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Letters to the Editor

Editor:

The February 10, 2016 article "Community Outreach Meeting Kicks Off Downtown Parking Study" helpfully provided overview of the January 27, Parking Study meeting where the Orinda City Manager introduced TJKM, the City's consulting firm. Held in the same auditorium in which the City Council meets, a large body of Orindans with parking concerns was present. The article referenced the methodology of the study, but failed to describe the size & type of comments made by the public, noting only that "public comments were received". Thus the article omitted the substance of the public comments. Given the clearly significant importance of the Study to the readership, which in many ways is as important as a meeting of the City Council, one wonders why this omission. Council meetings allow microphone access so all public speakers can be heard, and audio and video are recorded. For this Meeting, however, disregarding those unable to attend but interested in following the public dialog, the City apparently chose to not use that same voice/video recording system that is used in Council meetings. Absent those Council meeting features, members of the public were not given access to a microphone. Instead, they had to almost shout trying to make their comments audible to all, and the audience was straining trying to hear what was being said by members of the public. Many worthy comments were not heard by all, likely including by the consultants.

Lastly, there was no apparent electronic recording of audio or video of that Parking Meeting. Rather, unbelievably, one TJKM person was seen taking abbreviated notes using hand markers on an easel, clearly an obsolete technique, involving inherent filtering of the public comments by the person writing with the markers.

It is simply not understood why the exact comments made by the public were not amplified, and not accurately and properly recorded. What was the City afraid of? Do we not deserve a chance to study those comments and perhaps continue the dialog? Just asking.

Chet Martine

Orinda

Editor:

Thank you for your recent article, "Call It a Dam," which brought attention to the plight of fish and other aquatic life in San Pablo Creek. Not only could fish return to their natural habitat if the small dam/drop structure on Bear Creek Road is removed (or at minimum, maintained regularly by EBMUD to keep the opening clear of debris), but this would restore the more natural functioning of the creek.

Unaltered waterways balance erosion with deposition in carrying their sediment load. Prior to 1990 streams were engineered to "control nature" and an unfortunate consequence was to disrupt this balance. It has since been shown that dams and other concrete projects increase erosion downstream by creating "hungry" water without a natural "load." At the same time, they are only temporary structures because sediment and debris fill up the waterway behind the dam. This is a physical reason they are being dismantled all over the country. The biological objective is to allow fish and other aquatic creatures free movement upstream and downstream in a healthy environment; fish also need the gravel trapped behind the dam to spawn.

The creek behind Orinda Village is another example of an engineered problem that needs restoration. The channel was straightened, narrowed and placed in concrete in 1958, but a few years later half of the concrete blew-out in a storm and traveled downstream blocking a major culvert. The now bare banks were/are exposed to "hungry" water and created an erosion problem we still have today. In addition, the failed project increased the likelihood of flooding by decreasing the capacity of the natural creek. In the last two decades, hardscaped projects began to be replaced

with natural riparian channels. Re-vegetating banks and restoring some of the meanders would not only be aesthetically pleasing and improve habitat, but also slow runoff and increase the capacity of the creek to hold flood waters. (To see the creek, walk behind Siam Orchid and Orinda Veterinary Clinic on Orinda Way, where trees have regained a foothold over the last 55 years.)

Friends of Orinda Creeks has been working on these two projects for years. Orinda is lucky to have fisheries biologist Brian Waters and UC wildlife professor Reg Barrett engaging with EBMUD and other government bodies.

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