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Orinda council is enthusiastic about BART site grant, not so much about MWELO

By Sora O'Doherty

Not wanting to suffer any potential ill effects of failing to meet the State of California requirement to adopt a Model Water Efficient Landscape Ordinance (MWEL) the Orinda city council agreed to adopt the state model ordinance on March 21. The matter will return to the council for a second reading and final action at a later date.

Council Member Brandyn Iverson called the state law "particularly poorly written," and Council Member Latika Malkani pointed out that the city can adopt the ordinance now but amend it in the future if needed. One question that remained unresolved is whether the restriction of the ordinance apply to public parks and golf courses. Staff may have additional information upon the second reading of the ordinance.

The city council was very enthusiastic, however, to support an application for a \$200,000 priority development area (PDA) grant submitted to the Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC) to work towards housing development on the site of the Orinda BART Station. The grant would provide funds to work towards a memorandum of understanding between the city of Orinda, BART and Caltrans regarding a path forward for future transit-oriented development at the BART site.

In 2008, the city established downtown Orinda as a PDA. The PDA program is a voluntary partnership between local governments, the MTC and the Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG) to identify future housing and job growth areas served by transit.

The grant application was filed by Orinda on Feb. 15, but requires a resolution of support by local decision-makers by April 15, which was what the council adopted. The item was introduced by Planning Director Drummond Buckley who pointed out that the site has a number of constraints, such as high voltage lines running across the property, which is owned by Caltrans and not by BART.

The grant is intended to help the city work through the issues that need to be addressed before the development of housing on the site can be considered. Vice Mayor Darlene Gee inquired what the agreement between BART and Caltrans says, but Buckley said it was a very old agreement and actually did not say a lot. Council Member Brandyn Iverson, who recently joined the city council after serving on the Planning Commission, said that she is very excited. "People would like to understand what might be possible," she said, although she acknowledged that it may be a very long, complicated process.

Council Member Latika Malkani was also excited by the prospect of moving forward, and Mayor Inga Miller noted that the BART station and its parking lots are at the center of the Connect Orinda project.

Buckley stated that BART also supports the city's application, and Gee said that if the city does get the grant, they should publicize it. The resolution of support was passed unanimously.

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