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Community comments on potential changes to downtown Orinda

By Sora O'Doherty



Residents placed color-coded dots and sticky notes on an aerial photo of Orinda to indicate which areas they believe need improvement and the types of improvements they would like to see. Photo Sora O'Doherty

Highway 24.

After the introduction, the crowd was ushered into the Community Center Founders Hall, where very large exhibits were available for the public to view. At the stations, colored sticky dots were available as well as sticky notes. Members of the public were invited to stick the dots to areas on the maps or aerial photographs to indicate areas where they would like to see improvement. They could also write comments and suggestions on the sticky notes and place them on the exhibits as well. At the final station, the culmination station, participants were invited to affix black dots to the projects that they would like the city of Orinda to study further.

As the participants moved around the hall, the consultants, staff and members of the city council were available to answer questions or generally chat about ideas for improving downtown Orinda. Light refreshments were provided. This part of the evening was allotted 90 minutes, after which the city council meeting resumed in the Library Auditorium. Owing to a somewhat late start, few participants returned to the meeting, but Nick Waranoff told the council that in his opinion there was too much emphasis on bicycle riders in the plans, whom he estimated to number about 50, versus the 10,000 licensed drivers who use downtown Orinda. He suggested that an inexpensive option would be to allow bicycle access to the pedestrian bridge from the BART Station. This would be cost effective, he said, and might qualify for a Transportation Development Act Article 3 grant to rehabilitate the overpass.

Buckley informed the council of the next step in the process, which will take place on March 5. At that council meeting, staff and consultants will return with refined list of projects for the council's consideration. Between the workshop and the March meeting, staff will make available a live online survey for Orindans to continue to comment on the potential downtown improvements. The survey will remain available for two weeks.

Council Member Amy Worth thanked everyone, calling the response "so encouraging." She particularly thanked staff for their tremendous effort. Council Member Nick Kosla was impressed with the event, noting that he had gone to many such events in his career and this one was really well done. He decided to offer his preliminary response to the potential projects that night, rather than introducing them for the first time at the selection meeting in March. One of his overriding concerns is with the power lines that span downtown Orinda. He noted that Wilder had managed to have their power lines relocated, at an approximate cost of \$50,000, he believed.

San Pablo Creek is a huge asset, and Kosla suggested that studies be undertaken to determine how to enhance the creek, for example, how to have the creek run all year long. He indicated that topography and hydrology studies will be needed, and that they will be expensive. There are now, he said, very good see-through sound barriers that could protect the creek area from the noise of traffic on Camino Pablo, while not impeding the views.

Moving on to the BART area, he said that the experience of walking from the Village to the Theatre District

The Orinda Library Auditorium was packed to overflowing on Jan. 29 as residents gathered to participate in the ConnectOrinda workshop. Director of Planning Drummond Buckley and Associate Planner Adam Foster gave a brief introduction, with Buckley saying he felt like a kid on Christmas, and Foster agreeing that he was equally excited. Also present were Victoria Eisen, partner at Eisen|Letunic, the consultant on the Downtown Streetscape project, known as ConnectOrinda.

The consultants were selected in June and the first formal launch event was held in October, following interviews with stakeholders. At the workshop, the public was invited to comment on 19 potential projects in four categories: the Theatre District, the BART/Connection zone, the Village District and Character & Beautification. The projects include calming traffic on Moraga Way, improving casual carpool waiting area, enhancing walking routes between BART and the Theatre District and the Village, enhancing Orinda Way and improving walkability, and planning for creek access. Also included are potentially moving and/or closing access ramps to

is unpleasant, dirty, and feels unsafe. He said that the Theatre district is "architecture forward," meaning that the buildings are beside the sidewalks, not separated by large parking lots in front, and added that he would like to see the same on the Village side. Kosla cited the successful downtown improvement project undertaken by Truckee. He also suggested that Orinda might adopt a theme, as Auburn has successfully deemed itself "The Endurance Capital of the World," and has attracted many outdoor activities.

Council Member Dennis Fay suggested that the city seek to obtain a grant to look at traffic circulation. This will probably require more money than the streetscape, he suggested.

The ConnectOrinda WebMap survey is now available. Comments will be received until 5 p.m. on Friday, Feb. 15. The WebMap survey can be accessed using the link below:

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