmental, technical, and historical reports produced over the last 50 years as well as press clips; campaign materials; and verbal anecdotes. This research, along with observation of City Council, Waterfront, and Planning/ Zoning committee meetings, provided insight into how community attitudes and perspectives impacted discussions about the waterfront over time.

A major focal point of this research was a series of 80 in-depth, one-on-one, in-person interviews with Albany residents (opinion leaders, community and business leaders, elected

officials, city staff, and individuals with a history of involvement with the waterfront, as well as regional stakeholders). The goal of the interviews was to gather perceptions about the city and the community, and to understand how the issue might be framed to ensure participation beyond the “small core of those already opinionated about the issue.” FTA needed this information to inform both the outreach strategy and the design of an appropriate participatory process.

FTA strove to ensure that interviewees represented an even mix of perspectives and sought to understand how the waterfront figures into the lives of Albany residents. Again and again, FTA heard that Albany is a close-knit community and that its small-town ambiance and high-performing schools are what makes Albany unique and what keeps real estate prices high.

As for the waterfront, some envisioned the site as a regional park while others were more concerned about the need for tax revenues and feared a large tract of open space would be costly to purchase and expensive to maintain. *“We have an incredible opportunity to have a great park and a shoreline that’s publicly used, available, and open,”* said one resident, while another said, *“If the racetrack closes, we’re going to need to replace those revenues. We can’t afford to have that land become ‘just’ open space.”*

Still, many saw the opportunity for something between the “poles” of total open space and extensive development: *“It’s a beautiful site that has the opportunity to offer many things to many people.”* The goal of this phase was to conceive a process that could find common ground, and to avoid past experiences which reinforced divisions in the community. FTA wrapped up the research phase with a clear sense of the complex history of Albany’s waterfront planning; a strong understanding of the mix of perspectives and roadblocks to effective communication and participation; and insight on misinformation spread over the past years. It was clear that FTA needed to address some key issues in order to ensure a respected and well-attended process:

History of Conflict / Lack of Trust. Previous efforts to consider the future of the waterfront resulted in significant polarization. Each side viewed the other as inflexible and unwilling to consider other perspectives. Some felt that, because “pro-park/anti-development candidates” won the contentious 2006 election, there was little hope for productive exchange.

Widespread Misinformation. The waterfront had been a hot button issue for several decades, during which time a range of supposed “facts” had been disseminated. In part, these disputed facts stemmed from the informal ways that information spreads in a small city, as well as the politicized nature of the facts. From interviews, FTA knew that Albany residents lacked solid information about both the possibilities and the challenges of the site.

Fear that the Voices of “Outsiders” would Dominate the Process. The interviews revealed that over the years, non-Albany residents appeared to dominate waterfront decisionmaking. There was also a concern that outspoken residents and special interest groups would monopolize one or multiple sessions and thus inordinately sway the ultimate direction of the process.

Community Participation: A “Block-by-Block” Approach

To set a tone of professionalism that would ground the process, FTA branded the process “*Voices to Vision*,” which captured the goal of gathering input from many voices and moving toward a shared vision.

To launch the process and to counter widespread misinformation, FTA produced a 20-page tabloid-sized publication that was mailed to every Albany address. The publication featured rich, easy-to-read, fact-filled text; photographs; and graphics that covered the environmental, land use, economic, historical, and regulatory issues that might affect waterfront development in Albany. It offered articles dealing with the history of the site and the purpose of the *Voices to Vision* (V2V) process, and “at-a-glance” information presented in tables and maps. A glossary

of important terms and a comprehensive set of frequently asked questions were also included. The publication reflected the information needs of an educated and engaged audience.

FTA also developed a website dedicated to the process. It included ways for users to ask questions, to register for V2V activities, and to share comments. An evolving list of questions submitted by the community (with answers) was posted on the website.

To counter concern about non-residents dominating the process, V2V was designed to engage only residents, who were organized into “micro-neighborhoods” of approximately three square blocks. Each micro-neighborhood was assigned a particular date and time for their session¹. The delineated neighborhoods were shown in a centerfold map in a publication mailed to every household. Postcards reminding people to “register” for the sessions were hand-delivered to each address a few days prior to sessions². All sessions were held in welcoming and familiar public spaces (community center, schools, library).

