

Chapter 6
CRITIQUE OF FUTURE DEVELOPMENT PROPOSALS
FOR THE ALBANY WATERFRONT
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Introduction

Recent attention has been directed towards the future development of the City of Albany's waterfront. Albany Waterfront extends from the city limits of Richmond at Cerrito Creek on the north to the city limits of Berkeley at Codornices Creek on the south. Interstate 80 and State Route 17 (Hoffman Boulevard) form the eastern boundary, and the Bay shoreline constitutes the western boundary. Currently, 142 acres of the Albany Waterfront is privately owned by the Santa Fe Land Improvement Company (SFLIC). The remaining 40 acres of landfill extending from the Santa Fe property into San Francisco Bay are owned by the City of Albany (see location map, p. vi).

Much of the Albany waterfront, and a small portion of the Berkeley waterfront, are leased by Santa Fe to the Pacific Racing Association for the use of the Golden Gate Fields race track. The entire race track complex covers 225 acres of shoreline landfill (Imlay, 1983). It provides \$655,000 annual revenue to the City, primarily in the forms of property tax and sales tax. This amounts to 13.8 percent of Albany's \$4.7 million annual revenues (Krivatsy, 1985). The association's lease can be extended after the expiration date of 1997, although this seems unlikely; Santa Fe has recently stated that it does not plan to renew the lease (Cappio, pers. comm., 1985).

Current zoning establishes the area as a Waterfront District which provides for water-oriented commercial recreation and retail activities as well as open space, conservation, and parks and recreation uses (Krivatsy, 1985). The requirements for use within the Waterfront District include continuous public access to the water's edge and no enclosed structures located within 100 feet of the shoreline. Construction as planned in the following proposals will require numerous changes in the present zoning provision.

The City, Santa Fe and other concerned agencies have begun to prepare proposals for future development of this valuable piece of East Bay shoreline in the event that the track is closed. Development planners are not always in agreement about how the waterfront should be developed, hence proposals vary in content. The goal of this paper is to present, analyze, and determine the feasibility of these current proposals based on environmental, economic and social factors. In achieving this goal I hope to aid the City of Albany and Santa Fe in their effort to develop a suitable proposal which will meet the needs of the citizens of Albany, and the San Francisco Bay environment.

Past Studies

There has been no study specifically analyzing future development proposals for the Albany waterfront. However, there has been a feasibility study prepared for the City's Albany Waterfront Committee which examines development alternatives for the City-owned property (Environ, 1976, vol. 1). Contained in this report is a master plan which includes development of a 500-berth marina, some commercial uses, day-use facilities, and park space on the City's property. The plan was adopted by the City Council, but is now waiting for approval from the Bay Conservation and Development Commission.

The California Department of Parks and Recreation (CDPR, 1982) examined the potential for open space and recreational uses along the East Bay shoreline. It proposed a project which integrated the waterfronts from the Bay Bridge to the Contra Costa County line to create an East Bay shoreline park designated for both water- and non-water-related activities. Currently, the CDPR is negotiating with Santa Fe for portions of the waterfront which will be maintained as parkland (Falconn, pers. comm., 1986).

Wilsey and Ham (1984) compiled a useful analysis for the Santa Fe Land Improvement Company which explored opportunities for and constraints against waterfront development.

Site Description

For clarity when discussing the various proposals, I have adopted Wilsey and Ham's (1984) division of the existing waterfront site into 9 sub-areas (Figure 1). The site is primarily landfill, with the

