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Safe Routes to Schools - But How? Proposed pedestrian path on Moraga Way

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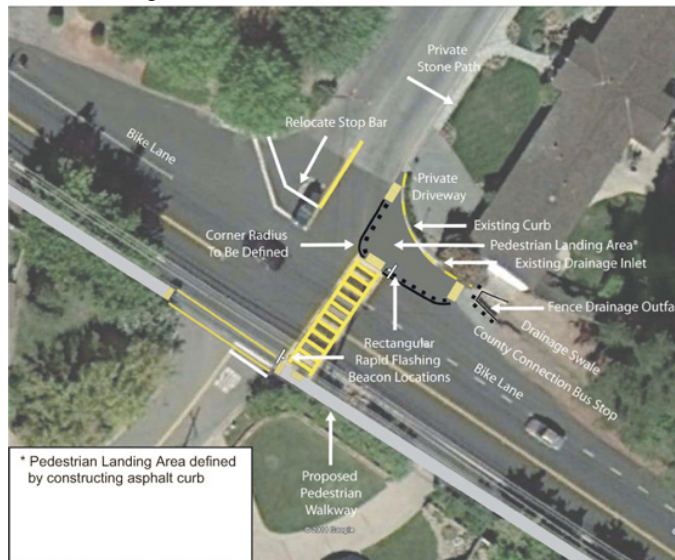


Illustration provided

Orindans provided a primer for other communities on how to conduct civil, productive discourse at a recent community meeting at Miramonte High School. The January 24 public hearing offered residents the opportunity to weigh in on proposed construction plans for a new pedestrian pathway on Moraga Way, and was led by City Engineer Janice Carey.

The idea for the pathway was an outgrowth of the City's larger Bicycle, Trails and Walkways Master Plan prepared by Alta Planning + Design and adopted by the City in January 2011.

Carey noted that residents have been concerned about bicycle and pedestrian safety in the neighborhood for quite some time. Attendees were nearly evenly divided in favor and against the project.

Planners propose to create a roughly 3,355 linear foot pathway within the public right-of-way near Miramonte High School. It would be located on the western side of Moraga Way from El Camino Moraga to Ivy Drive south. The current paved roadway shoulder would be converted to a five-foot wide asphalt pathway, and separated from bicycle lanes by an asphalt dike with conformers created for residential

driveways entering onto the west side of Moraga Way. The shoulder cross slope would also be flattened to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Additionally, two push-button Rectangular Rapid Flashing Beacons would be installed on opposite sides of a striped crosswalk on Moraga Way at Estabueno and Eastwood Drive. Described as state-of-the-art by the representatives of outside consultants, Harris & Associates, the solar-powered beacons are viewed as less expensive and greener than in-roadway enhanced crosswalk beacons.

One neighbor observed that, "The value of having a better crosswalk at Eastwood is huge," while another expressed his appreciation for the hard work done by City staff before stating that the project might actually make Moraga Way more dangerous since it would take space from both traffic lanes to build the pathway.

Several suggested that there are not enough walkers to warrant the expense when the City is still struggling to get its roads paved, and advised planners that children and their parents actually prefer to take back ways through neighborhoods rather than walking along Moraga Way. Others expressed the belief that, "If we build it, they will come."

One advocated an even bolder approach, recommending that the pathway be lengthened further because it would make the City safer and encourage people to get out of their cars and walk.

When Orinda City Council considered the issue at its August 2011 Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) review, Council members were advised that \$35,000 would be spent for planning, design, and administration plus \$181,930 for construction and \$14,000 for construction management for a total of \$230,930.

That construction figure has since been revised upward by \$100,000 for an estimated total project cost of \$330,930, as indicated on page 11-21 of the final version of the CIP that was adopted by Council for 2011-2015.

Staff have already secured \$166,000 from the Metropolitan Transportation Commission's Safe Routes to Schools program, and anticipate making up the difference by using \$54,930 in City park dedication fees from fiscal years 2012 and 2013, \$10,000 from 2012 gas tax revenues, and \$100,000 in 2013 local traffic impact fees.

When asked about the increase in estimated expenditures, Carey explained that project costs change as the design becomes "more refined as the project design becomes more complete." Saying that there may be at least four budget phases "in estimating a project while it goes through the design stage: conceptual, schematic, design development, and working drawings," she also noted that, "We will not really know the true cost of the project until it is bid for construction."

One resident urged scaling the project back to simply create a safe crosswalk rather than building the entire pathway, stating that proposed plan was not a good solution for residents who live along the section of Moraga Way where the path would be located.

All agreed on one thing: There is an increasing need to inspire Orinda motorists to drive more safely on community roads - particularly so when driving near schools and other places where children are present.

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