The neighborhood approach was a good fit with the small-town spirit of Albany. Though more complicated from a logistical standpoint, meetings in public spaces felt more “open,” in contrast to the most recent private developer-run sessions which were held in private homes.

To participate in *Voices to Vision*, residents needed to RSVP through the website or the *Voices to Vision* phone line. Thirty-eight sessions were held in a six-week period. On the days prior to the sessions for each neighborhood, *Voices to Vision* flyers were hand-delivered to each address in the zone.

Encouraging Participation. Outreach in the weeks leading to the sessions was extensive: banners at the Community Center and at major intersections; posters on the windows of businesses and schools; and a model of the waterfront (scale of 1”:200’) was at the Community Center. Guided tours were made available. Outreach was also done through schools, and some sessions were for high school seniors.



Voices to Vision Community Sessions

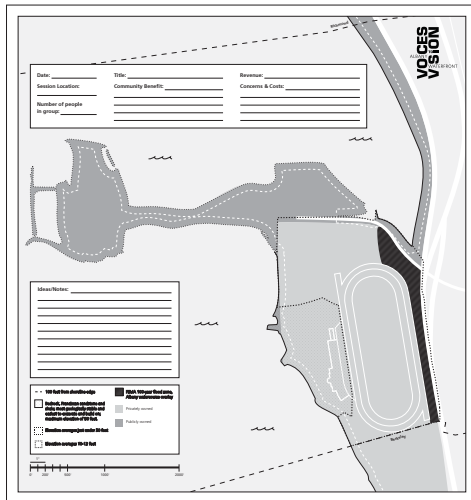
The two-hour sessions encouraged residents to “think big,” and understand site constraints; to learn from the activities and from each other; to know how their input would be used; to be comfortable stating their opinions; and to enjoy the session.

To accomplish this, a series of exercises were developed to engage residents, well beyond what typically happens at community meetings. The major emphasis of the session was “The Albany Waterfront Game” where participants worked with a large-scale map of the site to think proactively about possibilities. Unlike previous developer-led processes, there was no development plan to react to.

Voicing Visions. Over the course of six weeks, 38 community sessions — identical in format — were facilitated. The sessions ranged in size from less than 10 to more than 50 participants.

1 If residents were unable to attend the session in their neighborhood, they could arrange to attend another session.

2 The RSVP process allowed FTA to ensure one-time participation by Albany residents, and to ensure sufficient space, facilitators, and supplies for each session.



The community sessions were comprised of six parts, with the Albany Waterfront Game taking the majority of time:

- Icebreaker (The Best Thing About Albany)
- Envisioning Albany 10 to 20 years into the future
- Reviewing the Albany Waterfront (The Facts)
- Your Personal Drive for the Waterfront
- The Albany Waterfront Game
- Group presentations by participants

Facilitators used a script to ensure that all sessions were as close to identical as possible.

Creating a Vision for the Waterfront. The core of each session was an exercise where participants created their vision for the Albany waterfront. The group was split into small teams to explore what they'd like to see at the waterfront, as well as the ways in which various uses could provide benefits to the city and community.

To form teams, each person selected from five “driver” cards — each with one “theme” (open space; ideal for families; economic development; regional asset; racetrack remains at site) — the card that he or she viewed as the most important factor driving the future of the waterfront. Small teams of 4-6 people formed, based on who chose the same card.

Each team sat at a table with a large waterfront map showing the 190-acre site (delineating ownership, some geotechnical aspects, site features, and setbacks). Each table was given a “game box” with 56 playing pieces. Each piece was color coded and proportioned to the 1”: 200’ scale of the map. Pieces represented different land uses (e.g. hotel, housing, open space) and included information on building type, acreage required, height, and potential tax revenue.

Each table group discussed the opportunities and constraints of the site, including environmental and aesthetic impacts, community benefits, tax revenues, and challenges of different land use options. If the group came up with a land use not covered by the colored game pieces, there were blank pieces they could use for “bright ideas” (which were recorded and noted). There were enough “open space” pieces to turn the entire site into a park.



Residents of Albany planning for their Waterfront future at “Voices to Vision”

Participants talked about where on the site any development and open space should be located and placed the appropriate game pieces on the site map.

