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Published June 29, 2016

Orinda Council Happy with Bargain Mini-Park

By Sora O'Doherty

After years in the planning, the conceptual design of the Orinda mini-park came back to the city council recently, with a price tag knocked down from \$400,000 to \$100,000, and the council was happy with the bargain.

The Orinda Community Foundation has committed to dedicating up to \$150,000 for the renovation of the mini-park, which is located at the intersection of Camino Pablo and Brookwood Drive. It is in need of attention because redwood trees planted to screen the back of Theatre Square are causing problems for PG&E. The trees are directly beneath high voltage transmission lines and, according to PG&E, must be removed. The city has agreed, and has been working with the utility for over four years to arrive at a plan for removing the trees and refreshing to look of the area. Other problems include the non-functional fountain and landscaping at the end of its lifespan.

The city has been working with the OCF, local garden clubs and Gates and Associates to develop the conceptual design for the mini-park. There have been six public hearings on the matter. When last considered by the council in February of 2015, the recommended preferred design was estimated to cost between \$350,000 to \$450,000. The council requested that staff come back to them with a project reduced to approximately \$100,000.

The new recommended conceptual design uses the existing pathways, and updates the landscaping and event sign. In addition, an Orinda monument sign will be installed on the corner.

PG&E has assured the city that the tree removal will be scheduled only shortly before work on the relandscaping begins, and that is hoped to be in the fall. PG&E has had its share of difficulties regarding the removal of trees in other communities, the company stated that it is compliant with statutes, such as the Migratory Bird Act, and has a 40 page document on wildlife issues dated December 2015, which is available to the public on its web site.

At the June 21 meeting, council member Darlene Gee asked if the replacement trees would be evergreen and received assurance from city staff that such is the plan, although the exact species of tree is not yet known, and was also told that PG&E has specifications for the maximum height of trees planted below high voltage transmission lines.

Council member Dean Orr complimented staff on managing to scale back the project and expressed the hope that the city can tie all the construction projects in the area together and have a single grand reopening.

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