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Published October 29th, 2008

Bicycle, Trail and Walkway Master Plan Takes the Next Step

By Andrea A. Firth

Over forty Orinda residents recently attended a community meeting with members of the City staff and Vice Mayor Sue Severson to provide input to guide the development of Orinda's Bicycle, Trail and Walkway Master Plan (BTW Plan). During the two-hour meeting, attendees heard a presentation by the consulting group Alta Planning and Design (Alta) who shared the results of an ongoing online survey of residents regarding the status and needs of the paths and trails throughout the City.

"Many Orinda citizens regularly participate in walking, hiking and biking around town," states Severson. "Unfortunately, there are limited areas in our community where these healthy activities can be enjoyed safely. This is especially true for our youth, who face many challenges in attempting safe routes to school," she adds. The online survey results echoed these sentiments and revealed that while a majority of residents regularly walk, bike, and hike around Orinda, just as many are dissatisfied with the pedestrian and bicycle paths they have to navigate.

Alta noted that Orinda's access to BART, neighborhood schools, and the regional trail system provides an excellent opportunity to create a more pedestrian- and cycling-friendly community. Challenges to achieving this goal include the narrow right-of-way and lack of sidewalks on many residential streets, topography and drainage issues, and the limited number of existing paths and bikeways outside of the Downtown area.

Residents at the community meeting were invited to participate in a workshop session. As the attendees poured over maps of the City to identify the most important areas to be included in the BTW Plan, the common theme of a desire for safe access to downtown, schools, and trails resurfaced. "This public input helps us to get a good handle on what is most important," says Todd Skinner, Director of Parks and Recreation. He adds that the public process and the creation of the BTW Plan will help to establish clear priorities and enable the City to determine what is most easily attainable, affordable, and creates the greatest usability.

"The BTW Master Plan process is very collaborative," states Severson. Over the next several months, additional public input will be solicited on the contents of a draft BTW Master Plan, which will then be revised before it is presented to the City for adoption next year.

"Once a Master Plan is in place, it will provide a vision for improving safe access to schools and our downtown area with prioritization for best use of limited resources," notes Severson. "This will allow for greater opportunities to receive future grant dollars in realizing the improvement plan."

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