Each group then named their idea and listed community benefits and estimated total revenue generated — based on information noted on the game pieces. At the conclusion of the session, each group presented their plan to the other table groups. Careful notes were taken

by facilitators and written directly on each map as the solutions were presented. A photograph was taken to document each map.

Analysis of Phase One. At the conclusion of Phase One, there was a wealth of information to analyze, including 199 rendered site maps showing concepts for the waterfront produced by more than 600 Albany adult residents, about 100 Albany High School seniors, and a handful of non-Albany residents, as well as demographic and session evaluation information. Each site map offered a unique perspective and rationale. While the ideas reflected many differences, there were common themes that emerged related to: the amount of new dedicated park/open space; favored uses; tax revenues; and acceptable locations for site development.

- Nearly all participants wanted to increase open space at the waterfront — to varying degrees. About 62% had maps with 72 acres or less of new dedicated park/open space; non-residents favored more open space; youth opted for development and “things to do.”
- More than 85% of attendees placed a hotel at the site; most favored a 3-story, eco-boutique-style hotel/conference center on an 8-acre site (generating about \$700,000 in tax revenue) rather than a 10-story hotel/conference center on 5-acres (est. \$1.4M in gross tax revenue).
- High end retail/restaurant was the second most favored use and the only other use that a majority of Albany adults placed on their maps. This use was shown to require a minimum of 250,000 sq. ft. in order to generate sufficient regional draw. This use would require a minimum of 24 acres and generate approximately \$1,050,000 in gross tax revenue.
- Retail was most favored by youth (70%) and least favored by non-residents (25%).
- Other sought-after uses focused on education-oriented (non-taxable) uses. About 30% of adults and more than 65% of youth favored a museum or aquarium.
- Housing generated much discussion — with many residents having difficulty envisioning how housing at the waterfront could be integrated into the life of the city.
- Residents were uninterested in developing offices at the site.
- About 11% chose to preserve GGF, long term — either for continued use as a racetrack or for a strategic rehabilitation of the structure for another use, such as an outdoor theater. Some of the solutions that retained GGF indicated a phased plan, maintaining the racetrack for a few years. (None of the non-residents chose to retain GGF.)
- About 80% of the maps included at least one “bright idea,” including water recreation, alternative energy production to power waterfront development as well as other parts of Albany; a velodrome; ice rink; mini golf; marijuana farm; and regional campground.
- About 60% developed the site to provide between \$1 million and \$3 million in tax revenue, but used far less land than what GGF currently uses.
- Seventy percent of participants created maps with uses that generated at least \$1.4 million in tax revenue; nearly 50% generated maps with tax revenues of at least \$1.7 million; 30% selected uses that generated \$2.3 million. Twenty-five percent of participants created maps with up to \$700,000 in tax revenue; 6% of Albany adult participants created maps that did not generate any known tax revenue.
- Regardless of the initial “driver,” the solutions were often more similar than different.
- Thirty-eight percent of participants preferred development at Fleming Point; the current site of GGF was favored by approximately 35%. Of those maps showing high end retail/restaurant uses, more than 60% placed this use on the current GGF site.
- Access was an important topic of discussion, with many ideas emerging about ways for Albany residents and non-residents to get to the waterfront and ways that Albany’s pre-existing commercial districts could be connected to Albany’s commercial districts.

More than 90% of Phase One participants indicated they liked working in small groups. They appreciated the specially-designed tools and the creative approach to participation; they felt their opinions were heard and recorded. But 10% noted that despite working in very small groups, they still felt their voice was not as strong as others at their table. Based on these comments FTA developed the format and tools for Phase Two.

Phase Two Community Sessions

Prior to the design of Phase Two community sessions, FTA created and analyzed an on-line survey which gathered additional information and clarification of some terminology.



Phase Two Sessions: 10 identical sessions held over one weekend.

also blank cards that could be used to note attributes not mentioned. Working alone, participants dropped each card into one of three color mugs at their table (green = pro; red = con; yellow = neutral) to reflect whether they thought that attribute was positive, negative, or neutral for that scenario. Additionally, participants commented on each of the six scenarios by answering a list of questions.

