

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

Agenda Date: July 7, 2021
Reviewed by: NA

SUBJECT: Designation of a City Council Member to Provide Public Comment Regarding Proposed Albany Village Graduate Student Housing Project

REPORT BY: Jeff Bond, Community Development Director

SUMMARY

This report is intended to provide the City Council an update to campus planning initiatives on the UC Berkeley campus and proposed student housing development at Albany's University Village.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

That the City Council designate a Council Member to provide public comment at the July 21-22, 2021 University of California Board of Regents meeting regarding proposed Albany Village Graduate Student Housing Project.

BACKGROUND

UC (University of California) Berkeley is currently undertaking a planning and approval process for a new graduate student housing project in University Village at the northeast corner of Jackson Street and Monroe Avenue. Pursuant to the California Constitution, UC facilities that are constructed for educational purposes, including student housing, are not subject to city government regulation. UC Berkeley has proposed a housing project for single graduate students that would be up to six stories in height, 400 units, 825 beds, and 240 parking spaces at the northeast corner of Jackson and Monroe. Also included in the project is the construction of replacement facilities that will be displaced by the proposed housing, including support facilities for the College of Natural Resources growing grounds and a new Village community facility building.

Pursuant to the CEQA (California Environmental Quality Act), the campus has determined that an Addendum to the 2004 University Village Master Plan Environmental Impact Report is the appropriate level of environmental review for the proposed new housing project. An Addendum was initially published on March 18, 2021. A revised Addendum is expected to be published in the near future.

The proposed housing project will be implemented and operated by American Campus Communities (ACC), which is a publicly traded real estate investment trust, in association with a non-profit housing partner, pursuant to the terms of a long-term ground lease. This type of

partnership is an increasingly common form of implementation of student housing at higher education institutions.

On April 19, 2021, the City Council held a study session on the campus Long Range Development Plan (LRDP) and the proposed student housing project and discussed a wide range of project elements. At the conclusion of the study session, the Council voted to form an ad hoc committee to discuss with the appropriate UC Berkeley authorities any concerns that are not better handled at the staff level. Council member Nason and Council Member Tiedemann were selected to serve on the subcommittee.

On May 3, 2021, the City Council received a report from Councilmember Tiedemann regarding UC Village rent increase and pandemic measures. The Council approved sending correspondence to UC Berkeley opposing the proposed rent increase for UC Village tenants and requesting the University explore all options to forgive unpaid rent.

On June 8, 2021, the City Council Subcommittee met with UC Berkeley staff to receive an update on the status of the project, and to discuss various project elements.

DISCUSSION

The UC Board of Regents are expected to take action to approve Albany Village Graduate Student Housing project at the July 21-22, 2021 University of California Board of Regents meeting. This is expected to be a major milestone for the project, and the only formal opportunity for the City to address high-level University decisionmakers.

The proposed student housing project will have implications across a variety of subject areas of interest to the City, including:

- Mobility – It is hoped that the proposed project can accommodate the future implementation of bicycle, pedestrian, and transit improvements that are of shared interest of both the City and the campus.
- Creeks - As part of the project, new CNR and recreation facilities will be constructed near Village Creek and Codornices Creek. The ultimate design and placement of buildings can, if properly designed, improve public access, hydrology, ecological enhancement, and the Gill Tract Community Farm.
- Public Services – The City of Albany Fire Department will be the first responder to medical and fire calls initiated from the new project. The Fire Department is in consultation with the Campus Fire Marshal regarding the details of project compliance with applicable codes, operational requirements, and cost reimbursement. In addition, the Albany Police Department provides mutual aid to UCPD and often will be first on scene for high priority calls. Albany Police will coordinate with UCPD on operational requirements associated with the project.
- Housing – Increasing the availability of housing for graduate students is consistent with many of the policies contained in the City’s Housing Element portion of the General Plan.

It is not yet clear, however, whether student housing will count towards the City's Regional Housing Needs Assessment (RHNA) target for the next Housing Element, which is currently being prepared.

In addition to public comments by a member of the City Council, staff will prepare written correspondence to the Board of Regents. This correspondence will be prepared following review of the forthcoming revised Addendum.

SUSTAINABILITY CONSIDERATIONS

Section 5.7 of the LRDP draft environmental impact report provides a detailed description of University of California Sustainability Policies and the UC Berkeley Sustainability Plan goals. Of note, UC Berkeley Sustainability Plan goals include "By 2050 the campus will use only 100% clean, renewable energy" and "All new buildings and major modifications off of the main campus energy system will eliminate carbon emissions through no on-site fossil fuel combustion for space and water heating, laundry and cooking."

SOCIAL EQUITY CONSIDERATIONS

The expansion of UC Berkeley's enrollment capacity will lead to greater opportunities for historically underrepresented students to attend UC Berkeley. Associated with providing greater enrollment opportunity is the need to provide more student housing.

Within the City of Albany, University Village is one of the most culturally diverse neighborhoods. It is expected that an expansion of student housing would continue to attract students with a variety of ethnic backgrounds, which in turn can contribute to the vibrancy of the City as a whole.

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

Currently anticipated expenditures associated with engaging in the planning at University Village can be accommodated within existing department budget appropriations and contract authorization authority.

Attachments

1. Comment Letter on CEQA Addendum for Albany Village Graduate Student Housing project
2. Comment Letter on CEQA Draft Environmental Impact Report on the Long Range Development Plan
3. Letter opposing the proposed rent increase for UC Village tenants and requesting the University explore all options to forgive unpaid rent