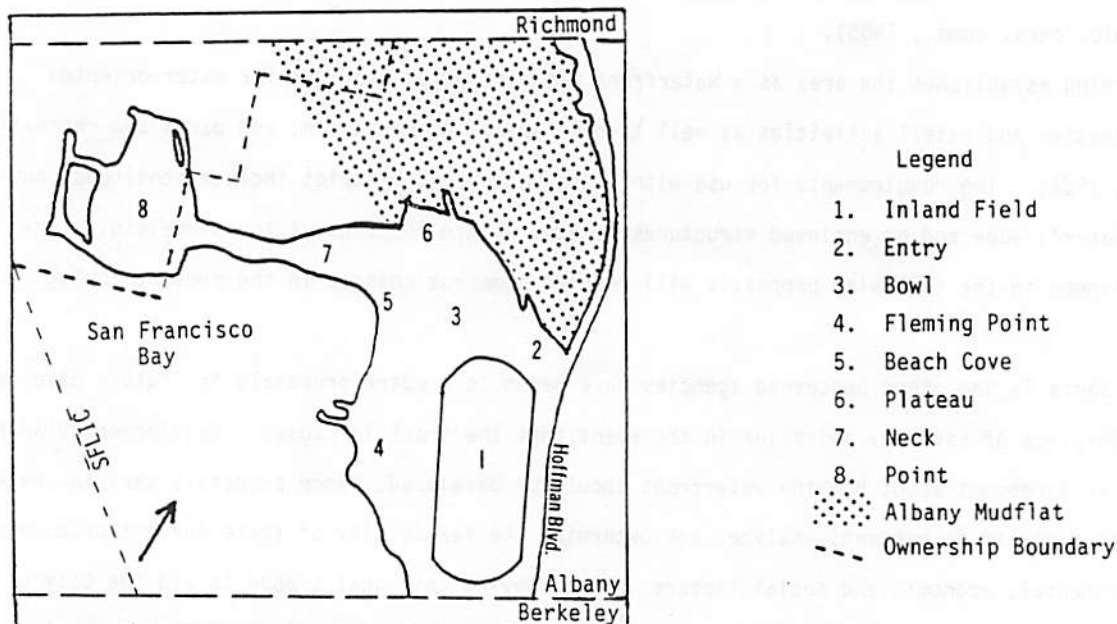


Figure 1. Albany Waterfront sub-areas.

Source: Adapted from Wilsey and Ham, 1984.

exception of what was once Fleming Point Hill on which now stands Golden Gate Fields' grandstand and parking facilities. Marshland and mudflats between the hill (formerly an island) and the original shoreline have been covered with fill to create land for the Inland Field area (Environ, 1976, vol. 2). The Entry provides a pedestrian and auto access corridor to the waterfront via the four-lane Buchanan Street right-of-way.

The Bowl area serves as parking for the track and tennis club. The Plateau is a flat mesa used as the track's weekend over-flow parking lot. Access to the Plateau's shore is limited due to the steep eroding slopes. Adjacent to the Beach Cove, which includes a dilapidated fishing pier and various debris, is the Neck, which connects the Santa Fe and City properties. Along the southern edge of the Neck are located vast numbers of productive clam beds.

The Point, also called the Bulb, is a closed dump site which has been raised to 45 feet above sea level. An array of bricks, broken concrete, dirt piles, and such can be seen as one walks to the western edge of the point. Spontaneous fires from buried waste are not uncommon on the Point (Cappio, pers. comm., 1986). The CDPR has provided one million dollars to the City for the sealing of the dump with the stipulation that a portion of the site be dedicated to the proposed state shoreline park (Falconn, pers. comm., 1986).

The northernmost area is the Albany mudflat, which is currently protected by public trust as a marshland nature preserve administered by the California Fish and Game Department. The mudflat (approximately 160 acres in size) is habitat for a variety of shorebirds and waterfowl, including several rare and endangered species (CDPR, 1982).

Methodology

In this paper I have chosen to examine three recently suggested development proposals which are the most apt to be adopted by the Albany City Council. The first two concepts were designed by the Albany Waterfront Committee. They are called the Central Park Plan and the Village Hub Plan (Figures 2 and 3). The Committee intends to modify these plans before including them within a program EIR at the end of April, 1986.

