



Independent, locally owned and operated!

www.lamorindaweekly.com 925-377-0977

Published May 26th, 2010

Public Forum

Revitalizing Downtown Orinda

Dear Editor:

The goal of the Orinda Planning Process Review Task Force ("PPRTF") was to maintain Orinda's charm while providing for the future. The best plan that could be conceived while maintaining stated goals is to increase the height limit with dignified and appropriate setbacks to the buildings such that Orinda maintains its charm, looks good, has more pedestrian and bike paths with more trees and flowers that provides for an accepting atmosphere for its residents.

There have been a number of misstatements and misunderstandings about what has been proposed by the PPRTF in order to revitalize downtown Orinda. Please let me try and clarify.

1. There is not and never has been a proposal to use City funds

to move the power poles out of downtown;

2. There is not and never has been a proposal to use City funds on BART parking areas; and

3. There is pending a proposal to increase the height limit from 35' to 55' in some specific areas of downtown, but ONLY with specific requirements to maintain Orinda's charm.

The PPRTF proposal increases setbacks such that buildings will not go straight like the Orinda Library, which is 47' high, or the Vintage House building, which is 55' high.

The PPRTF proposal also increases street setbacks to allow for wide sidewalks, trees, planters and maybe sidewalk dining; then at 27' high (as compared to current height limit of 35') the building must articulate and step back at each level. This will allow for sun and light to shine on the street and sidewalks.

During the 150+ public meetings and six workshop - town hall type publically noticed meetings, the PPRTF heard that a majority of the people, who understood and saw drawings of the how the proposed height limit increase would work, approved the PPRTF Revitalization Plan. After reviewing information and drawings, the public understood that the proposal would not create a Walnut Creek type-setting, but instead would maintain the charm of Orinda while updating the many old buildings to allow for more services to Orinda residents.

I have also heard from many Orinda residents that support the following:

1. Improve our roads, fire-flow water pipes and other infrastructure that NEED to be repaired or replaced;
2. Provide housing in the downtown area for the majority of Orinda residents that are retirement age and are looking to downsize their homes;
3. Provide more stores and service businesses in the downtown area so Orinda residents do not need to leave town to spend their money on necessary items;
4. Provide more parking in downtown;
5. Creating a park and access along San Pablo Creek;
6. Make the area more pedestrian friendly and adding bike and walking paths;
7. Allow for a mixture of retail, service, and residential uses in the downtown area;
8. Implement green building codes; and
9. Increase the number of street trees and planters.

In order to accomplish all of these goals, the City needs more tax dollars. A way that will bring a steady stream of revenue to the City is to receive more sales tax dollars from money spent in Orinda (which is down 15.3% this year). The only way to get more sales tax dollars is to increase the number of stores and service businesses in Orinda. The only way to increase the number of stores and service businesses is by allowing for updated buildings to provide for residential units above retail with more parking. Unfortunately, the reality of the situation is that the City cannot make necessary repairs to roads and infrastructure without allowing for more service businesses in the downtown area.

Basically, the concept was to allow for a thoughtful and artful renaissance of the downtown to accommodate a pedestrian friendly and charming flower and tree filled environment for all Orindians to enjoy. I hope this creates more discussion on how to update Orinda and provide for the future.

Sincerely,

Thomas T. McCormick

Reach the reporter at: info@lamorindaweekly.com

Copyright © Lamorinda Weekly, Moraga CA