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Concerns Are Raised as Sidewalk Construction Begins on Ivy and Coral Drives

By Jennifer Wake

Ivy Drive at Fiesta Circle Photo Victor Ryerson

Signs and sandwich boards went up as construction of 5-foot sidewalks began last week on portions of Ivy Drive and Coral Drive in Orinda. The construction is part of the Ivy and Coral Drive Sidewalk project, which is being partially funded by a federal grant through the Safe Routes to School Program.

Two meetings were held in September to alert residents about the construction, as well as the resurfacing of Ivy Drive, but a broader proposed master plan, called the Orinda Intermediate School Sidewalk Master Plan, was presented to the City Council March 3. The OIS-SMP proposes adding sidewalks along both sides of Ivy Drive, from Cielo Court to Coral Drive, and on both sides of Coral Drive, from Ivy Drive to Moraga Way. The OIS-SMP proposal came as a surprise to Orinda resident Kim White, who attended the council meeting. "After two meetings held in the community, the sidewalk project was never discussed as a master plan," she said. "It was dumped on us like a bomb as part of Ivy Drive getting fully paved."

While some residents were supportive of additional sidewalk construction, citing traffic safety concerns, others questioned the sidewalk placement decision, preferring sidewalk construction on only the west side of Ivy and north side of Coral.

Council advised staff to present the OIS-SMP to the Traffic Safety Advisory Committee and to get TSAC's recommendation. "It's premature to discuss the plan before it goes to TSAC," said Vice Mayor Victoria Smith.

Approximately 15 residents attended a TSAC walking and informational meeting June 15. Residents reiterated concerns about the size of the sidewalks, the 12-foot right of way over their properties, and the potential impacts on landscaping and other items in their yards. At the March 3 council meeting, Senior Civil Engineer Larry Theis explained that they tried to conform around some landscaping features, but some homeowners will need to relocate some items back, such as mailboxes, due to the sidewalk construction.

Another concern was the slope of driveways, where steep grades can create challenges when adding new sidewalks, but according to Associate Civil Engineer Daniel Chavarria, BKF Engineers, the designer for the project, resolved the issue of bottoming-out (or bumper scraping) by reconstructing and re-grading part of the driveways to minimize the grade break impacts of the project.

One Ivy Drive resident who attended the TSAC walking meeting expressed concern about the process.

"I would like to see the opportunity for meaningful public comment, and intelligent design and land use," he said. "Personally, I have nothing against sidewalks per se, but they must be consistent with Orinda's General Plan mandate to maintain the semi-rural character of the community. What city staff is contemplating - and actually implementing on a short segment this

summer - will make Corliss Drive in Moraga look like a country lane."

Chavarria said the OIS-SMP is still a work in progress and considered a long-term plan. "The OIS-SMP is a critical plan prior to the city applying for more state and federal funds regarding sidewalk construction," he said in an email. "Currently, if the city would like to apply for more Safe Routes to School Funds for design/build sidewalks, it would have to apply to the Active Transportation Program (ATP). The ATP has a 'competition' process statewide and Bay Area-wide. Orinda would have to compete for state and federal funds. The OIS-SMP is trying to have an approved neighborhood sidewalk plan and is committed to the plan before we apply for funds."

No formal recommendation from TSAC was provided at the June 15 meeting. Another TSAC meeting will be held in September and more discussions will follow regarding OIS-SMP.

Reach the reporter at: jennifer@lamorindaweekly.com

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