

Published July 16th, 2014

Orindans Work to Build Baseline Understanding

By Laurie Snyder



Orinda residents learned more about the housing element portion of the city's General Plan from city planning director Emmanuel Ursu (right) at special workshops at the Orinda Library in June and July. Photo Ohlen Alexander

rated from "No Impact" to "Significant and Unavoidable" for issues which cannot be reduced by mitigation or are outside of Orinda's ability to mitigate. Areas to be assessed are: aesthetics, agricultural and mineral resources, air quality and greenhouse gases, biological resources, cultural resources, geology and soils, hazards and hazardous materials, hydrology and water quality, land use and planning, noise, population and housing, public services, transportation and circulation, utilities and service systems, and recreation.

That meeting was adjourned early, however, when a handful of individuals repeatedly interrupted the opening remarks of the representative from the consulting firm hired by the city to guide it through the fifth cycle planning process. (Read the July 2 article, "Heated Housing Element Workshop Sparks Fear - But Also Determination" in our archive at www.lamorindaweekly.com.)

Rather than listening to a formal presentation during the July 9 workshop, the 50-plus attendees were able to visit one or more of six information stations where they could ask questions of staff and consultants about various aspects of the Housing Element and EIR. Although the tone was far more civil, there were some in attendance - including several of the residents who disrupted the prior meeting - who questioned whether or not the city truly needs to update its Housing Element.

It is a legal requirement for all cities. According to the California Department of Housing and Community Development's website, "Housing element law, enacted in 1969, mandates that local governments adequately plan to meet the existing and project housing needs of all economic segments of the community. All California localities are required by Article 10.6 of the Government Code (section 65580-65590) to adopt housing elements as part of their general plans, and submit draft and adopted elements to the Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD) for review of compliance with State law." Local governments must then periodically review and update these elements to ensure continued compliance. The actual government code wording may be found here: www.leginfo.ca.gov/cgi-bin/displaycode?section=gov&group=65001-66000&file=65580-

Well into the opening weeks of preparations for Orinda's fifth cycle of the Housing Element of the General Plan for 2015-2023, the City of Orinda continued its outreach efforts to local citizens July 9 by presenting the second of two introductory workshops to familiarize Orindans with what a housing element is and why cities across California are currently readying to update theirs for the fifth time.

About 75 people attended the city's first workshop June 26 because they knew little about the Housing Element. Still others came specifically to learn about the scope of an Environmental Impact Report that the city will be preparing as part of this fifth cycle. According to PMC representatives, this EIR is one of the differences between the prior and current cycles, and will "evaluate the likely environmental impacts of the Housing Element Update, cover all aspects of potential impacts from implementation of the Housing Element Update including construction and operation, and discuss project alternatives and cumulative impacts." Items reviewed will then be

65589.8.

In addition to receiving feedback at both workshops, city personnel have also been accepting comments from Orindans in writing and via email. Staff was scheduled, as of press time, to present a Housing Element update status report to the Orinda City Council on July 15 during which members of the public would be given the opportunity to provide feedback.

The intent of these initial meetings, say city leaders, has been to "establish a baseline understanding for all attendees." To that end, the city is also making educational materials from these early information sessions available on the city's website, and will be conducting further meetings and formal hearings over the next several months as the drafts of the fifth housing element and its related EIR make their way through their respective development and review processes. At present time, the draft EIR is slated to be released for public review sometime in September with the first of the formal hearings conducted by the Planning Commission that same month.

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