

# Orinda Seeks a Vision

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At the crux of the current debate is increasing the building height, and residents' feedback on that aspect has been contentious. But there are points of agreement. Pedestrian-friendly, adequate parking, retail that meets Orindans' needs, and retaining the City's semi-rural, village charm are tenets of a vibrant downtown environment that seem universally acceptable. However, residents' views diverge on what this revitalized downtown should look like and how to get there.

With the first Visioning Orinda workshop set for next week, the Lamorinda Weekly met with the creators of the PPRTF downtown recommendations, Bruce Burrows and Clark Wallace, and two citizen groups invested in the downtown planning process, Save Orinda and OrindaVision. Here's what they had to say about their visions for the City.

## PPRTF Downtown Subcommittee—Burrows and Wallace

"We were optimistic, we thought we could make the downtown better for the community, and this plan is the embodiment of that," says Clark Wallace as he points to his dog-eared, highlighted copy of the downtown recommendations that comprise 35 pages of the PPRTF report. Wallace, an Orinda resident for 47 years and a prominent developer in Lamorinda and the Bay Area, worked with another longtime resident, Bruce Burrows, to draft the recommendations which focus on downtown revitalization through a mix of retail, residential, cultural, and office uses.

"What impressed me about the task force was the incredible amount of experience among the members," says Burrows, who has worked in commercial real estate for almost 40 years and has specific expertise in retail leasing. Burrows, Wallace, and nine other residents, including Council Members Tom McCormick and Amy Worth, were appointed to the PPRTF by the City Council following a recruitment and interview process that was noticed and open to the public. Both men believe a revitalized business environment will result in increased sales and property tax revenues for the City.

Some residents have criticized the appointment of two local developers as inherently biased. Wallace believes these comments are directed primarily at him. As the developer of The-

ater Square, which sparked controversy when built, he acknowledges that he fell out of favor with some residents along the way; he is emphatic that he has no plans to develop anything in downtown Orinda again. Neither Wallace nor Burrows currently owns any property in downtown.

Burrows and Wallace have distilled their vision for downtown to three primary objectives: infuse residential units into mixed use housing above retail and office space; encourage redevelopment of outdated and underutilized properties with an expansion in building height; and initiate a coordinated leasing and marketing strategy among property owners.

Both men feel that the addition of buildings with four floors to accommodate two floors of residential space above first floor retail and second floor offices is essential to incentivize retail revitalization and provides housing options for residents and built-in shoppers for retailers. "The current 35-foot building height limit is an impediment to development. It's a deal breaker," says Wallace. The last commercial development in Orinda's downtown was Theater Square back in 1988, according to Burrows. "We're not insensitive to residential interests," says Wallace, and both men stress that the recommendation for increased building height is confined to select areas.

Burrows spoke with many property and business owners throughout the course of drafting the downtown recommendations. Orinda's commercial land is spread across a disparate group of 30 property owners, some managed by family trusts and many who live outside of the City. So far, neither the property owners nor small business owners have actively joined the public discussion regarding the downtown recommendations.

## Save Orinda

Save Orinda is a grass roots operation with a core group of about twenty residents who are unified on retaining Orinda's existing 35-foot downtown building height limit. Scott Zeller is a founding member of the group, which has endorsed his candidacy for City Council. "Endorsement of Scott is one of the ways we feel we can have an impact on the decision makers in these issues," says Owen Murphy, a de facto spokesperson for the group. Revitalization is a mis-

nomer according to Save Orinda's interpretation of the PPRTF report, which they feel is all about development. Collectively the group has been frustrated with the PPRTF process, and they frequently mention that any change in downtown building height should be placed on the ballot for voters to decide. They also feel that the proposal for mixed-use buildings has not been adequately evaluated to determine the impact on traffic, parking, and municipal services. Members' views vary on the viability and appropriateness of infusing residential space into downtown, but based on the retail leakage study recently conducted by the City, they do not believe residential units will bring a meaningful increase in sales tax revenue.

Preserving the City's semi-rural village character is a top priority for Save Orinda—one they feel is inconsistent with taller, higher density, transit-based, mixed-use redevelopment. "I care about the small businesses in Orinda, and I don't want to see them priced out," says Save Orinda member Kent Hagen. In lieu of what has been proposed, the group supports beautification in downtown with changes such as better streetscapes, cleaner signage, and storefront improvements. "We lean toward ad-hoc, market-driven facility modernization, to be negotiated directly between landlords and tenants, within existing building codes [including height]," explains Murphy.

