

Lamorinda Community

Calendar, Notes, News

Orinda

Calendar	
City Council	7pm
Auditorium, Orinda Library 26 Orinda Way Tuesday, March 17 Strategic Planning Workshop at 9:30am in the Community Room at City Hall, 22 Orinda Way	
Planning Comm.	7pm
Auditorium, Orinda Library 26 Orinda Way Tuesday, March 24	
Traffic Safty Advisory Committee	
Sarge Littlehale Community Room 22 Orinda Way 7pm Monday, March 16	
Mayor's Com. Liaison	8:30am
Community Room at City Hall 22 Orinda Way Monday, April 6	
City of Orinda: http://www.ci.orinda.ca.us Chamber of Commerce: http://www.orindachamber.org • local businesses • upcoming events	



Suspected "Meth" maker 2/23/09 A smart pharmacist reported some suspicious activity – the purchase of cold medicine that included the ingredient pseudoephedrine – which is used to make crystal methamphetamine to the police, noting the vehicle description and license plate number of the get away car. When police pulled over the suspected vehicle they found 25 boxes of medicine containing pseudoephedrine from six different Rite Aid stores along with a 22 page list of Bay Area Rite Aid locations. Driver was arrested for possession of a precursor with intent to manufacture.

D.U.I. 2/21/09 Orinda police gave assistance at a car crash incident on Highway 24 at Pleasant Hill Road. The driver was parked sideways in the number four lane blocking traffic and reeking of alcohol. The 21-year-old male was slurring his speech and had urinated on himself. The young man was arrested at just after 2:00 a.m. – isn't that the time that bars usually close?

Orinda Motors robbed, 2/16/09 Sometime during the night an unknown suspect(s) broke into the business and removed property valued at over \$4,300 from the main office and shop area. Missing items include computers, tires, wheels, tools, even the ceiling fan from the bathroom was taken. No fingerprints were found.

Bold shoplifter, 2/12/09 An 18-year-old white male from Lafayette pushed a shopping cart containing two 12-packs of Bud Light out of the store, bypassing the front cash registers. "It was stupid thing to do," the young man said. He alleged that all of his friends have done it, so he believed he could get away with it. The store manager didn't press charges, but banned him from the store for a year.



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Council and Planning Commission Review PPRTF Recommendations

Neighbor Opt-In and FAR Changes Uncertain

By Andrea A. Firth
The City of Orinda set out to create a streamlined, objective, and user-friendly process for residential and commercial development—an admirable goal and herculean task. After 140 meetings and over a year of work by the eight members of the Planning Process Review Task Force (PPRTF), Council Members Tom McCormick and Amy Worth, and the City Planning Director Emmanuel Ursu, a 99-page draft report listing 61 ways to improve the City's planning process has been presented to the Planning Commission and City Council for their review and input.

"I was a member of the Task Force and support everything in the draft report," stated Ted Urban at the start of the recent meeting of the Planning Commission and City Council. However, he noted that some of the recommendations in the report would require changing Orinda's General Plan and therefore necessitated careful scrutiny. And it looks like that scrutiny will take several more meeting hours before a final report can be generated for the City Council to adopt.

At the February 24th meeting, Planning Director Ursu carefully reviewed the recommendations and answered questions regarding the rationale behind and potential impact of the proposed changes. After three hours, the group had provided feedback on the first 18 of 61 recommendations. While most of the recommendations breezed through with a nod, smile, and praise from the Commission and Council, two of the proposed recommendations generated lengthy discussion and garnered equivocal feedback.

Neighbor Opt-In. The proposed Neighbor Opt-In recommendation would allow residential projects of 1,500 square feet or more to bypass the Planning Commission (as long as no requests for a public hearing are received) if the resident obtains the written consent of adjoining property owners. The consent process would require that the neighbors have the opportunity to review the project plans and design standards and that story poles be posted and viewed. "The intent of the recommendation is to improve communication in the community and to have neighbors build neighborhoods," stated McCormick. However, Council Member Smith and several members of the Planning Commission were reluctant to remove the Planning Commission from the approval mix and felt that the proposal tipped the balance too far toward the neighbors.

Dean Orr, the current Chair of the Planning Commission, expressed a general uneasiness with turning the planning process over to the community noting that the Commission's job is to view individual

projects while keeping the community as a whole in mind. "We can all wrap our heads around a 1,000 to 1,500 square foot addition, but a project with no ends is not so easy," stated Orr. He also felt that the Neighbor-Opt In option might set up unrealistic expectations that neighbors' signatures would guarantee approval.