The third design analyzed is the Santa Fe Illustrative Development Plan (Figure 4). This proposal for development was submitted in November, 1985, to the City Council for approval in the form of an amendment to the City's General Plan (Bangsberg, 1985). It should take approximately one year for the City to process the amendment application (Falconn, pers. comm., 1986).

The plans are described below with emphasis on the kinds and amounts of commercial and open space development. A figure illustrating each concept indicates the approximate locations of development. Specific concerns addressed include the quality of access to the shorefront, the placement of structures, and the visual and environmental impacts of development.

The Plans

Each of the three examined proposals incorporate development into phases. Essentially, the first phase of development will begin prior to the race track's closure, along the Plateau and Mudflat. This initial phase is designed to recoup any lost revenue when the track does finally close. Subsequent phases will follow after the track's closure in other areas depending on market demand.

Present development plans are largely conceptual and only describe types of land-uses; actual dimensions of structures, square footages, and building heights are not always included. These and other details will be determined at a later date once a basic outline is agreed upon by the City and the private owner.

The Central Park Plan: The Central Park Plan created by the Albany Waterfront Committee (see Figure 2) emphasizes an initial phase of development beginning with the construction of workplaces and a hotel along the Plateau, with later development in the Infield and Bowl areas. Workplaces could include offices, small industry, and research and development establishments. The later development phase consists of additional worksites situated along the freeway, a second hotel on Fleming Point, a community center, a theater, and a retail shopping mall which is built to the shoreline and connected to a major pier.

This plan is composed of approximately half commercial development (76 acres), and half open space (65 acres). The majority of the open space is contained in a circular park located in the Bowl area. The Beach Cove and Neck will be devoted to water-oriented recreation, such as small-craft boating and fishing. Most of the shoreline has been left undeveloped for compliance with the State Shoreline Park.

The Village Hub Plan: The Albany Waterfront Committee's Village Hub Plan (see Figure 3) proposes 81 acres of commercial development with 60 acres devoted to open space. The major focus of this concept is a horse-shoe shaped, marina-oriented shopping area with a community center, and a public community plaza in the center. Activity will be concentrated towards the Bowl area. Again, construction of a hotel is proposed on the Plateau, while the entire Inland Field will be worksites. The Beach Cove and Neck are reserved for small-craft boating and fishing, while a recreational sports facility is placed on the south end of the Entry.

The Santa Fe Illustrative Plan: Santa Fe envisions a waterfront that is half parkland (72 acres), with three distinct development centers styled as knoll-top villages dispersed around the site (70 acres) (see Figure 4). In the center of each neighborhood will be situated a community square. This proposal differs from the others in that residential areas will be integrated with office and specialty retail space. Plans call for one- and two-story buildings facing the shoreline, building up to higher, more concentrated development in the interior of the neighborhoods.

Two to three hotels with approximately 500 rooms each have also been proposed. The buildings on the Plateau will be no more than six floors, and for other areas they will be no higher than the race

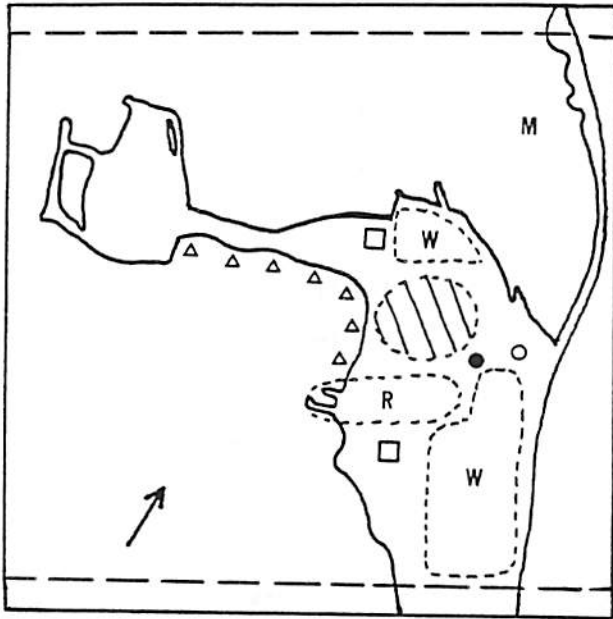


Figure 2. Central Park Plan.