After placing the attribute cards into one of the mugs, participants filled out “Individual Scenario Worksheets,” offering additional input about each scenario.

Every eight minutes, the facilitator gave a brief introduction to the significant characteristics of the next scenario and “attribute cards” for that scenario were given to each participant.

FTA’s analysis of the nearly 200 maps created in the Phase One sessions provided the data to develop a set of six “conceptual site scenarios,” which reflected the range of community thinking and framed the activities of the Phase Two sessions. A list of desired environmental/ sustainability parameters was also developed and expected to be implemented for any proposal.

The design of the Phase Two sessions enabled participants to discuss topics as a group (of six per table), but also to provide input as individuals.

Ten Phase Two sessions were held over one weekend. Again, residents could only participate in one session. The format and activities of each session were identical, with the exception of the slightly longer introduction for those who had not participated in Phase One. Each session began with a presentation of the results of the first phase.

After a brief description of each scenario, the facilitator handed out the six “conceptual scenarios,” one at a time: large-scale color maps (1” : 300’) and a bulleted list indicating the acreage of new public open space added in each scenario, the amount of built development (if any), as well as a description of features and related tax revenue information.

Participants discussed and reviewed each scenario as a table group. Then, they “weighed in” as individuals; each person was given a deck of cards; each card listed a specific attribute of that scenario (e.g. “Hotel fills need for locally-based visitor accommodations.”) There were

After eight minutes, cards and other materials were collected and the process was repeated with the next scenario map. When the exercise for the sixth and final scenario was done, participants completed the “All Scenarios Worksheet” which provided an opportunity to give additional, comparative feedback — after having reviewed all scenarios. Participants then indicated their favorite scenario, the one that best met their goals for open space and tax revenue.

Voices to Vision Phase Two Analysis. The various activities and exercises in the Phase Two sessions provided an extraordinary amount of quantitative data, as well as qualitative commentary. The conceptual scenarios and corresponding exercises were designed to understand the minimum amount of new public open space Albany residents would support. While many differences emerged, it was possible to analyze the information to generate a well-informed set of guidelines for the site. The key results include:

- While a small number of participants (11%) were satisfied with the addition of 19 acres of new, dedicated public open space, the majority (62%) supported projects that provide at least 72 acres of new open space. Five percent of participants would only be satisfied if close to 100% of the site was turned into dedicated open space.
- About 33% considered the development of the entire site as a park to be a positive statement, but only 10% felt total park development would be an appropriate use of the site.
- The majority (74%) considered restoration of wetlands to be positive; 76% supported a large area of pedestrian-only open space.
- Seventy-one percent of participants wanted to limit building heights to three stories; some indicated a willingness to go higher as a trade-off to gain more open space.
- Building on the site’s southern portion was described as “best location for development.”
- Fifty-eight percent of participants indicated support for a hotel (especially a one-to-three-story boutique hotel with conference center); hotel plus park was the most desired pairing.
- Thirty-six percent thought hotel and retail uses were appropriate.
- Forty percent of participants viewed garages negatively, but 32% supported parking structures as a way to gain additional open space.

ALBANY AND NON-RESIDENT PARTICIPANTS

A quick overview of the similarities and differences in opinions regarding open space, based on results of Phase Two sessions

Requirements for open space met with:	% Albany residents	% Non-residents
98 acres	5	27
87 acres	5	11
83 acres	29	36
72 acres	27	19
68 acres	24	0
19 acres	11	4

A quick overview of the similarities and differences in opinions regarding sufficient revenue to be generated from the site:

Requirements for revenue met with:	% Albany residents	% Non-residents
None	11	22
\$700,000	13	11
\$1,400,000	44	56
\$2,100,000	6	0
\$2,300,000	24	6
\$2,600,000	2	6