Planning Commissioner Louise Adamson concurred with Orr's concerns, but she added that the idea of neighbors communicating and working together was a component to the planning process that should be strongly encouraged. Adamson suggested some alternative incentives for gaining neighbors' consent that would still include a review by the Planning Commission.

Floor Area Ratio. The current policy for floor area ratio (FAR) limits the size of a home based on the size of the parcel. The Task Force has recommended that the FAR standard no longer be an absolute limit on the maximum home size for a given parcel and instead serve as a trigger for design review. Ursu explained that the design review trigger would provide greater flexibility for small additions (50 to 300 square feet) on smaller lots (less than .5 acres). While currently these additions might put the home beyond the allowable FAR, the project might not have a negative impact on neighbors and could provide benefit to the homeowner.

"There are some small lots that have ridiculously low FARs and similarly there are huge lots with very large FARs," stated Orr, but he expressed uncertainty about the Task Force's change. "My concern is with lots in the 20,000 square foot range. I wish we could adjust the FAR more definitively versus asking for design review and obtaining a variance." Council Member Glazer also expressed doubt. "I have always had

a problem with the FAR and felt it was an artificial number," he stated, "but I'm not sure this recommendation is an improvement."

The Planning Commission and City Council will continue to meet to review the remaining 43 recommendations of the PPRTF. These meetings are open to the public and will be noticed on the City website.

Neighbor Opt-In
Current Guideline: Residential projects that are 1,500 square feet or greater require a public hearing by the Planning Commission.

Why Change?: Many projects meet the applicable standards, undergo more scrutiny than necessary, and do not require a public hearing.

Proposed Change: Residential projects that are 1,500 square feet or greater can be approved by the Zoning Administrator (i.e., the City Planning Director) without a public hearing before the Planning Commission, if the adjoining neighbors provide written consent. Neighbors must be provided the plans and design standards for review and be able to see the project story poles in place. The Zoning Administrator can deny or refer a project to the Planning Commission at anytime.

Floor Area Ratio
Current Guideline: The floor area ratio (FAR) standard sets a maximum limit for the size of a home based on the size of the parcel.

Why Change?: The current FAR standard sets unrealistic expectations for the maximum size of homes on large lots and unnecessarily restricts the size of homes on smaller lots.

Proposed Change: Allow the FAR standard to serve as a trigger for design review versus an absolute limit. Re-evaluate the application of this more flexible FAR standard in two years or after 10 relevant projects are completed.



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Orinda City Council Sets Strategy—Prudent Fiscal Management the Priority

By Andrea A. Firth

In a relaxed, collegial, workshop format, Orinda's City Council met with several members of the City Staff to establish goals and objectives for the year. All agreed that infrastructure remained the City's number one problem. However, the Council set clear direction that its number one, overarching priority is prudent fiscal management. As the Council and Staff reviewed the City's plans related to infrastructure, public safety, planning and economic development, and customer service and community outreach, the discussion often returned to the need to implement programs as cost effectively as possible.

"Can we be more efficient? Are we doing our best?" were questions raised by Council Member Tom McCormick. He suggested that the City conduct an internal review of all departments and programs to look for efficiencies and ways to save money. Mayor Sue Severson agreed that an internal review was appropriate noting that the City had already set the plans for enhancing revenue in motion through the implementation of the recommendations offered by the Revenue Enhancement Task Force.

City Manager Janet Keeter reported that the City had no cuts planned and was working to "hold

the line" on the City budget. Keeter and Administrative/Financial Services Director Beverli Marshall also reported that input from members of the Finance Advisory Committee, formerly the Budget Committee, had been very helpful in last year's budget process and would be part of the process again this year. "We really celebrate the work of the Budget Committee," stated Council Member Amy Worth.

Improving public communication was another important priority identified by the Council Members. As an example, Worth pointed to the significant amount of work done by the Planning Process Review Task Force and the need to bring the group's recommendations to the community in a big way. Although the Council liked the look of the City's new website, members were frustrated by its less than user-friendly access to information. "Three and four clicks to find something is too many," stated McCormick. In addition, McCormick repeatedly called for the City to establish and grow effective email distribution lists for communicating to residents.

The City Council and Staff will continue the Strategic Planning Workshop on Tuesday, March 10 at 9:30am in the Community Room at City Hall.

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