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Temporary signs: perhaps not lovely, but mostly legal

By Sora O'Doherty



Photo Sora O'Doherty

On a matter initiated by Orinda Vice Mayor Darlene Gee, the Orinda City Council considered what feels like a proliferation of temporary, sandwich-style signs in the city, particularly in the Village. Although the issue has been discussed from time to time since 2011, Gee requested that staff look at it again.

□ The Planning Department conducted a survey of temporary signs in the downtown area on July 28 and July 31, finding a total of 62 temporary signs for 42 different businesses; 81% of the signs were A-frame, sandwich board signs. About a third of the signs were located on private property, and the rest were in the public right-of-way. Five signs were found to be obstructing the sidewalk and 15 were locked onto something like a post or a tree.

□ Signage in Orinda is regulated under Orinda municipal code 17.18, adopted in 2012, for various purposes, including reducing traffic and safety hazards,

preventing uncontrolled sign competition, enhancing the appearance and economic value of the signs, encouraging signs to be well designed and pleasing in appearance and constructed of high quality material.

□ Gee wanted to know if the city could prohibit signs posted by businesses that are not local. City Attorney Osa Wolff explained that the city could prohibit all off-site advertising, but had decided to allow it for all because of its use for real estate open-houses, lemonade stands, charity drives and so on.

□ Gee just plain doesn't like the signs, proclaiming that in her 33 years of living in Orinda, she has never gone into a business because of a sandwich board sign. "I don't think they look nice." Council Member Janet Riley agreed, asking why the the city had to have so many ugly signs. She would prefer more elegant signs. Planning Director Drummond Buckley explained that the city could require signs to be made of natural material, but that would have to apply to every sign, including realtors, garage sales, and others.

□ In the end, the council decided that it wouldn't amend the law, but would seek out more creative means in the hopes of improving the sign environment. Mayor Inga Miller suggested that staff should work actively with the Orinda Chamber of Commerce to encourage better signs. Council Member Brandyn Iverson thought that a survey of other jurisdictions' treatment of temporary signs was a perfect example of something a summer intern could do, but not something with which the council wanted to burden the planning department.

□ In conclusion, Miller did ask for code enforcement for signs not in compliance with existing law, such as those chained to trees or other permanent fixtures.

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