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## First creek improvement completed, thanks to Friends of Orinda Creeks; more planned

By Sora O'Doherty



Orinda Vice Mayor Inga Miller, Director of Planning Drummond Buckley, and Assistant Planner Darin Hughes take a moment on Oct. 5 to admire the work undertaken by the Friends of Orinda Creeks at San Pablo Creek in downtown Orinda. Photo Sora O'Doherty

"Contra Costa County entered into an access agreement with FOC that enabled us to perform the project on the county-owned property."

Bowen credited former Orinda City Manager Steve Salomon with suggesting that creek restoration in downtown Orinda be approached in phases. The planning of the current phase began about a decade ago. Engineering and permitting took roughly two years. Once everything was in place, construction took about a week and a half.

The next phase that the FOC hopes to see come to fruition involves the stretch of San Pablo Creek that runs beside the Chevron Station on the corner of Santa Maria Way and Orinda Way in the Village. According to Bowen, Chevron has generously offered to donate the creek portion of their property to the city to promote restoration of San Pablo Creek downtown.

"As additional properties change hands or new proposals for development [are presented]," Bowen says, "we'll look at those and try to accommodate creek restoration." Discussing the two projects, the weirs and the Chevron property, Bowen explained, "As pieces of the puzzle, they both fit into a meandering creek restoration vision. Both stretches are in the right place relative to the restoration plan." Similar to the just completed portion on the County property, The channel location on the Chevron property cannot be changed.

The FOC is very attached to its vision of a meandering creek, although the city has yet to be convinced. The FOC presented its vision of the restoration of 1,400 linear feet of San Pablo Creek from Santa Maria Way down to just before the Safeway parking lot to the City Council for the Downtown Precise Plan.

The FOC vision includes a meander, or bend, between the County parcel and the Safeway parking lot. After discussions with the city, the FOC had modified its plan for the meander to reduce its scope as well as reducing the number of parking spaces that would be affected by its creation. Experts hired by the FOC, at their expense, believe that this can be accomplished, but the city has chosen not to include this concept in its Downtown Precise Plan, as the opinion of city expert consultants differs from those experts employed by the FOC.

Another area where the FOC differs from the city is in regard to a trail along the creek bank. The FOC favors an informal, unpaved trail, while the city plans to put in a paved trail that the FOC believes will damage the riparian area around the creek.

Where both groups agree, however, is in the necessity of restoring San Pablo Creek as it runs through Downtown Orinda. Vice Mayor Inga Miller and Director of Planning Drummond Buckley came to see the restoration work. Buckley commented, "We believe this to be a momentous accomplishment, hopefully followed by additional restoration along other segments of the creek in the near future. Restoration of San Pablo Creek is an important objective of the Downtown Precise Plan currently under preparation by the

Where there was old, broken concrete disfiguring San Pablo Creek as it runs through downtown Orinda, there are now three beautiful rock weirs, that create pools where fish can hang out and a wonderful stretch of natural serenity. The work was undertaken by the Friends of Orinda Creeks, which raised the approximately \$100,000 required for the removal of the broken concrete channel and the installation of the rock weirs. According to FOC board member Michael Bowen, the weirs operate as grade control structures intended to maintain the channel at approximately the same elevation as it was at the beginning of the project.

This project affected some 50 linear feet of the creek as it runs behind 25 Orinda Way, occupied by the Vintage Building. Bowen expressed the FOC's gratitude to the owner of Vintage House, Daniel Goldberg, who, he said, "graciously allowed us to stage our equipment and cross his property." The project benefitted from a \$6,000 grant from Contra Costa County Fish and Wildlife, but, according to Bowen, "the project would never have happened without the very generous support of the Pease family and other private donations." He added,

Planning Department, including the recently-completed creek study prepared by PlaceWorks and Questa Engineering." As noted, the FOC disagrees with that study.

Miller said, "We were absolutely admiring the FOC's work, and we are really excited to see the progress on San Pablo Creek, to see the weirs constructed out of natural materials and riparian plantings." She added, "We are really excited to see this step towards the restoration of San Pablo Creek."

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