

Published July 20th, 2022

Planning Commission welcomes new project with 51 affordable housing units for seniors

By Sora O'Doherty



Rendering provided

Vista Verde won unanimous approval from the Orinda Planning Commission on July 12, as the commission voted to recommend the project to the City Council, which has the final say on whether or not to approve the project. There is a period of 10 days in which an appeal may be lodged.

The project, commenced in 2018, will add 51 affordable housing units for seniors and one caretaker unit to be built on the upper parking lot of the Orinda Community Church. This will be the second housing project that the OCC has sponsored on its property. Orinda Senior Village was also built on OCC land in the 1980s, and provides 190 senior residents accommodation in 150 apartments. Over the years Orinda Senior Village has provided housing for over 1,000 residents and currently has a waiting list of more than five years.

The project was introduced to the commission by Planning Director Drummond Buckley, who said it was a "big night for Orinda," and described Vista Verde as "a big project that helps the city meet its affordable housing obligations." Buckley also discussed proposed concessions on height and story limits, as well as private open space. The project will consist of five stories totaling 53 feet in height. The highest point in the development will be approximately 25 feet below the homes on Watchwood Drive in Orindawoods. The developer requested amendments to the general plan and zoning. Because of the number of affordable housing units provided, the project qualifies for state density bonus provisions, Buckley added. The project planner is Richard Smeaton.

Victoria Smith, chair of the Orinda Senior Housing Foundation, explained that the church created the foundation in order to provide safe, attractive and affordable senior housing in Orinda. The foundation chose Dahlin Architects for the project. Dahlin were the architects of Monte Verde, an existing senior housing project that was awarded an Orinda Mayor's award of excellence. Monte Verde is located at 2 Irwin Way and Verde Vista will be at 10 Irwin Way. Orinda Senior Village is located at 20 Irwin Way. Orinda Senior Village is located at 20 Irwin Way.

Ann Barr, the OCC lay leader, said that the church is excited to be supporting Vista Verde. The church has participated in the Winter Nights project to provide temporary housing. Both are in line with the church's mission. OCC congregants voted overwhelmingly in support of this project, Barr reported.

Padu Kang, Dahlin Architects Director of Design, presented the plan to the commission. He noted that Vista Verde will be in good company with similar housing nearby. He added that, although the site does have constraints, it will have many amenities. Vista Verde will be walkable to downtown, and will have sufficient parking and accessible entryways from the parking lot. The building will have meandering paths through garden spaces, into which the architects were able to incorporate some features, such as a trellis and fence, that have sentimental value to residents.

There were a number of comments from the public supporting the project, but also one complaint from a resident of Watchwood Drive in Orindawoods that overlooks the project, and a few negative written comments as well. Overall comments were characterized as supportive.

The commissioners were impressed with the project. Commissioner Mautner said that the 3-D models provided were really impressive. He added that when Monte Verde was originally under discussion there was also some concerns, but now 10 years later it "really fits that site." He suggested that some people who expressed concerns about the new project may feel better about it in five years.

Vista Verde will be the third senior housing project in Orinda. The first project, Orinda Senior Village, was built on land donated by Orinda Community Church. The second senior affordable project, Monte Verde, was built on land donated by the City of Orinda (after a land swap with the developer of Wilder) by Eden Housing, a nonprofit affordable housing developer. Vista Verde Community Housing will be built and owned by the Orinda Senior Housing Foundation, a nonprofit sister organization with the same board of directors as the Orinda Senior Village Foundation that manages Orinda Senior Village. Vista Verde will be on land leased from OCC.

More details about the proposed senior housing project can be found on the website:

<https://vistaverdeorinda.com/design>

Project plans may be viewed at <https://cityoforinda.box.com/v/10IrwinWayDRA>

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