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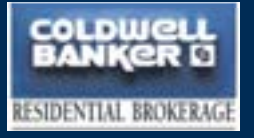


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Early Childhood Education a Phair Bet?

Orinda Planning Commission okays preschools in commercial areas; will continue review of Fountainhead application

By Laurie Snyder



Phair building on Avenida de Orinda Photo Ohlen Alexander

During an over five-hour meeting Aug. 13, the Orinda Planning Commission weighed in on two design review applications for new homes before its public hearing of the proposal by Fountainhead Montessori to transform the historic, but long vacant Phair's store in the Orinda Village.

According to the staff report, the "application proposes the construction of a new, two-story building at 10

Avenida de Orinda...The existing structures, known as the Phair's buildings, would be demolished and replaced with a preschool, along with retail spaces along Orinda Way."

Discussion centered on whether or not city regulations permit operation of preschools at any sites currently zoned for commercial use. Ten Orinda residents and others who work or have students at Fountainhead spoke in favor of the project. Another 10 spoke against in a civil debate in which opponents frequently praised Fountainhead for the quality of instruction delivered to Orinda youngsters.

Robert and Karen Burt observed that the "Phair's property and adjoining properties – including the vacant land behind Phair's – represent a one-time planning and development opportunity that would occur if the Phair's property alone were to be developed for a school.

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Orinda Housing Element Discussions to Continue

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Countering resident Clyde Vaughn's dire prediction of ultra-low income housing that would result in slums and gang intrusion into one of the country's friendliest cities, Orinda's Laurie Reich said, "We are not talking about slums. We are not talking about gangs," and noted that the income level of those seeking lower income housing in Orinda would likely be higher than many realize – around \$46,750. "I

think we should provide housing for our teachers."

"This is a generous community," observed Rev. Will McGarvey, the executive director of Contra Costa County's Interfaith Council. He praised Orinda for providing affordable senior housing, but spoke of the need for communities to do more. The Rev. Scott Denman addressed the value of providing housing "for the

citizens who serve us every day as teachers, firefighters." The Rev. Dr. Hubert Ivery, pastor of St. Mark's in Orinda, concurred.

The City Council directed staff to return with a red-lined version of the draft, which will be reviewed but not approved at its next meeting Sept. 17. The City Council still must address issues related to the California Environmental Quality Act.

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