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Council Gives Green Light to Seek Bids for Downtown Parking Study

By Victor Ryerson

The City Council has authorized Orinda city staff to seek competitive proposals from professional traffic planning and engineering firms to prepare a comprehensive parking study for the Crossroads/Theater District and the Village in the downtown area. The council's action follows numerous meetings in which downtown parking concerns were raised by residents and by the Orinda Chamber of Commerce. "The goal here is that we want to solve for local parking," emphasized Mayor Dean Orr, rather than "for people coming from elsewhere."

In recent months, residents and business owners have approached the council on a number of occasions about a variety of parking issues that prompted the council to act. These include the problem of overflow parking in local neighborhoods, limited parking for employees who work downtown, and shortage of merchant and customer parking, as well as overflow parking by BART riders. The council directed staff to prepare a formal draft Request for Proposal (RFP) at its March 3 meeting, and approved the staff's draft with added language on July 7.

The consultant selected for the project will perform a complete analysis of the current downtown parking supply and demand situation in the downtown area, as well as neighboring residential areas. "The key thing is to know who is using the parking," observed Council Member Victoria Smith. The RFP specifically requires the consultant to perform a parking audit in the field in addition to analytical tasks, prompting Jennifer Englewood to chide the council that the necessary information could be developed from available resources and meetings with residents. "I recommend discussions with a facilitator" before engaging a consultant, she urged, adding, "I bet you each a soda pop" that the results would be better.

Specific topics to be addressed in the report will include how to improve the efficiency of customer and employee parking, opportunities for public-private partnerships for using available parking spaces most efficiently, and improvement of the existing parking enforcement program. Among solutions to be considered are the issuance of parking passes or permits for downtown neighbors and employees. Council member Eve Phillips also asked staff to add consideration of instituting shuttles on the Moraga Road corridor to utilize parking facilities that are outside the downtown area. Phillips has been actively working on the BART overflow issue. Although BART commuter parking will be considered in the study, she observed that BART's attitude toward its parking overflow has been less than sympathetic until recently. "BART does not think much about the land outside BART," she said, and overflow BART parking has been regarded as "our problem." However, she and former mayor Steve Glazer recently met with BART in an effort to generate joint solutions to the problem.

The study must also consider methods of financing improvements in the parking supply - perhaps including parking meters. Orr anticipates that such recommendations will undoubtedly generate "robust discussion" down the road.

City Manager Janet Keeter stated that the rough estimate of the projected cost of the report is \$45,000 to \$65,000. Although she said price will be an incredibly important factor in the selection process, the contract will not necessarily go to the low bidder. She emphasized that the city wants a report recommending concrete solutions. "Deliverables would be action-oriented plans," she said. Although the staff is authorized to issue the RFP, selection of the consultant will come before the council with the staff's recommendation. Following the selection, the winning bidder will be required to conduct several kinds of public meetings to obtain input for the report under the requirements of the RFP. These will include a kickoff meeting; one or two stakeholder meetings with downtown business owners, residents and staff; and up to three public input meetings.

Reach the reporter at: info@lamorindaweekly.com

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