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A creek runs through it: Orinda seeks kids' input on the future of downtown

By Sora O'Doherty

The city of Orinda is looking to hear from Orinda children for its downtown plan. The planning department put together a brief video to provide local kids with background information as well as a survey just for kids. If you have school-aged children in Orinda, the planning department would love to hear from them!

The video asks children about some things they may not be aware of, such as that San Pablo Creek actually runs through downtown Orinda, and that the planning department is making a 3D model of the downtown. Senior Planner Adam Foster presented the video to Cathy Campbell's third-grade class at Wagner Ranch Elementary School. Foster found the children to be very enthusiastic about the project. They suggested a singing fountain for downtown.

The survey has nine questions for children, including, What do you think downtowns are used for? What is your favorite thing to do in downtown Orinda? Of all the downtowns you have been to, which did you like the most? Why? And, Does anyone live in downtown Orinda? The survey also has room for suggestions. The responses so far are from a variety of kids, from first through 12th grades. The answers are thoughtful, and the children seem well traveled, liking nearby downtowns, such as Danville, to New York City across the country. A number of cities in Oregon were named as favorites, including Bend and Ashland. Walnut Creek got some positive comments, but also some negative ones. Santa Cruz and neighboring Lafayette also received positive comments.

Children like to visit the library, with Orinda's library getting praise, to visit the toy store and eat out. Loard's Ice Cream, Starbucks and Nation's Giant Hamburgers got shoutouts, as did the local hardware store. Respondents wished for more parks, more restaurants, and more shops, including a book store. One respondent, who noted that their parents were divorced and had to sell the family home, wished there were smaller homes or apartments available in Orinda. Another also wished for more affordable housing. An eighth-grader suggested, "Please make Orinda exciting!! It's always so dead, so please build more affordable housing, add retail and maybe consider raising the height limit on buildings." A second-grader suggested murals for downtown. A sixth-grader said, "Grass Valley has my favorite downtown. This is because the city has preserved its history very well, but it is still a very interesting place to hang out. Plus there always seems to be something exiting going on, like a parade, street market, or festival." A fifth-grader answered the question, "What do you think downtown Orinda will look like in 100 years?" with the pithy observation, "I will be dead."

The kids survey is in addition to the survey for adults, which is still available. Over 600 people have already completed the survey. The planning department has also released a tentative schedule of upcoming meetings on downtown development. The city council's downtown subcommittee will meet at 5 p.m. June 10 via Zoom Webinar and again on July 7. On June 23 there is a second community workshop on the downtown precise plan. The workshop, tentatively scheduled for 7 p.m., will also be via Zoom Webinar.

Video Link: www.youtube.com/watch?v=II2mq_pbVQk&feature=youtu.be

Survey Link: www.surveymonkey.com/r/downtownorinda4kids

Survey for everyone else: www.surveymonkey.com/r/downtownorinda

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