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Residents Encouraged to Weigh in on Downtown Recommendations

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In a process that is expected to continue through May, Orinda's Planning Commission will next meet on Tuesday April 27th at 7:00 p.m. in the Library Auditorium to discuss the Planning Process Review Task Force's (PPRTF's) recommendations for development in downtown Orinda. Wanting an inclusive and transparent process, the Planning Commission strongly encourages residents to attend and offer feedback.

So far there has not been a robust turnout of Orinda's citizens to the Planning Commission meetings to provide the input that could help shape the future of Orinda's downtown. Commissioner Chris Kniel noted, "There have been numerous meetings set up to address this issue. There has been plenty of opportunity for the public to participate." Still, Commissioner Louise Adamson commented, "We've been disappointed in the community's response."

Although the recommendations for downtown were on the agenda for the Planning Commission's April 6th meeting, due to the lengthy discussion of prior items, the matter was continued to April 27th. It will be the only item to be heard that night, so residents will have plenty of opportunity to share their thoughts and concerns. The Commission will review the PPRTF's recommendations by topic in the following order: land use, residential density, lot coverage and open space, building setbacks, building height, parking, and landscaping. The Commission's review is expected to take more than one meeting to complete.

For a small city flanked by hills and bisected with a freeway that has a general plan that dates back to 1987, developing a vision for future growth has not been easy. The task force spent over a year compiling their recommendations, which will be presented to the City Council after the Planning Commission completes their review. Looking to revitalize Orinda's two downtown areas into a connected, vibrant, pedestrian-friendly village is the goal of this volunteer effort that may require clarifying specific land use policy to potentially include mixed-use buildings and increased height limits.

The final report of the PPRTF listed the primary reasons for Orinda's downtown revitalization are the need for: revenue enhancement through increased sales taxes, greater breadth and depth of retail offerings, downtown housing opportunities, improved aesthetics and function of aging deteriorated buildings and infrastructure, and parking improvements.

A small group of residents voiced their opinions regarding the recommendations at the Planning Commission's April 6th meeting. "Not all of us appreciate change," stated Ann O'Connell-Nye, "You can't imagine how frustrated people are." Another resident commented, "I am categorically opposed to anything that increases density."

The PPRTF's final report is available on the City's website: www.cityoforinda.org. Select Planning Department and go to Planning Process Review Task Force in the green box.

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