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## Another Vision for Orinda

By Andrea A. Firth

Longtime Orinda resident Ann O'Connell Nye has been making the rounds to the Planning Commission and City Council to present her ideas for how to revitalize the City's downtown commercial districts. "I'm proposing

positive solutions that don't cost much and that we can do now to enhance our downtown districts and help to make them better connected," says Nye, who has been a vocal critic of the city's task force recommendation to increase

the building height limit in downtown.

Some creativity, paint, and donated time might be all it takes to give downtown a needed facelift, Nye says. She suggests that the concrete walls under the freeway

overpass could provide the perfect canvas for a mural by local artists. And, the overhead bridge wall surface could be a painted with directions for drivers, such as "To Orinda Village" and "To the Theatre District." Nye also proposed

that the section of Camino Pablo that runs from the Crossroads entrance (at the intersection of Camino Encinas and Moraga Way) to El Toyonal and Orinda Way be renamed with a name that has a historic tie to Orinda.

## BART Expands Plan for Solar Shades

By Aleksandr Auzers



West parking lot at Orinda BART station

Photo Andy Scheck

In the course of a recent Orinda City Council meeting, Council members were notified that the Bay Area Rapid Transit District (BART) plans to construct four hundred solar parking shades at the Orinda BART station, contingent on approval by BART's Board of Directors; that vote is expected by the end of the year.

The District previously indicated it would install forty shades at the station, but developer SunEdison withdrew from the project in February. Under the auspices of the Northern California Power Agency (NCPA), a joint-powers agency representing municipal power concerns, Lightbeam, Inc. was selected to construct the shades. BART will not pay for the shades themselves - instead, it will compensate Lightbeam for the electricity they generate.

Frank Schultz, a manager in BART's Energy Division, indicated the District has solar installations in Hayward and Richmond which have functioned nearly continuously between 6:00 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. for two years. The Orinda installation would generate 750 kilowatts of power, two-thirds of which would go to run the station, and one-third of which would enter the main BART grid.

The shades would stand twelve feet tall, allowing space for cars to park beneath them; existing lamp poles would be removed in favor of lights hung under the shades. During construction, station parking spaces would be made unavailable on a rolling basis.

Though BART has not yet conducted a lighting impact study, it plans to do so before the Board's decision, said Schultz.

According to City Attorney Osa Wolf, BART has an exemption from area land-use regulations and is not required to obtain Orinda's permission before proceeding with construction, nor is it compelled to conduct an environmental impact report (EIR) using Orinda's usual standards. While a challenge to BART's authority is technically possible, "other cities have tried and failed," she said.

Addressing the Council's concerns about environmental review, Lightbeam representative Jim Lavelle said, "A parking lot is not necessarily considered to be an environmentally-sensitive area."

Orinda Vision's Peter Hasselman and Ian Baird were among only a handful of residents in attendance at

this meeting, and both expressed concerns about the proposed installation. Hasselman said the installation would be neither good for the downtown area nor aesthetically successful. Baird suggested the contract allow for the panels to be moved and reintegrated into future building developments.

BART Director Gail Murray, who represents District 1 (including Orinda), indicated a community forum could be organized to solicit

input from the public.

The proposed solar installation would cover the West parking lot. Asked why BART did not plan to blanket all station spaces, Schultz replied that Pacific Gas and Electric Company restricts "distributed generation" projects to 1000 kilowatts per site, to protect its proprietary interests. He noted that BART is considering a solar deployment at other locations as well, including the Lafayette station.

## Coming Soon In Orinda

At the next City Council meeting on Tuesday, May 3rd, the City's infrastructure issues will be on the agenda. Vice Mayor Steve Glazer has suggested that the Council discuss forming a subcommittee to work on ways to address Orinda's road repair needs.

On Saturday, May 21st Orinda will host its first Community Public Services Fair to introduce both new and longtime residents to city and public safety services, utility providers, local nonprofits, and clubs. Staff will be on hand in the Library Plaza, 26 Orinda Way adjacent to the Farmers Market, from 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. to answer questions and help residents learn more about the community.

At the April 19th Council meeting, Council member Amy Worth suggested, and her colleagues concurred, that the City request the members of Orinda Vision make a presentation at an upcoming Council meeting regarding their ideas for development in the city. The date is to be determined. A.Firth

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