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Council reviews parking options for downtown Orinda, chooses pilot for employees

By Sora O'Doherty

A pilot program for permit parking for Orinda employees on Altarinda Drive was the city council's favorite of the proposed parking remedies presented by Adele Ho, Project Management Consultant on parking solutions projects. City staff asked the council for further direction on how to proceed with some suggested parking management tools. Another idea that gained traction with the council was the concept of entering into agreements with local churches to use parking spaces that are otherwise underused during the work week. Although the council stated it cannot afford to provide shuttle service from these lots to BART, it was noted that several factors make connecting to the county bus system more attractive now. The frequency of buses on the Moraga Way route has been increased, and riders can track the buses in real time with the County Connection's app, making it easier for commuters to park in a church lot and then take the bus to the BART station.

Another pilot program the consultant suggested was rejected by the council after hearing from local residents. That pilot would have affected lower Bates Boulevard, which contains a mix of commercial and residential properties. The commercial property at 2 Bates Blvd. has some 40 parking spaces, which it offers for rent to the public at \$115 per month. The council was surprised to learn that eight of these spaces have yet to be taken up.

The council also considered a pilot permit program for BART parkers, but did not move forward with this.

The council is only interested in such a program if it can be limited to Orinda residents, and there is some question about whether the use of public streets can be limited in that manner.

Another major item that was part of this latest parking study was the issue of a "parking in lieu" fee.

Commercial buildings are required by Orinda municipal code to provide for a certain number of off-street parking spaces, depending on the size of the building. Currently, according to the staff report submitted by Director of Public Works and Engineering Larry Theis, if a proposed development or change in use is unable to meet the requirements, the zoning administrator or planning commission must make findings for an exception to the requirements. If an exception is adopted, there is no associated mitigation or fee required. Other cities have an in lieu fee that requires the owner to pay a certain amount for each parking space required but not provided. These fees range from a high of \$57,344 in Danville to a low of \$19,200 in Lafayette. The city council members were very interested in the concept, but believed that it needs more study before being adopted by Orinda.

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[back](#)

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