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Orinda's Planning Task Force to Hold Public Workshops

By Andrea A. Firth

"I think this is Orinda at its best," stated Vice Mayor Sue Severson following a brief presentation by Planning Director Emmanuel Ursu of the draft recommendations of the Planning Process Review Task Force (PPRTF). Charged with identifying ways to make the development review process in Orinda streamlined, objective, and user-friendly, the PPRTF and subcommittees met over 120 times in the past year.

"These draft recommendations are the result of a very careful and thoughtful analysis," said Council Member Amy Worth. "On the residential side, there were architects involved who know how the process works in Orinda."

Led by Council Member Tom McCormick, who received a round of applause from the meeting attendees in recognition of his efforts in leading the Task Force, the PPRTF generated ways to update the planning and zoning code to simplify residential building and remodeling and to reduce impediments to downtown revitalization along with developing some unique recommendations for downtown improvements. "There is some pretty bold stuff here," noted Worth. "The downtown revitalization plan is exciting."

"One of the things that we tried to emphasize in the proposed recommendations is that [if adopted] you can streamline the process by getting the signatures of your neighbors in support of your project," stated McCormick. Coined the 'wine and cheese concept,' the proposed recommendation encourages residents to discuss their building plans with their neighbors and address their concerns before completing project designs to reduce the number of Planning Commission hearings and expedite the application process.

The next step in the process toward adopting the PPRTF recommendations is to obtain public input through a series of four workshops that will be held throughout December. Two of the workshops will focus on the process and residential recommendations (December 4th and 6th) and two will focus on the commercial recommendations (December 11th and 13th). At each workshop, a 20-minute presentation of the PPRTF's report will be given after which attendees will break into small groups and meet with a Task Force member for discussion. The PPRTF will then reconvene to discuss and incorporate this information into their final report to be presented to the City Council in mid- to late January. Details of the workshops can be found at the City website <http://www.ci.orinda.ca.us>.

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