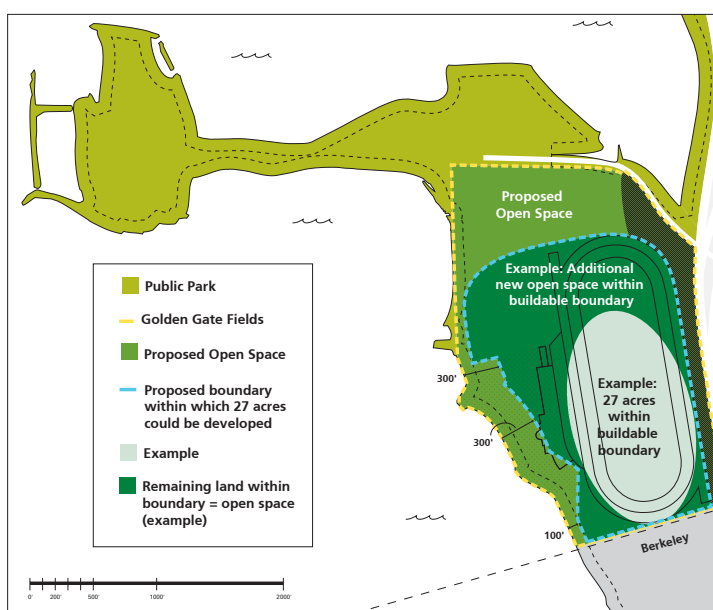
A quick overview of the similarities and differences in opinions regarding a sample of site attributes:

Site attribute	“Positive” for % Albany residents (+/-)	“Positive” for % Non-residents (+/-)
Developing site entirely as park	34%	60%
Large area of pedestrian-only open space	76%	93%
Keeping buildings to 3 stories or less	71%	50%
Hotel addresses need for visitor accommodations	61%	28%
Restaurant with organic food	66%	38%
Potential for racetrack to remain functional long term	24%	12%
Developer funds significant portion of open space	70%	50%

- Roughly 66% thought eating establishments highlighting locally-grown, organic food would be a positive addition to the waterfront.
- Less popular uses for the site included mixed use (housing, office, retail); 44% did not support a functioning racetrack long term; fewer than 20% thought a racetrack and boutique hotel combination would be appropriate for the site.
- Nearly 70% of participants believed developers should fund a significant portion of the creation of new open space.
- Forty-four percent of participants indicated \$1.4 million tax revenue from the waterfront site was the minimum acceptable amount; 24% wanted the site to generate at least \$2.3 million; 13% were satisfied with tax generation of \$700,000. Eleven percent of participants were comfortable without any tax revenue.

A Community Vision Emerges

With about one in 10 Albany adults voicing their ideas about the future of the waterfront, residents appeared to have garnered a newfound sense of hope about the waterfront. In evaluation forms, more than half said they believed that *Voices to Vision* would lead to a coherent sense of the future of the waterfront; and another 35% stated that they “hoped it would.” Out of these discussions, and out of the “common ground” that residents found with one another, a vision (and a physical framework) for the future of the waterfront was articulated. It recognized the importance of the entire site (public land and private land.)



It recognized the importance of the entire site (public land and private land.)

In summary, the Albany community envisioned: a waterfront that could be a model of environmental and economic sustainability, that supports a multi-generational community, small-scale, independently-owned businesses, and local arts, culture, and cuisine.

Site Guidelines. The 2010 report included site standards, design guidelines, and illustrative conceptual scenarios that indicated possible development opportunities that matched the desires of the community. The guidelines added two new uses (hotel and retail) to the existing zoning, with square footage and acreage restrictions — and the creation of, at minimum a 163-acre public park (including more than 75 acres within the now-privately-owned area).

With the goals of the community in mind, the recommendations focused heavily on balancing the desire for new dedicated open space with the concern for tax revenues, and were developed to simultaneously create a major public park and 27 acres of commercial and nonprofit development consistent with the community’s values.

The planning and design guidelines reflect the community’s desire to create a place that respects, protects, and enhances the waterfront while simultaneously acknowledging the importance of tax revenue to support the quality of life that Albany residents desire. The guidelines indicate the significance, potential, and challenges of the site, in relation to: its size (107 acres of currently private land adjacent to 88 acres of public open space); its location (at the edge of the Bay, bordered by two cities and a freeway); and the site’s physical condition.

Underlying the guidelines, is Albany's strong commitment to create and enhance public open space at the waterfront; to acknowledge and support the broader regional plan to create a continuous shoreline park; to restore and improve the site's wetlands, marshlands, and other natural features; and to enable an appropriate type, scale, and quality of private development that reflects Albany's goals for economic and environmental sustainability, while simultaneously respecting the city's and the waterfront's uniqueness.

