

# Pulte's Orinda Grove Creates Community, Friendships

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Photos Andy Scheck

Voiced concerns from project naysayers have apparently continued, but the schools have not seen the feared spike in student numbers and the City of Orinda has benefitted from a bump in property tax revenue, albeit not an overwhelming windfall.

One home recently sold in June 2015 for \$1.4 million, which would equate to \$14,000 per year in property taxes, but of that figure only 7 percent goes to the City of Orinda, or \$980 per year. The remaining 93 percent of every tax dollar goes to schools, Contra Costa County, special districts and the Moraga-Orinda Fire District.

Although there are occupants in all the homes, the school census is down this fall from last year. At the end of the 2014-15 school year, 2,564 students were enrolled in the Orinda Union School District. As of January 2016 the student population has actually 24 fewer students than last year, now 2,540, according to Teresa Sidrian, director of business services. She speculates this could be due to a number of factors, such as children living in the development might be too young for

kindergarten or neighborhood kids attend private schools. Either way, "We are not seeing higher numbers," she said.

Unlike many of Orinda's ranch-style homes, the development by PulteGroup embraces vertical space and density – there are just slightly less than seven units per acre in the new neighborhood near Orinda Woods. What they lack in exterior space, the new homes make up for on the interior – with residences ranging from 1,533 square feet for duplex units to 2,672 for single-family homes in models with three, four or five bedrooms and two or three bathrooms. Open concept interior spaces feature a functional great room on the main level connecting the stylish kitchen with a massive island, dining and living rooms.

Although the unusual configuration of garages accessed from alleyways was supposed to make the development more pedestrian friendly, in practice, it means the row of homes facing Highway 24 also has their front doors facing the freeway. While only the four duplex

units have a shared common wall, the space between homes is miniscule, and there are no backyards. Architects did make a real effort to employ an array of paint colors to help differentiate the homes, along with a variety of porches, decks, trellises, upper level setbacks and planter boxes to help the homes look less boxy.

The two new ball fields fronting the Pulte development were a component of the negotiations from the beginning; they replaced aging fields that had been part of the original site, and are still owned by the City for public use. OUSD negotiated with Pulte Homes to construct the new school district office building on the just under half-an-acre of the property that the district retained; it opened in 2014.

The project is more than a decade in the making. What was a run-down, vacant former school is now home sweet home to 73 friendly families.

*[Editor's Note: This is the second in a series the Lamorinda Weekly has done on new communities in Orinda.]*

