

Orinda's Fifth Cycle Housing Element Takes Shape

By Laurie Snyder

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 RHNA's, assigned to them by the state. Accommodation of market-rate housing RHNA's "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 RHNA's 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.

Civic News Orinda

From Front Page

Orinda Honors the Memory of Its First Mayor

... continued from page A1

Heggie, who passed away in 2012, was respected by world leaders and neighbors alike, earning Orinda's Citizen of the Year Award and the Government of Belgium's Order of Leopold. (See sidebar for further accomplishments.)

He was "dignified, fair, respectful, honest, intelligent," said Landers. "You could not find a finer representative to start a city out on the right foot." After their council terms ended, the pair partnered to establish Orinda's Sister City program with the Czech Republic. "This August, we welcomed our 15th student from Tábor to study at Miramonte."

Former mayor Laura Abrams recalled first meeting him while working to save Orinda's art deco theater. It was "his prestige ... his personality ... his manner of being. It was his relationship with the community which enabled him to act on our behalf," said Abrams. Both he and his wife, Bea, gave so much, "and did it in a way that was gracious and inclusive and gentle and kind."

"I really got to know him well in

1984 when the whole incorporation effort started," said former mayor Joyce Hawkins. "We were the new guys on the block. It was very important for the community to have a standing, to establish itself. He was such a respectful person and was so respected himself." It was Heggie's expertise in diplomacy, she noted, which helped Orinda become a player in the county.

But marvelous as these speeches were, it was 120 seconds unseen by many which captured the day's true essence. Two preschoolers, making a beeline for the library in hopes of finding the *best book ever*, were momentarily diverted from their mom-chaperoned mission by the sight of – cupcakes! As they buzzed around Heggie Plaza under the dazzling blue sky – heedless of the high wattage VIPs around them, they knew only that it was a great day to be alive in their hometown.

And it was such flashes of clarity that were what Mayor Richard Heggie wanted for all of us.

Accomplishments of Richard Heggie, Orinda's First Mayor (abridged list)

Richard Heggie graduated from UC Berkeley while serving at sea as a World War II naval officer. He met his wife, Bea, at Cal and also earned a master's degree in international relations there. His 19 years with the Asia Foundation took him to Sri Lanka, India, Pakistan, Japan, and the Philippines. Through the 1970s and early 1980s, he led the World Affairs Council of Northern California. He was also:

- President and Lifetime Achievement Award Recipient, Japan Society of Northern California
- President, National Council of Community World Affairs Organizations
- Regent and Wheeler Oak Award Recipient, University of California
- President, University of California Alumni Association
- President, Society for Asian Art
- President, League of California Cities – East Bay Division
- Vice President, Oakland Museum Board of Directors
- Trustee, UC Berkeley Foundation
- Chair, San Francisco Committee on Foreign Relations
- Vice Chair, Chinese Culture Foundation
- Director Emeritus, East Bay Community Foundation
- Board Member: American Red Cross Bay Area, California Shakespeare Theatre, Institute of International Education – West Coast Chapter, International House – UC Berkeley, Kennedy King Scholarship Fund, Osaka Sister City Association



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