The development guidelines are divided into discrete but interconnected parts:

- **Built Area and Dedicated Open Space:** Describes the maximum amount of built footprint (including associated circulation, and parking) for any commercial development and suggests acreage intended to be dedicated for public purpose structures (e.g. museum, aquarium, amphitheater, interpretive center).
- **Height Limitations**
- **Allowable Uses** (within "Built Area"): Defines specific building types and amounts of recommended commercial uses and open space to be allowed at the waterfront and notes restrictions related to uses and preferred characteristics.
- **Site Design and Architectural Quality:** Includes criteria and standards related to environmental sustainability, architectural design, site planning, and innovation.
- **Financial Implications:** Highlights community expectations of developers.

Voices to Vision Revisited: 2011

Less than one year after the conclusion of the community engagement process and publication of "*A Community Vision for Albany's Waterfront*," the owners of GGF — along with 20 other property owners — responded to a Request for Qualifications from Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratories (LBNL) for the development of its second campus (requiring up to 2 million sq. ft., plus parking). In May 2011, the GGF site was selected as one of six finalists. LBNL's process involved a competition-style effort to select one site out of the six finalist locations.

The owners of GGF (The Stronach Group) put together a development team and brought in a broad array of consultants to assist them in thinking about the LBNL project and site constraints, including the community-based recommendations of *Voices to Vision*, the need for a citywide vote; siting for LBNL's needs, geotechnical conditions, sea level rise, demolition/construction costs, timing, energy usage; and more. Beyond LBNL's needs, the GGF team desired to develop additional private land uses that could be co-located on the site and which they believed would:

- be compatible with the Lab's operations (and also profitable for the developer)
- provide resources to fund (a portion of) necessary infrastructure development
- replace tax revenue to offset loss (LBNL, a public entity, would not be taxed)
- allow for publicly-accessible open space at the waterfront

The city of Albany contacted FTA because they felt that it would be important to ensure both a meaningful community process (rather than a developer-driven process) that reflected and respected *Voices to Vision* and careful consideration of opportunities and challenges associated with the proposal³.

It was made clear to LBNL and to the owners of GGF that Albany's outreach and engagement process (unlike the processes at the other five competitive sites) would need to reflect the transparency, broad thinking, and well-informed activities and engagement set by *Voices to*

3

Given the very recent completion of *Voices to Vision*, the GGF team agreed to reimburse the city for such a process and for the city to take the lead on a public information, outreach, and engagement process. The city in turn engaged FTA to conceive, design, facilitate, and lead all aspects of this effort.

Vision. But, now the community would need to review opportunities and challenges of a real project, demanding specific requirements (many of which had never been contemplated during *Voices to Vision*).

Like V2V, *Voices to Vision-2* (“V2V2”) reflected a commitment to fact-based, neutral, and clear information that would be available to all residents. The process was kicked off with a letter from the City Council to Albany residents and businesses, along with a set of Frequently Asked Questions and a transcript of an FTA-conducted interview with representatives of GGF. The *Voices to Vision* phone number and website were re-established, offering information related to the new LBNL proposal.

Because LBNL demanded a very fast timeline, a 22-member Albany Waterfront Task Force was appointed by the City Council. FTA-facilitated six sequential 2.5 hour sessions with that Task Force over 11 weeks, followed by a citywide workshop with the City Council where the Task Force presented its individual and collective findings.

The mission of the Task Force was “*to ensure the collection, review, and dissemination (to the Albany community) of adequate, factual information and data related to potential development by the owners of the GGF site.*” The Task Force structure provided the developer an opportunity to present the project and intentions in a public setting — enabling the city and the community to see and hear changes to their thinking and direction. With this in mind, the developers were regularly asked about new information. Experts were invited to Task Force meetings, as needed, (attorneys, City Manager, Superintendent of schools, economists, etc.). Each session focused on a single topic: site plan (including parking, heights, land uses, etc.); ownership; legal issues; California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA); entitlement processes; initiative process; environmental impacts; and economic and fiscal impacts for the city and schools. Additionally FTA hosted an architectural peer review of the proposal that resulted in important feedback and modifications to the site plan.

