

Orinda 'Architecture Awards'

Meant to Strive for Best

By Chris Lavin

Because applications for and disputes about some of Orinda's residential redesigns have become the front and center of more than one city planning meeting, Mayor Steve Glazer has instituted the "Mayor's Award for Excellence in Architecture, Design and Sustainability," an award meant to inspire even the most recalcitrant homeowner to strive to a new standard of aesthetic awareness.

"We would like for people to do their best within their budgets," Glazer said.

Applications for the award are open until September 15 for projects under way or currently in the application process.

More than half of Orinda's homeowners have owned their homes for more than two decades, and because resale and buying anew costs so much, more homeowners are opting for redesigning rather than moving, real estate agents say. When a homeowner applies for a redesign permit, the city must approve the plans and then the county reassesses the property value considering the new addition or remodel – not the

entire house. So while property taxes might increase somewhat, the home is not reassessed at market value.

But when one or more parts of a redesign happen to fall within the eyesight of neighbors or passers-by, trouble can begin. Retaining walls, decks and new driveways are sometimes the culprits, and neighbor gets pitted against neighbor at planning department meetings.

Glazer has long advocated that neighbors simply talk to one another about their redesign plans. Before applying for a permit to redesign or rebuild a part of the property, he has said, let your neighbors know what you are doing. That way they don't find out about the plan through city disclosures, notices or word-of-mouth.

"So much of the pain can be avoided," Glazer said.

For more information about the architecture awards, visit www.ci.orinda.ca.us.



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