

Orinda Garden Club

Est. 1937

City Planner Meeting
Monday, November 18, 2019

OGC Members Present: Lisa Hallahan, Gina Field, Sue Andersen-Berger, Sandy Barnett, Sylvia Carter, Shari Bashin-Sullivan, Kathy Fernbacher, Laurie Smith, Ruth Fortune, Sheila Wendt, Linda Thompson, Gina Barretta, Katie Rittmann, Shauna Brennan, Janet Pease, Bobbie Wilson, Laura Millham, Jane Wiser

Orinda City Planners Present: Adam Foster, Drummond Buckley, Steve Salomon, Steve Ehrhardt, Todd Trimble, Larry Theis.

Drummond welcomed us and asked for introductions. He voiced the City's appreciation for our comments, concern, and time. The Orinda Garden Club is one of the most important stake holders in Orinda and the City is eager to have a good dialog and relationship.

Drummond asked Adam Foster to present the ConnectOrinda plans. It will be voted on by the City Council on Tuesday, Dec. 19th. This is separate from the Precise Plan for major future development. Adam presented some slides that he felt would be most pertinent to our interests. Adam said there has been vibrant feedback from the community to formulate this plan.

Village District: Community Center Library, Park, etc. Large gathering areas and parking options make this area appealing. One proposal project is to make the Library terraces on Orinda Way more useable for dining and gathering. New ground surface materials, bistro lighting, etc.

Fenced property across from Library: Plan that was approved is being reviewed by the owner. Ongoing issues with owner keep this area undeveloped.

Theater District: Plan proposes 1) adding a landscaped berm beyond the circle at Moraga Way and Bryant Way, 2) Create Pedestrian Alley between La Piazza and Casa Orinda building, with bistro lights, planting and tables for dining.

3) Freeway exit "Crossroads Mini Park" on Camino Pablo at back side of Theater Square where redwood trees were removed: Property is owned by PG&E. Orinda leases it back, and they are waiting for terms for renewal. Plans for a total remodel have been revised again. It includes circular pathways, decorative Orinda Sign and possible water feature. Conceptual drawing is found [here](#).

OGC asked what will be done until it is approved which we know will take a long time. It is unacceptable as is. Improved maintenance is critical, with some planting.

Questions were asked about plans, reality, and larger visions of various areas in the districts.

Steve Solamon explained the genesis of financial circumstances with Orinda's incorporation. He explained the maintenance issues and lack of business owner's financing. Basically, he said

there is no money. It may look rich with homes, but the city is poor. With Prop 13th constraints, Orinda gets \$.07 on the dollar from property taxes. This has strapped the City for maintenance funds for years. Also, downtown commercial property owners turned down a request to increase their annual contributions several years ago. Orinda Foundation contribution is approx. \$250,000 but goes to various causes, not just maintenance.

Maintenance/Landscape/Parks and Rec: Todd answered questions about our concerns.

- Budget: he is not sure of the budget for landscape maintenance. Approx. \$700,000 between public works and Parks and Rec. They contract with MCE with 3 full time employees.
- 3 employees cover all ball fields, downtown maintenance and now several fields at local schools. OBA rental of the fields is the largest income producer.
- Weeds: since the use of Round-Up was discontinued a few years ago, the weeds have been harder to control. Small staff is unable to handle everything. We were adamant that this has to be corrected with more maintenance.
- OGC highlighted the horrible conditions of the bulb-out street planters in the Village.
- OGC asked about the oversight of the maintenance workers.
- OGC described our concern about the lack of care on all sides of town, trash, overgrowth, dead hanging baskets, no watering.
- OGC asked for further explanation of maintenance and costs.
- We suggested community outreach for volunteers to help clean and plant. Add another Orinda in Action day/quarterly event.
- Shari specifically asked about costs, maintenance, and accountability.

Note: all should download “What’s Up Downtown Orinda” App/Instagram, DUDO. Everyone should follow on Instagram for latest happenings in town.

Drummond discussed suggestions for funding in the future. Possible Bonds/Parcel Tax.

- Federal Funding? Green Infrastructure plans, Creekside filtering. State funds are easier than Federal applications.
- Downtown areas are challenging because Cal Trans owns most of the land. Cal Trans owns Bart parking areas.
- Bart parking revisions are a part of the Precise Plan. Probability for higher density housing developments at Bart. Now is the time for Orinda residents to set design criteria.

Drummond will provide added information about our questions.

OGC said we are eager to see:

- Creek development and clean-up of invasive plants on village side.
- Clean up and weeding in all of downtown, especially street-side near Community Center
- Improvement at Crossroads Mini Park while waiting for re-landscaping that could be months/years away.

- Clean up in front of community center. Remove manzanita and other overgrown plants.
- More volunteer days for clean up around town, in addition to Orinda in Action days.

It was agreed that a follow up meeting will be scheduled for next spring. Further communications will be funneled through Beautification Committee to OGC membership.

Unfortunately, we did not take a group photo.

Jane Wiser