The Task Force process included preparation of extensive session packets related to each topic. Notes were prepared and disseminated following each session. All information was posted on the V2V2 website; meetings were open to the public and televised.

Based on the vast amount of information presented, as well as that which was requested of the developer and LBNL but never provided to the Task Force, at the conclusion of five Task Force sessions, FTA prepared a document summarizing “*what was known, what was thought, and what was still important to find out.*” Armed with this data, Task Force members weighed in on their individual sense of “pros, cons, and opportunities” related to nine distinct (but interrelated topic areas) prior to a the sixth and final Task Force meeting.

The culmination of the Task Force’s work was a presentation to the Albany City Council, which focused on the pros/cons/opportunities identified by the Task Force and a summary of open questions and missing information requested of LBNL and the landowners. It was clear that the Task Force’s work was deliberate and thoughtful — working to understand an extremely complex project on a challenging site. What became clear to the Task Force was just how the land uses requested by LBNL impacted the community’s fiscal concerns and its desire for open space (because of the large amount of acreage and construction needed for the LBNL plan); addressing LBNL’s needs at this site affected fiscal desires of the community. (As a public agency, LBNL would not pay local taxes.) In order to address the community’s fiscal needs, additional construction and development, beyond LBNL, would need to be considered. Decisions about land use on the adjacent property in Berkeley impacted Albany (and vice versa). Unanswered environmental concerns related to LBNL were of great concern to the Albany community.

While LBNL was the catalyst for the developer's proposal and might bring benefits to the community, it became clear that locating LBNL on this site posed many challenges — from timing driven by the Lab to loss of tax revenue and community control.

As in many discussions and debates about waterfronts, the overarching conversation focused on the “value” of open space and what a community should accept (regarding development, scale, height, traffic, environmental impacts, etc.) in order to get that open space, and how this impacts revenues. The Albany site is unique — not only for its spectacular views and location, but also for its singularly complicated and integrated components: a vote to approve any plan; the potential loss of tax revenue; private property moving into public ownership; the reality that the proposal would need to include more than LBNL in order to be financially viable; and the conversion of a site that had been the focus of community discussion over many years.

Ultimately, neither the Task Force nor the Council voiced support for (or rejection of) the proposal, and GGF was not selected as the future home of LBNL's second campus.

Conclusion

For the Albany community, *Voices to Vision* (and *V2V2*) was significant and successful in its ability to lead residents through a transformative process to revisit an issue that had been contentious and divisive for many decades. For about a year, residents were informed and engaged through innovative, participatory activities that led them to dream and discuss, while understanding real implications of those dreams on the site itself, in the city of Albany, and throughout the region.

Emerging from the *V2V* process with a newfound sense that compromise could be achieved in ways that did not water down aspirations nor diminish pragmatic goals, the Albany community quickly responded to a development proposal from GGF with the confidence that they deserved to be informed, heard, and respected in a comprehensive community review process. The city and its residents pointed to their recently developed Guidelines and questioned how the proposal reflected their carefully crafted vision. Indeed, the GGF team took the guidelines seriously and attempted (but were not successful in their effort) to create a development plan that respected the community's vision.

Voices to Vision — from start to finish over a two and a half year period — used principles of community engagement and authentic public participation to:

- build broad understanding of complex and interconnected issues;
- empower residents to give meaningful input and see how that input impacted outcomes;
- unite a community behind a common urban design vision for its waterfront;
- support Albany's policymakers, residents, employers, and employees to demand complete and accurate information in order to collectively and effectively consider the multi-faceted implications of a significant proposal for a major land parcel in their city;
- create trust, dialog, and a sense of common ground — while simultaneously addressing civil disagreement and discussion among those who may never fully agree, but who share a desire to productively participate in the civic life of their community.

At the start of *Voices to Vision*, Albany took a bold step and embraced an engagement process that was unlike any that had come before it — a process whose very nature would unfold over time. The results were palpable, deep, and multi-layered. As residents from neighborhoods across the city participated, they strengthened their relationships, coalesced as a community, and began to lay the groundwork for innovative urban waterfront design that would reflect their shared values.