

# Civic News

# Orinda

## Public Meetings

**City Council** Wednesday, November 3, 7:00 pm  
Auditorium, Orinda Library, 26 Orinda Way

**Planning Commission** Tuesday, November 9, 7:00 pm  
Auditorium, Orinda Library, 26 Orinda Way

Check online for agendas, meeting notes and announcements  
City of Orinda: [www.cityoforinda.org](http://www.cityoforinda.org)  
Chamber of Commerce: [www.orindachamber.org](http://www.orindachamber.org)

### • Police Report •

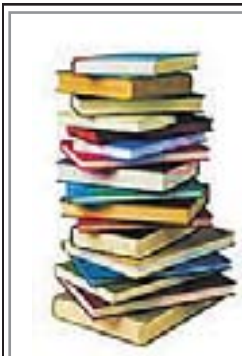


**Stolen check 10/20/10** A woman stole some checks from a mailbox in Fairfield and attempted to cash one at the Orinda branch of Bank of America. An astute teller noted the account was flagged and refused to cash it.

**Shoplifting six, 10/19/10** Six unknown women entered the CVS store in Orinda and were seen placing numerous undisclosed items in their purses then exited the store without paying. The dirty half-dozen were last seen on foot heading toward BevMo. After an extensive search no suspects were found.

**Petty theft, 10/17/10** An unknown suspect at Rite Aid hid a bottle of liquor in his clothing. The suspect was confronted by a store employee who recovered, more likely uncovered, the merchandise. The liquor wanna-be looter fled to his brown pick up truck and has not been seen since.

**D.U.I., 10/14/10** A 52-year-old white male was pulled over at Highway 24 and St. Stephens Drive. He had red watery eyes, slurred speech and an unsteady gait while performing field sobriety tests – the trifecta of intoxication signs. His .015 blood alcohol level sealed the deal – he was arrested for D.U.I. and taken to the Martinez Detention Facility.



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## Downtown Orinda—Double Vision?

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### Assets and Challenges

Asked what they feel are the assets of downtown Orinda, many residents' comments focused on environment over structure highlighting the area's climate, semi-rural nature, and people. The small-town feel, easy access to other parts of the Bay area, minimal traffic, free parking, historic buildings, lack of strip malls and fast food chains, and safe setting were other things people like about their City. "The sidewalks roll up at night," said one resident adding, "Non-vibrancy at night in downtown Orinda is a good thing."

But what was good for some was not so good for others. Several residents said that the downtown provided little of interest for residents and that the commercial districts had very limited options for teens. Another resident opined the lack of communal space for both youth and adults and advocated for broader walkways, plazas, and more outdoor cafes.

"I want to spend locally. I want to park and walk in downtown," said one young mother adding that she and her peer group would like to see more good restaurants and possibly a utility store.

Eartha Newsong, a resident of the Orinda Senior Village who helps to transport Orinda seniors who can no longer drive, bemoaned the lack of residential housing in and near downtown. Newsong said that many seniors in Orinda want to

move out of their homes in the hills to live within walking distance to downtown shopping and transportation.

The location of Orinda's downtown presented its own set of challenges. Beynon noted that while the BART station and Highway 24 provide easy access, these attributes bifurcate the city into two downtown districts, which presents an identity challenge. Residents also noted that the small size of downtown, which is wedged on a narrow strip of land between hills on the east and west sides, also creates constraints.

### Building Height

As the residents shared their likes and dislikes, they also repeatedly voiced opinions about the proposed 55-foot building height. Several preferred the low scale of the city, which currently has a 35-foot building height limit in downtown, and feared taller buildings would obscure the views of the hills and create a canyon feeling on downtown streets. One resident noted the potential for climate change due to taller buildings obstructing the ocean breezes that keep Orinda cool.

Others were open to a height increase, especially in the context of mixed-use buildings that would bring residential options to the City. "I would love to have my elderly mother move into downtown. I might even move there myself when I'm ready to leave my tidy lit-

tle rancher," said Maya McBride adding that as proposed, the increase in building height must meet appropriate design standards.

Change—Necessary or Inevitable? The fact that little has changed in the commercial landscape of downtown Orinda since the building of Theater Square twenty-five years ago evoked a mixed response among the attendees.

"Whether things should change is really a non-issue," said a resident who felt the 23-year old General Plan was outdated and needed to be updated to reflect how life is changing. Dick Marchick recalled that 35 years ago residents worried about the negative impact the building of Orinda Woods would have on the City. Marchick now lives in Orinda Woods, and the neighborhood has long been considered a desirable location and place to live. "We're selfish if we don't look forward to the future and think of our kids," added another resident.

The course of Theater Square represented a cautionary tale for some. "Theater Square was filled with restaurants and shops and now it is struggling with vacancies," said a resident who wondered aloud, "If we build it will they come?" Others questioned the need for and viability of Orinda's downtown. "No one moved here for the downtown. We're not going to use it," said a resident.

### Next Step

"Clearly, this is not a cookie-cutter suburb. Orinda is unique," said Beynon, who explained that MIG's next step would be to synthesize and analyze all of the residents' input from the workshop. Residents can continue to submit comments regarding a vision for downtown via the City website ([www.cityoforinda.org](http://www.cityoforinda.org)) through October 29th. The next visioning workshop will be held on Thursday, December 9th at 7:00 p.m. in Fellowship Hall of the Orinda Community Church, 10 Irwin Way.

## Retail Leakage Update

By Andrea A. Firth

The infusion of residential space in Orinda's downtown districts won't have a significant impact on local retail sales according to a sales leakage study update. "Not much," was analyst Stephen Wahlstrom's answer to the City Council's question regarding the impact of downtown housing on local retail sales.

The sales leakage study report was presented to the City Council in early September and Wahlstrom was back before the Council on October 19th to provide an update to address the housing/local spending question and fielding questions from Council Members Amy Worth, Victoria Smith, and Sue Severson. Mayor Tom McCormick recused himself from the presentation and discussion of the retail leakage study this time around pending advice from the California Fair Political Practices Commission on his participation due to the proximity of his home to downtown. Council Member Steve Glazer, who arrived late to the meeting, participated in the tail end of the discussion.

Wahlstrom explained that the addition of 200 housing units in the downtown would generate another

\$1.6 million a year in local sales revenue, a modest 2% increase in the annual sales captured by local businesses. This would translate to approximately \$16,000 in sales tax revenue for the City annually. Currently, sales tax comprises 9% of the City's annual operating revenue of just over \$11 million.

Wahlstrom's conclusion was based on the assumption that the earnings of these downtown housing units would be consistent with Orinda's average household income of \$177,000, which he acknowledged was optimistic. And like Orinda's existing residents, he assumed 70% of their retail spending would continue to leak away to Lafayette, Walnut Creek, and other locations with more shopping options.

"You are not realistically going to gain more sales tax revenue without adding retail space," stated Wahlstrom. He identified the long empty Phairs building as a potential site for an apparel store, a sporting goods store, a home furnishings store, or a Trader Joe's. Other than the Phairs building he noted that additional open retail space was limited, "You don't really have that many vacancies."