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## Orinda's Fifth Cycle Housing Element Takes Shape

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The Orinda City Council held its seventh public meeting on Sept. 30 regarding the state-mandated process for updating the Housing Element of its General Plan. During the prior cycle, Orinda was legally required to address reasonable accommodation for individuals with disabilities, emergency housing and transitional and supportive housing. For the fifth cycle, the state is requiring that cities address fourth cycle flaws, assess current and projected housing needs and create new Environmental Impact Reports.

Orinda's fifth cycle draft contains six chapters: a user guide with introduction describing the element's purpose, relationship to the city's General Plan and drafting process; an evaluation of the prior Housing Element's efficacy with recommendations for fixing deficiencies; an analysis of Orinda's current and future housing needs covering demographics, energy conservation, and housing stock characteristics, affordability and special housing needs; a description of sites which could support new housing in 2015-2023 (to be finalized after EIR completion); identification of potential housing development constraints (real estate costs, environmental hazards, high interest rates); and Orinda's official housing policies.

According to recent staff reports to the Orinda City Council and Orinda Planning Commission, cities must demonstrate their availability of land to meet Regional Housing Needs Allocations, or RHNAs, assigned to them by the state. Accommodation of market-rate housing RHNAs "is accomplished through the existing supply of vacant land zoned and available for single-family development." When proving to the state they are meeting their legally-mandated RHNAs for below-market-rate housing, cities may cite recent housing production illustrating that "affordable units have been created and are financially feasible," show affordable housing subsidies exist and are effective, or "zone land for multi-family development and take advantage of a 'safe harbor' in the law that deems certain densities as appropriate to accommodate housing for lower income households." To date, Orinda's below-market-rate RHNA accommodation has been achieved via: zoning and government subsidies facilitating development of the Monteverde Senior Apartments, zoning allowing second units in single-family neighborhoods, policies requiring Orinda Grove developers to include eight below-market-rate homes, and "default density" zoning of 20 units per acre on sites still to be determined - which allows, but does not require, property owners to build. The "safe harbor" will address 50 units not accommodated by other methods. The draft EIR is currently undergoing revision, based on suggestions from members of the Orinda Planning Commission following input from residents at a Sept. 9 meeting.

Orinda's leaders are pushing to meet the state's Jan. 31 deadline for fifth cycle Housing Element submission in order to head off a state penalty that would force noncompliant cities to update their housing elements every four years rather than every eight. Council members have explained during several meetings that an eight-year cycle would not only reduce element-related costs (staffing, the production of public meeting materials, consultants), it would free up city leaders, staff and residents to discuss other pressing issues, including road and drain repairs and the improvements Orindans want to see made to their downtown. To learn more, visit the city's website - [www.cityoforinda.org](http://www.cityoforinda.org).

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