

Letters to the Editor

Orinda Must Chart its Own Course

The State of California recently passed Senate Bill 35 which expedites housing development approvals in cities like Orinda. It is one that Orinda residents should pay attention to. In short, it's the opening salvo by the state against cities like Orinda that have prime access to regional transit like BART, but have outdated general plans that continue to govern land use policies and prevent new housing from being built.

With so many communities in the Bay Area claiming they are "built out" and unable to fit new housing in, the region now faces a severe housing shortage. The result of this shortage is skyrocketing rents and home prices that may benefit longtime homeowners, but condemn future generations to a lifetime without the possibility of affordable home ownership in communities close to their place of employment.

Some say another negative consequence of restrictive housing policies is the enormous environmental cost of sprawl in outlying areas. SB 35 is one way that state legislators are beginning to address the problem with a potential outcome of reining in cities who are resistant to the addition of new housing stock.

What should Orinda's response to this new law be? Some want us to retreat further into our cocoon, closing off our downtown for any new investment. But that will only increase the state's bulls eye on us, given our convenient freeway and BART access. The longer we try to prevent new development through restrictive zoning, the more likely it will be that the state and outside developers will do it for us, without our input.

Fortunately, there is a better way forward. Orinda should take action and chart its own course for downtown. Residents here are already frustrated with its ongoing decline. We should begin planning for a more convenient, fun and beautiful downtown, where empty nesters, young professionals, and other locals can live and support better retail amenities and public spaces that will benefit everyone in the community.

Our City Council shouldn't retreat from Sacramento's warning shot. It should immediately begin a process for a comprehensive update to the rules governing downtown development with the end goal of creating a Downtown Specific Plan. Earlier in the year, a City Council downtown subcommittee was created to discuss the process of downtown renewal. We urge this subcommittee to get to work and address our call for action. State and local agencies provide grant opportunities for such a process. Our current general plan is outdated, and its restrictive codes provide no incentive for the investment need required to bring in new retail, public spaces and a revitalized downtown creek.

It is time for Orinda's City Council to begin the long overdue process of updating our downtown planning policy right away, before others end up doing it for us.

Tom Trowbridge
for the Orinda Vision
Steering Committee

Kirsten Larsen
for the What's Up Downtown
Steering Committee

Who's bullying who?

The gun control advocates, Safemoraga.org, are perfectly entitled to voice their opinions. This is a constitutionally protected right. And as such, even if the remaining 98 percent of us believed that they should not be allowed to speak their minds - it still wouldn't matter. This is what having a constitutionally protected right means. They are not subject to the whims of local government or pressure groups. Our Founding Fathers designed it this way for a reason.

However, Safemoraga.org doesn't seem to understand this when it comes to Second and the Fourth Amendment rights. Apparently, only their opinions matter, here. Make no mistake. The "safe storage" ordinance is about telling us what we can (and cannot) do in the privacy of our own homes. If you don't like guns, then pick any other thing you might do in your home. Ask yourself - are you certain that all of your neighbors approve of your life style? If not, should they be able to affect the way you act in your home by passing a town ordinance?

In the half dozen towns that have enacted this ordinance - not a single citation has ever been written. Not one! San Rafael PD has stated they will not enforce their ordinance because it "causes neighborhood tensions." This ordinance can only be enforced by one neighbor calling the police on another. This sort of thing was tried in Germany in the 1930's and it didn't turn out well.

Amazingly, our PTA went on record "unanimously supporting" this ordinance BEFORE the first draft was completed. I was not aware our PTA is clairvoyant. I guess we need waste no more time STAR testing our children because the PTA already knows the scores.

On cue, Safemoraga dismissed a letter by the NRA as "bullying tactics". I've read the letter and have no idea what Safemoraga is talking about. Rather, the letter clearly illustrates how this ordinance would be in direct violation of current State and Federal law. Isn't this something we should be aware of? How is this "bullying"? Perhaps it is time to put aside our ideologies and actually try to understand what the letter is telling us. Better yet - we might try actually reading the ordinance before throwing ourselves blindly behind it.

Call me crazy.

Doug Home
Moraga

Support for RVR stop signs

I appreciate that the City of Lafayette has added new stop signs and a cross walk on Reliez Valley Road. I used to walk and ride my bike to Springhill elementary and cars were always driving too fast. I support efforts to reduce the amount of traffic and the speeds on my road.

