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## New Village Development will 'Enliven' Orinda

By Victor Ryerson

Orinda Village will be getting a facelift as the Planning Commission approved a major project across the street from Orinda's community center.

After holding a study session and two formal public hearings, the commission approved a commercial development proposal located directly across Orinda Way from the Orinda Library and Community Center. The new building will house ground-level retail and restaurant spaces, second floor offices, and associated rooftop and second story public parking spaces. The plan features a public area for outdoor seating and caf tables at the sidewalk level, and existing trees will be incorporated into the sidewalk design.



A rendering of the proposed development on Orinda Way. Image provided

The developer, Paul Urgenti of Tandem Real Estate Co., adapted the project plan several times in response to comments offered by the commission

and the public since it was unveiled in November. The biggest change from the original proposal was to move the front of the building back an average of three feet to widen the sidewalk to 11 feet - a width the developer says is sufficient to accommodate three double strollers, side-by-side. Overhangs were also pulled back. This change reduced the leasable area by 500 square feet. Commissioner Willy Mautner commended the developer for making these changes, expressing his feeling that the usable sidewalk area "will really enliven the town."

Changes were also made to the front and rear facades in response to comments. Additional changes to the front of the building will reduce the appearance of the architectural themes from three to four. Additional features were added to the rear fa e for the same reason, improving the view from the Vintage building behind the site.

Not everyone was entirely pleased with the result. Sixty-five -year Orinda resident Lawrence Burde remarked that "ticky-tack fa e architecture is horrible." Other reactions were more restrained, and the commission directed staff to work with the developer to modify a particularly troublesome Spanish colonial element added to the front in response to earlier comments.

Recognizing that no plan would please everyone, the commission reached a consensus that this project met all of the city's zoning requirements, and is a good first step toward improvement of the downtown. They all agreed that it is an improvement over what exists now. The empty lot, which has languished for many years behind a chain link fence, was previously the site of a defunct service station. Its dimensions, tapering from a width of 100 feet at the south to 50 feet at the north, presented a significant challenge to development because of the economics and various zoning requirements, a fact that the commission acknowledged. The strategic location across from the heart of Orinda's community center also made the project design a particularly sensitive issue for the public.

Approval required waiving the 35-foot height limitation to accommodate certain features of the building, including a tower that will house the elevator shaft. The 10-foot setback requirement from lot lines was also waived, so the building basically fills the entire lot.

The result is a building with an entirely new look for the Village side of Orinda, and may well be a precursor of future designs for projects in the area. "It's a good design," declared Commissioner Claire Sammon Roberts. It "offers what some Orindans say they want," conceded public speaker Bruce London less enthusiastically.

There is a 10-day appeal period before the commission's decision is final.

A three-dimensional virtual animation of a street level drive-by of the building design as it was presented to the commission on March 22 may be viewed at <https://cityoforinda.box.com/s/qu2u7ebzflv11ytksw00kpyhd5mi9e11>.

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