Save Orinda believes a comprehensive survey of all of Orinda's citizens regarding what they would like to see happen in downtown is needed.

## OrindaVision

About a year ago, urban planner Peter Hasselman and local architect Bill Simpson started to share their vision for what a vibrant downtown Orinda could look like. Hasselman's conceptual sketches present a pedestrian-friendly cityscape with attractive public plazas and mixed-use development. Capitalizing on the BART property—reworking the space to support retail and commercial uses and as a connecting link between Orinda's two downtown districts—is a key component of their design.

Hasselman and Simpson have been joined by four other longtime Orinda residents, Ian Baird, Michael Hanneken,

## Orinda Downtown Vision Meeting on 10/18 and 12/9

To provide all of Orinda's residents with the opportunity to help to determine the vision for Orinda's downtown, the City has planned two public workshops, says City Manager Janet Keeter. The first workshop will be held on Monday, October 18th, starting at 7:00 p.m. at Orinda Community Church Fellowship Hall. Professional facilitators from MIG Inc. in Emeryville will lead the "town hall style" meetings to allow residents to constructively discuss the merits of the recommendations presented in the downtown segment of the Planning Process Review Task Force Report. The second workshop is planned for December 9th. *A. Firth*

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## Julie Rossiter for Orinda School Board



Logo designed by Aidan Rossiter, OIS student



For a complete list of endorsements and to learn more, visit Julie's website at: [www.julierossiter.org](http://www.julierossiter.org)

### Top Priorities

- maximize school funding and ensure best use of funds
- continue improving and updating school curriculum and resources
- partner with parents, community, teachers and administrators to ensure ultimate goal: providing best possible education for all students in Orinda

### Background

- three children in Orinda schools (ages 12, 10 and 4)
- business litigation and employment law attorney
- legislative representative for Del Rey Elementary to local PTA
- Annual Fund treasurer
- leadership roles in school fundraisers
- classroom volunteer in numerous capacities
- significant experience in negotiation and building consensus to achieve results
- family involved in many community activities

### Endorsed by:

#### All Five Current Orinda School Board Trustees:

- Jack Bontemps
- Matt Moran
- Pat Rudebusch
- Riki Sorenson
- Pam West

#### Current and Former Orinda Elected Officials:

- Glenn Alper, former Orinda School Board Trustee
- Linda Landau, former Orinda School Board Trustee and 2010 Orinda Citizen of the Year

Amy Worth, former Orinda Mayor and current City Council Member

#### Current and Former Parents' Club Presidents:

- Jeanette Broad
- Courtney Chandler
- Katherine Dureault
- Kristen Fenn
- Susan Miller
- Lynn Molloy
- Yosh Neugebauer
- Carolyn Parodi
- Shauna Simmonds
- Danya Stehr
- Kirsten Whipple

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# City Council Candidates Address Development

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I believe the PPRTF recommendations provide the framework for a plan to create a unified pedestrian friendly downtown with a town center—all within our semi-rural nature. I support increasing the building height limit on specific down-slope lots to allow four floors, so long as there are appropriate building step-backs (not boxes), residential units above, more parking, a shuttle bus, and a

pedestrian promenade. Studies show there is less traffic when residential units are above retail.

We currently do not have a plan for downtown; instead, we have an eclectic area with 1950's strip centers that do not accommodate resident's needs, parking or pedestrian walkways for people to enjoy our beautiful city. Creating a downtown plan will result in a unified village center where people can

stroll to visit shops, restaurants and others. An updated downtown will also generate much needed sales tax revenue to fix Orinda's failing roads.

A prior Council accepted money that obligated the city to build senior affordable housing at the old library site. The project needs to be reasonable in size and pushed back from the road, not like what has been proposed.

A City Council Candidate Forum co-sponsored by the Orinda Association and the League of Women Voters of Diablo Valley will be held on October 13th. The Lamorinda Weekly will be on hand to cover the candidate forum and hear what the five candidates vying for three Council seats have to say. If you are unable to attend the forum, check out our website ([www.lamorindaweekly.com](http://www.lamorindaweekly.com)) the next day to read all about it.

## ELECTION DAY IS NOVEMBER 2nd!



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### Priorities:

- Communication and Collaboration Between Parents, Schools, District and Community
- Fiscal Responsibility
- Strategic Improvement
- Attract and Retain Quality Teachers

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