



Friends of Five Creeks

*Volunteers preserving and restoring watersheds of
North Berkeley, Albany, Kensington, south El Cerrito and Richmond since 1996
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Nov. 3, 2016

City Manager, Mayor Maass, and Council Members
City of Albany
1000 San Pablo Ave.
Albany, CA (by email)

Dear Mayor Maass, Council Members, and City Manager:

We urge the City of Albany to expedite spending approximately \$600,000 in Measure R funds reserved for creeks on capital projects that carry out long-held goals of the city.

At your July 5 Council meeting, Finance Director Glasser outlined how, to avoid IRS difficulties, funds from the 1996 Measure R bonds should be spent in timely fashion. The bonds mature in 2019 – a short time to plan and carry out a capital project. Councilmember McQuaid suggested a fall Council workshop involving both Friends of Albany Hill and Friends of Five Creeks. Councilmember Pilch agreed, and Mayor Maas suggested also involving the Parks and Recreation Commission. (See meeting video from 1 hr. 25 to 1 hr. 35 minutes).

A Nov. 10 Parks and Recreation Commission meeting is scheduled to discuss only the 50% of Measure R funding dedicated to Albany Hill. This is a good first step toward spending of this largest block of Measure R money.

But \$600,000 for creeks is another key opportunity to realize long-envisioned goals, dating back to the 1995 Joint Watershed Goals Statement, which calls for “restoring creek corridors as natural transportation routes with pedestrian and bicycle paths along creekside greenways.”

We very much doubt that the funds remaining will pay for full-fledged re-contouring and re-planting like that done on Codornices Creek below Sixth Street. Grants from state bonds, which paid for earlier restorations, now seem unlikely. Previous applications have failed, most older bond money is gone, and there are new priorities. But \$600,000 can complete valuable capital projects like the following:

- 1. Complete the Codornices Creek trail from 10th to 8th Streets.** A linear trail along Codornices Creek is included in all plans for the creek and the 2035 Albany General Plan. The city has already paid for a conceptual plan.

Belmont Village Senior Living is building a trail from San Pablo to downstream to 10th Street. Trails along the creek from 8th Street down to the railroad were built as part of restoration. Filling the gap -- partly a narrow dirt track where walkers cling to a cyclone fence -- would create a highly valuable urban amenity. Kids could walk or cycle safely to the creekside ballfields. Seniors at Belmont Village and all Albany residents could relish nature while strolling or rolling along the creek, and also easily reach the area's new destinations.

Friends of Five Creeks is a partner project of 501(c)3 Berkeley Partners for Parks

Maintenance is the weak spot in urban creek restoration. Unifying and beautifying this urban stream makes it much more likely that neighboring residents, businesses, and other community interests will provide the ongoing stewardship that this rare home to threatened steelhead trout needs. We imagine public art from creek neighbors like artistic blacksmith Dan Dole or the Tile Shop, or volunteer work parties ending at Urban Adamah's farm, Covenant Winery, or Field Work Brewery on Sixth Street, for example.

- 2. Build a bridge over Cerrito Creek in the Albany Hill area near the south end of El Cerrito's Belmont Avenue.** The Belmont Avenue location was chosen after careful study in the 2004 Cerrito Creek Bay Trail Connector Feasibility study done by Alta Planning through an ABAG/Coastal Conservancy grant and adopted by Albany, El Cerrito, and Richmond. (This study also led to the current bicycle path along Pierce Street.) A Belmont bridge is shown in Albany's Active Transportation Plan and Creekside Park Master Plan.

This bridge would connect Albany Hill and Albany's Creekside Park to parks and trails along the north side of Cerrito Creek, as well as San Pablo Avenue. Perhaps the most-used access to Albany's Creekside Park now requires scrambling down a steep stone wall, crossing the creek on stepping stones, and making ones way up a slippery mud edge to steps built by Boy Scouts. A bridge also would improve access in fire, police, and medical emergencies. Vehicles now must go through Bayside Commons gates and drivers are reluctant to use the fire trail along the base of Albany Hill.

- 3. Build a bridge over Cerrito Creek at Adams Street,** connecting to Carlson. A bridge here was envisioned at least as early as the 1990 General Plan (as was a possible trail along the south bank of Cerrito Creek, through Albany's easement through Orientation Center for the Blind property), and is included in Albany's Active Transportation Plan (as well as El Cerrito's).

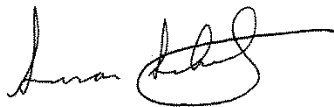
Surprising numbers of people ford the creek here, despite having to clamber up or down the steep, slippery bank in Albany, cross the creek on stepping stones, and go up steep steps and climb over a chain on the El Cerrito side. A bridge here would let Albany residents enjoy the creekside trail and also easily reach local businesses by foot or bicycle.

This project would take careful coordination with the state Orientation Center for the Blind, which owns the end of Adams Street and creek banks. There are significant safety issues for a multi-use trail crossing the Orientation Center's walkway used to train adults who have recently lost sight. But the bridge also would add to opportunities for the Orientation Center's students.

While these projects seem to us the most practical and beneficial, there may be others. But Albany should not miss out on the chance to use this money to fulfill long-held dreams.

Most documents referred to in this letter are at <http://www.fivecreeks.org/background/index.shtml>.

Sincerely



Susan Schwartz, President
Friends of Five Creeks

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