Source: Wilsey and Ham, 1984.

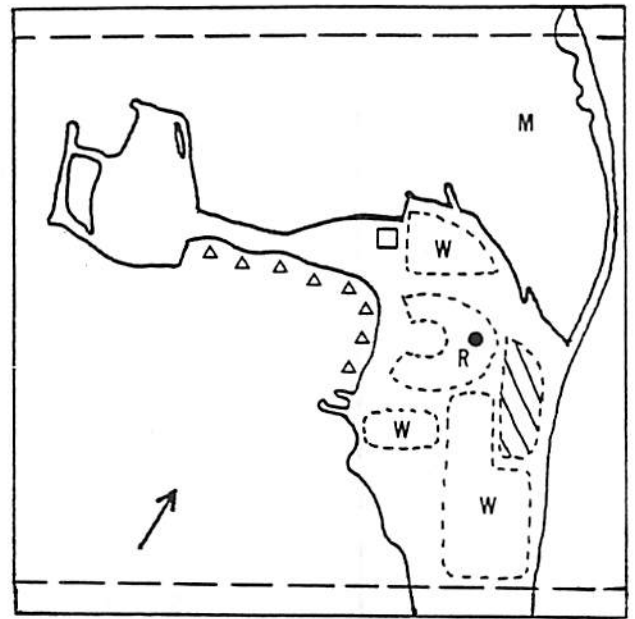


Figure 3. Village Hub Plan.

Source: Wilsey and Ham, 1984.

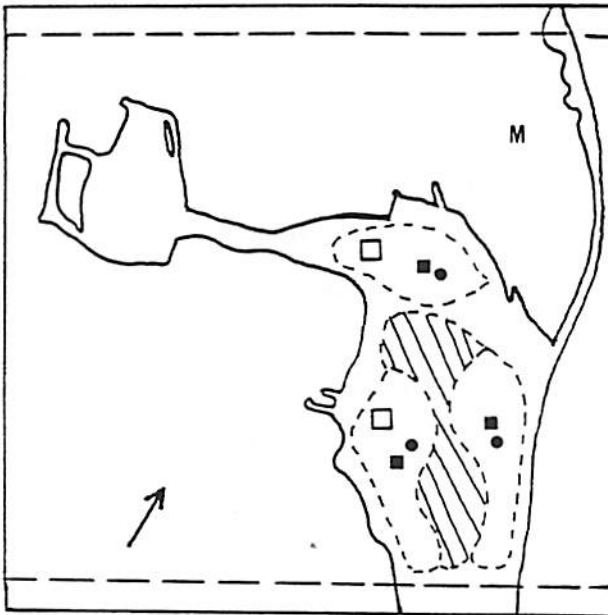


Figure 4. Santa Fe Illustrative Plan.

Source: Bangsberg, 1985.

Legend

- M = mudflat
- W = worksites
- R = retail
- = hotel
- = theater
- = community center
- △ = small-craft boating
- ▨ = parkland
- = residential

track grandstand (Bangsberg, 1985). The entire shoreline will be maintained as a continuous bicycle and hiking trail of varying width, with the exception of the pier near Fleming Point, which will be reconstructed and lined with small retail shops. Again, development will occur in two major phases.

Discussion

Some key factors should be considered when discussing plans for the Albany Waterfront Development. These include guaranteed auto and pedestrian access-ways to and from the shoreline, parkland and open space areas, uninterrupted views (both across the Bay, and toward the East Bay hills), and the construction of structures which will not disturb natural wildlife of surrounding areas. Concurrently, development must provide a substantial economic base for the City of Albany, and fair rates of return to the private owner.

