

Orinda City Council Reviews Affordable Housing Projects

By David Anderson

The Orinda City Council and the Orinda Planning Commission are currently working out the details of two new affordable housing projects planned for Orinda. The December 18th City Council meeting had two separate items for affordable housing on the agenda. The first project, which is significantly farther along than the second, is a portion of Pulte Home's 14.1 acre Pine Grove development. The second development is an affordable housing facility for seniors to be located at 2 Irwin Way (the site of the former Orinda Library).

According to a City Council Staff Report the "Orinda General Plan Implementation Measure 3-2 states in part that the design policies and guidelines for the Pine Grove Neighborhood 'shall require 10 percent of the units to be affordable to low and moderate income households.'" In accordance with this guideline the Pine Grove development will include eight duplexes to be sold at below market rates.

The Council decided Tuesday night that because the intent of the eight unit development is for families, the affordable housing units should be priced based on the median income of a four person household.

The Council also decided to support the Planning Commission's recommendation that the down payment for these homes be 10% of the sale price instead of 20%, due to the fact that low income families may have a difficult time making such a significant payment. With the standard household size to be four people for a three bedroom living space and the down payment likely to be 10%, the sales price of the homes, according to the city council staff report, will be just under

\$375,000. The maximum income for eligibility of these homes will be \$100,600.

Councilmember Amy Worth suggested that eligibility for the homes should not be based on income alone, adding that an "asset test" should be put in place to decide eligibility. She offered the example that those applicants with "lower paying jobs and a trust fund" should not be considered eligible.

The major discussion topic on this issue dealt with who gets preference to live in the homes. Planning Director Emmanuel Ursu stated to the Council that they cannot (for legal reasons) give preference "to someone who's worked or lived in Orinda a longer period." The City Council, however, did agree that preference should be given to those who live or work in Orinda and have salaries that qualify. Preference for the housing will likely be given to teachers, police, fire and municipal employees.

An affordable housing facility for seniors at the site of the former Orinda Library was also discussed Tuesday night. The first of seven steps to select a developer for the project is now under way. The City Council undertook the first of the seven steps December 18th by reviewing a draft of the Request for Qualifications (RFQ), which is a document for developers to display their qualifications during the application process. If the timeframe for each step adheres to schedule the Council will be choosing a developer in early May, 2008.

The Council decided Tuesday night to form a selection committee made up of two Council members, the Planning Director and two members of the community (one with expertise in affordable housing). The committee will be selected by Mayor Smith.