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Letters to the Editor

Editor:

I do not agree with the proposal, advanced in a recent letter by Peter Hasselman, that Orinda spend \$15,000 to have the Urban Land Institute and its Technical Assistance Program study our downtown. My concern is that Orinda is not and should not become "urban" and that an institute focused on "Urban Land" is ill-suited to provide direction to a city whose General Plan requires a "village" downtown, not an "urban" downtown. It seems unlikely that ULI would be oriented towards preserving Orinda's downtown as a village in a semi-rural residential environment.

It also seems unlikely that a team of "economists, lawyers, architects, historians, planners, traffic/transportation engineers, landscape architects, developers, mayors, parking consultants, etc." would be interested in preserving a village and its local businesses with only modest changes. It is more likely that they would want dramatic changes. Mr. Hasselman is on the steering committee for Orinda Vision so we know his bias. The "vision" of Orinda Vision would drive many of our local family owned businesses out of business, and would subject us to years of disruption and noise caused by construction, during which many local services and use of the community park would be adversely impacted. Ultimately that "vision" would create a traffic and parking nightmare that we simply lack the land area to handle. Many of us moved here because of Orinda's village character. We should not assume, as Mr. Hasselman does, that our children and grandchildren may want something different. If they do, they will have many choices of where to live. As does Mr. Hasselman.

Let's not destroy Orinda's village character in the guise of "saving" it.

Nick Waranoff
Orinda

Editor:

I disagree with Mr. Hasselman. We Orindans do not need a committee of "experts" to lead us into the future. We can find our own way. The best downtown planners are the individual owners of the land. A free market with the minimum of government interference makes the best decisions consistently. Government and "experts" always have political motives which are not in the public good:

1. They want us to use public transportation, not cars. They never plan enough parking.
2. They are consistently against efficient retailers. They only want cute boutique type businesses which they think contribute to a bohemian ambiance.
3. They value the Potemkin Village concept at the expense of commercial success.

We should remember that the sole motive for this stack and pack scheme is to enhance tax revenues. The current city council wants to take away the Prop.13 advantages the Crossroads and Village businesses now enjoy. Orinda is, at best a marginal business environment. The higher taxes the Council wants to impose will drive businesses out of Orinda - and lower the tax base.

Henry R. Pinney
Orinda

Editor,

Re: the article of July 29, "Priority Report Spurs Question of Possible Tax." A recent survey of Lafayette residents identified (yet again) that conservation of open space is a priority, and topped the list of items for which people may be willing to pay. Another concern for both residents and local merchants is a woeful lack of downtown parking and persistent traffic congestion. As your

reporter astutely noted, these will only worsen when a major condo development takes the place of a 100-space parking lot behind BART. Of course, it's only the latest in a recent slew of dense housing developments all along Mt. Diablo Blvd., leaving City Manager Steve Falk to ponder whether voters would be willing to pay for expensive solutions to the problems created by these projects.

I found his comments deeply troubling and, frankly, insulting. The City of Lafayette insists on defying the explicit will of residents by allowing developers to build hundreds upon hundreds of units. While Steve Falk may claim there is justification for the intense building boom, he has utterly failed to proactively plan for or accommodate the impact on traffic and parking, not to mention schools. Mr. Falk now has the gall to declare that Lafayette cannot afford to address the problems he helped to create, without additional revenue. This is completely appalling! If the City is not profiting handsomely from the building spate, then why does it continue? Projects should be negotiated so as to provide for their impact. Current residents should not have to suffer the negative consequences of development run amok then be asked to pay for a solution.

Mr. Falk noted that a potential parking garage, located well away from BART with 20% fewer spots than the 100 spaces being bulldozed by KB Homes, is estimated to cost \$3.85M. Instead of suggesting that developers contribute towards parking provisions, the City Attorney raised the possibility of levying a local sales tax - a measure voters could end up considering at the same time as CCTA and BART increase their tax rates. (It's safe to say voters will also be asked to approve additional funding for our schools, which are straining under the pressure of the city's growth, thanks in part to Mr. Falk.)

Whether or not citizens of Lafayette are willing to pay for a parking garage or a sales tax is beside the point. The question should be whether it is right and responsible for the City to even ask. Residents rank open space their #1 priority, and they get more apartment buildings. Local businesses and patrons desperately need parking, so a parking lot becomes condos. While developers wreak havoc and reap profits, our highly compensated City Manager looks to the rest of us to pay for a fix. As Steve Falk pompously said, "These are choices you have to make." If only we had a choice for City Manager.

Kathi Torres
Lafayette

Reach the reporter at: info@lamorindaweekly.com

[back](#)

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