



Friends of Five Creeks

*Volunteers preserving and restoring watersheds of
North Berkeley, Albany, Kensington, south El Cerrito and Richmond since 1996
1236 Oxford St., Berkeley, CA 94709
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Mar.27, 2023

Mayor and Council, City of Albany, and City Manager Nicole Almaguer
Parks Director Isabelle Leduc, Community Development Director Jeff Bond, Public Works Director Mark Hurley
Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Commission
City of Albany, 1000 San Pablo Ave.
Albany, CA 94706

Re: Mar. 27 Council Special Meeting, Work Session, Strategic Plan, Goal 3, Objective 3, Enhance Open Space, Item 4.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the City of Albany's next Strategic Plan. We are suggesting some changes to **Goal 3, Objective 3, Enhance Open Space. Item 4**, which deals with creeks. These ideas flow from thousands of hours of hands-on, often heavy-duty volunteer work, as well as working with local governments, over 27 years, to allow people and wildlife to enjoy local natural areas.

As background for the suggestions on the next page, please consider the following. Friends of Five Creeks' history is made up of variations on a theme. Local governments neglect the maintenance that natural areas in cities need. Tremendous volunteer effort is then needed to make them into what everyone wants: urban oases that welcome people and wildlife, maintained at low cost. You can see much of this in slide shows on [our web site](#).

- At our first large project after our founding in Albany in 1995, we replaced the chain-link fence and trash-filled ivy that had been Albany's gateway at the Ohlone Greenway with the creek-observation railing, steps, bench, and reasonably stable native vegetation that remain.
- In El Cerrito, after about 15 years of our work at a state-funded restoration of Cerrito Creek at El Cerrito Plaza, we handed an easily maintained, lovely area back to the city.
- Meanwhile, we began removing immense thickets of evergreen thornless blackberry that were increasing Cerrito Creek floods at Pacific East Mall. We continued upstream as Albany and El Cerrito abandoned the banks to the south and east. This is now a lovely creekside walkway and natural treasure, needing only light maintenance.
- In significant areas of Tilden Regional Park and the El Cerrito Hillside Natural Area, a decade of our heavy work curbed firetraps of French broom. Agencies had let this happen despite the lessons of the Oakland firestorm.
- On Codornices Creek below San Pablo, we returned to work on restorations funded by the state after all of UC Berkeley, Berkeley, and Albany essentially abandoned maintenance and a half-million-dollar maintenance fund. Below 8th Street, the creek now looks lovely and no longer needs big work parties. Albany's maintenance I think is reasonably low cost.

The fact that Cerrito and Codornices have come through this winter's storms beautifully and caused no problems shows that Albany is pretty close to the goal of maintaining vibrant natural areas at low cost. But these creeks that define Albany's borders will always need coordination and cooperation, and almost certainly some low level of volunteer stewardship.

- On Cerrito Creek, Albany, El Cerrito, Richmond, and large property owners will always need to coordinate.
- On Codornices, the 8th to 10th gap in the creekside trail remains, and there is still no maintenance agreement above 8th, where we still do heavy work.
- Volunteers will report problems, do early preventive maintenance, and make enhancements that staff cannot.

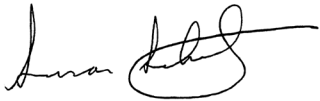
We hope this background explains why we suggest the changes (italicized in bold below) in **Goal 3, Objective 3, Enhance Open Space. Item 4.**

Continue implementation of CIP and maintenance projects on creeks. ***Work with other responsible agencies to establish maintenance plans that clarify responsibilities and funding. Establish frameworks that encourage volunteering.*** An annual meeting through the City's Parks, Recreation, & Open Space Commission should review status and assure momentum is maintained. ***This or a meeting coordinated with other responsible agencies should seek input from and provide a voice for community groups, neighbors, and users of the area.***

STATUS/COMMENTS: Staff provides regular updates to the PROS Commission on ongoing maintenance and capital work. Albany participated in a community stakeholder meeting in February 2023 in coordination with UC and City of Berkeley regarding Codornices Creek. ***The Phase IV project should be completed, building the creekside trail with city funds mainly left over from 1990s Measure R and Alameda County Transportation Commission funds. The ongoing MOU for creek restoration for maintenance should be revised as needed and extended eastward to San Pablo Avenue, clarifying maintenance standards and which of Albany, Berkeley, or UC Berkeley takes the lead in different tasks and parcels. Rotating volunteer efforts in Albany parks and open spaces have not resumed.***

Thank you for considering these matters.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Susan Schwartz", with a stylized flourish extending to the right.

Susan Schwartz, President, Friends of Five Creeks