Mac Follmer
Lafayette

Saranap factions come together to plan future

By John T. Miller

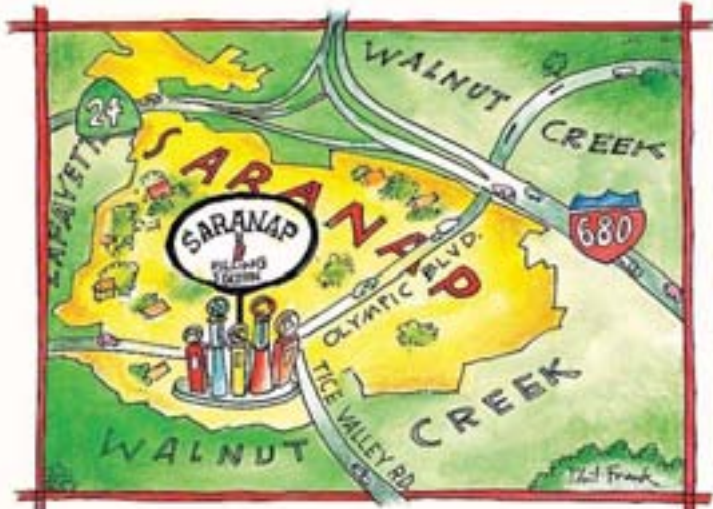


Image provided

In a move that would have been unheard of just a short time ago, members of disparate groups of the Saranap area came together to work toward future development plans that would be satisfying to all.

Supervisor Candace Andersen held a meeting attended by approximately 60 residents to find out what they envisioned as the future of the Saranap Avenue/Boulevard Way area last Monday night at Parkmead Elementary.

More importantly, on the Saturday evening prior to the meeting, individuals representing the Saranap Homeowner's Organization (SHO), the Saranap Community Association (SCA), and Sufism Re-oriented met at the home of Niroop Srivatsa to find common ground after nearly 10 years of contentious planning issues polarized many in the neighborhood.

According to David Dacus, president of SCA, the pre-meeting was the idea of Srivatsa. Although she is head of planning for the city of Lafayette, her main motive for calling the meeting was as a member of the Saranap community to get members of the different groups to come together and find common

ground.

Tim Lynch, president of SHO, said, "After 10 years of not really communicating, it was nice to sit down in the same room and plan for the future as a community."

One of the main points that came from the pre-meeting was an objection to the county's use of the words "Downtown Saranap" as being too directional for the public meeting. In a letter to Andersen, Lynch and Dacus asked that a new title be considered, and their suggestion resulted in a title of "Saranap Avenue/Boulevard Way Planning Process."

According to the county website, "The Saranap Ave/Boulevard Way Planning Process is a community engagement process to create a planning document that reflects the community's vision for the future of this area."

Supervisor Andersen said she was delighted that so many people came to Monday's meeting and were so engaged in talking about the future of Saranap. "For a community that was so divided, it's nice to see them all on one page wanting what's best for the area."

After a presentation from mem-

bers of the County Planning Department about what sort of planning tools, elements, and goals could be considered, along with attempting to describe the geographic scope of the area, the staff took questions, suggestions and comments from the participants.

Each of the five staff members from the County Planning staff and the Department of Conservation and Development then headed a breakout group for additional discussion and questions. A survey was available to rank the types of goals, amenities, elements and land use types that residents would like to see in the future.

According to Andersen, the next step would be to "percolate the survey and get additional feedback and present the findings to the community at the next meeting." She also mentioned reaching out to the current property owners along Boulevard Way to hear what they might like to see in the future and continuing to look into funding sources: "If the community wants a park, what kind do they want and how will it be funded and maintained?"

What the community and the county don't want is five years of fighting over each new project. "We would like the outcome to be a consensus from the neighborhood, a set of rules that we can show to the County staff when they're asked to approve these sorts of things," said Dacus.

Since there are no current applications for anything in the area at the moment, there is no sense of urgency as these meetings continue.

For those members of the community wishing to fill out a survey to let their wishes be known, they can find it at www.cccounty.us/PlanSaranap.

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