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Letters to the Editor

Dear Editor:

As one familiar with the Urban Land Institute (ULI) and its Technical Assistance Program (TAP) program, I believe Orinda would benefit from a ULI study of our downtown. Just like our roads, which were long ignored to our detriment, the time is long overdue to address our downtown. Previous local attempts have proven divisively partisan - hardly useful in problem solving.

The ULI is a national, volunteer, professional organization made up of senior members, each with a demonstrated expertise in a particular aspect of cities and towns. The members contribute their time gratis to the TAP program and have no local constituency or preconceived philosophy. They are selected to participate based on their professional judgment and experience. The ULI (not the TAP participants) charges a meager "fee" to cover administrative front-end expenses and the expense of reproducing the report. It is not remuneration for professional services and well below what a for-profit consulting firm would charge for the same service.

Depending on the issues defined by a city, the ULI will assemble a specific TAP team of experienced experts from their multi-disciplinary stable (that includes economists, lawyers, architects, historians, planners, traffic/transportation engineers, landscape architects, developers, mayors, parking consultants, etc.) - a team impossible to duplicate for \$15,000 because the panelists are volunteering their time.

The ULI has operated this service for decades in many geographic areas and dealt with virtually all the issues Orinda faces many times. Indeed many members come from towns comparable to Orinda.

This process, the epitome of openness, presents a path forward for Orinda. Our children and grandchildren will thank us for avoiding the temptation to again ignore our downtown problems and opportunities.

Peter Hasselman
Orinda

Editor:

I have an office in my home looking out on a cul-de-sac street in Moraga. I am home most of the time and I have made it a habit to leave my garage door up with my car in the garage. I also leave the keys in the front seat compartment (both bad ideas). Friday morning at about 11 a.m. I noticed a silver SUV drive up my street then back down. A few minutes later I noticed a girl in her early 30s dressed in black pants and a long sleeve black shirt with shoulder length blond hair and dark glasses. Suddenly it dawned on me that she had not passed by my window. I had a feeling she had gone into my garage. I quickly went to the inside garage entrance and saw the girl in the driver's seat of my car. I yelled and started for the car, she locked the passenger door and when I went around to the driver's side she locked that door. She found the keys and started the car. I jumped in the back seat as she quickly backed out of the garage squealing the tires. I reached forward and pulled the car out of gear. When the car reached the street, my hand still holding it in neutral, she got out of the car and ran down the street entering the silver SUV I had seen earlier.

I called the Moraga Police who arrived within minutes. They put out an APB on the car and woman. The police told me there have been over 20 such incidents of either stolen cars or car break ins the past week or so in Moraga. All these incidents were unlocked cars in front of houses, in driveways or garages with open doors.

I was lucky and did not get hurt and was able to save my car. The police very politely chastised me, advising in the future not to interfere, let the car go and immediately call the police. With a good description of the stolen vehicle plus license plates, they have a good chance to apprehend quickly. Also, there is a chance that the thief or thieves could have a weapon of some sort and would be

willing to use it.

The moral of this story is to park your cars whenever possible in your garage, locked, door closed and keys in the house.

J. Northrup
Moraga

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