Access to the waterfront now is at best minimal, especially for pedestrians. The California Department of Transportation plans for future development of bike trails and pedestrian walkways to the shore, but has not yet committed itself to a construction deadline. Each of the three plans allows the Neck and Beach Cove to remain as an unbroken stretch of open space, which will be maintained as part of the East Bay Shoreline Park. To provide a continuous approach to these open areas, development in the Entry and Bowl should be discouraged. The Village Hub Plan suggests the placement of a shopping mall in the Bowl area. This will obstruct passage to the water. The Central Park and Santa Fe Illustrative Plans appear to provide the greatest amount of access to the water's edge. Through the use of interior parks they permit an open area which leads directly onto the Beach Cove.

However, neither of these plans is in accord with the State Shoreline park project as they both propose to rebuild the pier near Fleming Point. Ideally, the CDPR desires an unobstructed shoreline trail which reaches all the way to the Emeryville fill in order to provide maximum public access to the shore. The pier will interrupt the continuous shorefront with retail businesses and restaurants.

Parkland and open space in the interior of the waterfront are necessary for recreational activities requiring wind protection, such as tennis and baseball. However, these interior spaces should not be the only ones available; people should have a choice between a variety of waterfront recreation areas. The Village Hub Plan falls short in this regard as its only recreation area is located on a small portion of the Entry near the freeway. The other plans have more ample park sites.

Presently, the view westward across the Plateau is extraordinary. Views across other parts of the waterfront are also excellent, although the grandstand at 100 feet above sea level blocks a portion of the view (Grote, 1986). If the Santa Fe Plan is adopted by the City Council, the proposed six-story hotel will greatly reduce views of the Bay; additional buildings situated along the shoreline would almost eliminate them. A thorough visual impact study should be completed before a plan is accepted to determine heights which will not obstruct lookouts.

Construction on or near the edge of the water may be harmful to many organisms. Of major concern is the effect development will have on the Mudflat. Development concentrated along the shoreline may

discourage migrant or resident species of waterfowl from occupying the water and coastline. Many have already been driven away from their natural shoreline habitat due to human activities. One species immediately in danger from East Bay waterfront development is the California clapper rail, a shorebird which utilizes the resources of mudflat and beach habitats (Johnson, pers. comm., 1986). Hence, development should be minimal near the nature preserve to ensure that species is not eliminated.

Similarly, developers might consider making an assessment of the impact residences will have on the site. Residential areas may prove to be a larger threat to organisms than commercial areas as they will present the site with a 24-hour population. The presence of unleashed pets is extremely disruptive to waterfowl: as a result, birds may be unable to utilize the waterfront (Johnson, pers. comm., 1986).

Conclusion

The Central Park Plan drawn up by the Albany Waterfront Committee appears to be the most feasible proposal. It situates development away from the shore. Most workplaces are contained in the Infield area, which allows the shoreline to be accessible. Moreover, it includes structures which are community-oriented, and may attract the public to the waterfront. The site may then be utilized more frequently.

Most importantly, the impacts to the environment seem to be minimized in this proposal, with the exception of the construction of a retail pier near Fleming Point. There is potential for disturbance of the productive clam beds and other aquatic life in the adjacent tidelands if the pier is rebuilt. Thus, these areas should be closely monitored prior to and after restructuring the pier. Changes in the current zoning provision should be made with the Bay and Mudflat wildlife in mind. Development should be limited to a distance of at least 100 feet from the water's edge. Another positive aspect of this plan is that there will be no residential development. This may enable the surrounding area to support shorebirds and waterfowl without disturbance.

The plan to be adopted for the City of Albany's waterfront needs to be carefully designed with consideration of economic, social and environmental impacts. Optimal benefits will arise if the plan can incorporate commercial development with open space, while complementing the San Francisco Bay environment.

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