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Community comments on potential changes to downtown Orinda

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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 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:

More information and a link to the survey available at <http://www.cityoforinda.org/connectorinda>.

Chamber honors Moraga Business of the Year and Nonprofit of the Year

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Besides helping clients find their perfect home, she has bought and sold her own houses here several times, saying, "Lamorinda is where our heart is."

Sue Olsen's son, Ben, was born in Lafayette, raised in Orinda and now lives with his family in Moraga, but he didn't follow in his mother's footsteps right away. An early career in computer technology allowed his skills to help Sue's growing real estate firm become competitive. His tech job forced him to travel a lot, and he "noticed a lack of warmth toward clients in the tech industry." Appreciating the personal touch his mother provided to her clients, Ben began to work for Sue as an administrative assistant. He eventually earned his Realtor license, and under Sue's mentoring went on to sales. "By then I had a family and had a connection with others in the community who were looking for a family home," he said. "I had a common ground as to their needs."

When asked about the award Sue replied, "I was flabbergasted! It's the first time they did a Business of the Year, so it's a great honor!"

Ben added, "It's nice to have the whole team hon-

ored. It will have a special place in our hearts, because we all live in Moraga." The Olsen Team has eight employees. Their website is www.theolsenteam.com.

The Nonprofit of the Year recipient is Moraga Citizens Network (MCN), founded in 2005 by a group of 25 townspeople who felt it was important to keep its citizens informed and abreast of town council decisions and other pertinent town information.

Ellen Beans, MCN's executive director, states, "Though Moraga Citizens Network is not a 'business' in the usual sense of the word, we do have a business that focuses on communication to instill the desire in Moraga residents to participate in issues and events that are relevant to Moraga." The MCN Link, managed by Beans, has provided e-bulletin news to the town since 2008, when she took over the newsletter duties from Edy Schwartz. MCN can now claim 1,781 subscribers to their email list.

Though the numbers have dwindled from the original 25, the small army that constitutes the current MCN board is just as mighty. Diana Obrand, current president, helps Beans run board meetings, create the agenda and organize events such as last council member election's Candidates Night, a booth at

the Pear and Wine Festival and the upcoming Staff Appreciation Luncheon on Feb. 20 at the Hacienda de las Flores to honor the town staff.

Other board members include Tory Courtney, past president and event volunteer; Larry Beans, treasurer; Leslie Engler, webmaster; Ben Olsen; George Barron and Sharon Flower, secretary.

Beans said the Nonprofit of the Year award, "came as a complete surprise! I was thrilled! It's a great honor to be recognized this way." The board is hoping that this honor will give them more recognition within the community and gain new subscribers. Beans added, "Our donors allow us to pay for the constant contact and services that we sponsor." To subscribe and/or donate visit the MCN website at www.moragacitizensnetwork.org.

To purchase tickets for the awards celebration, held at the Moraga Country Club on Tuesday, Feb. 19 (confirmed attendees are Supervisor Candace Andersen, Assemblywoman Rebecca Bauer-Kahn and Moraga Mayor Roger Wykle) with a reception starting at 6 p.m., dinner and presentation ceremony to follow, visit www.moragachamber.org or call Kathe Nelson @ (925) 323-6524. Seating is limited.