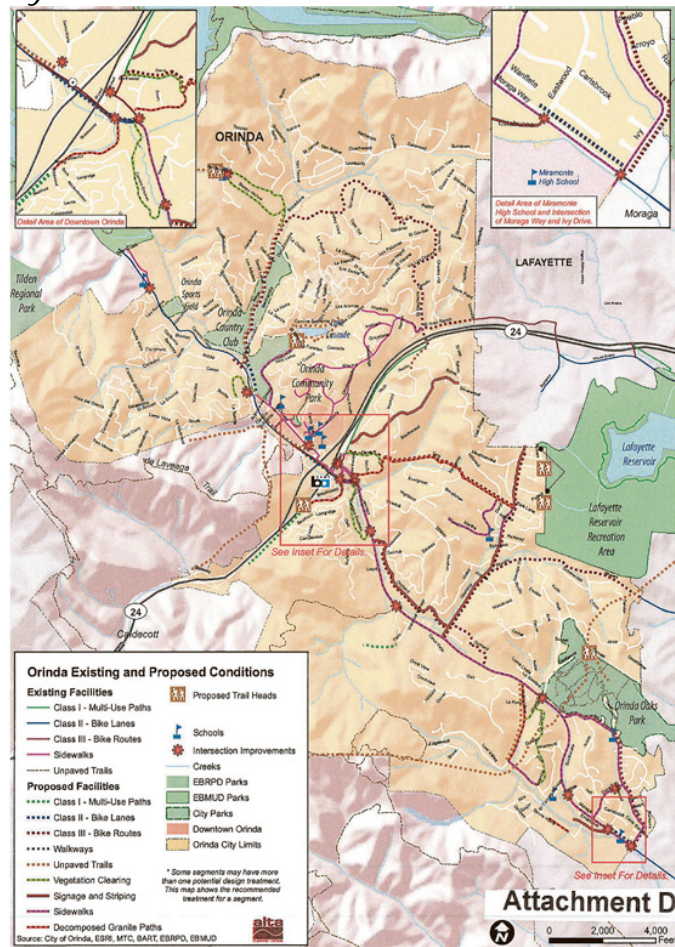


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Bike, Trail, Walkway Master Plan under Review

By Andrea A. Firth



Orinda's City Council recently held the first workshop to review the Bicycle, Trail and Walkways Master Plan (BTW Master Plan) which outlines \$21 million worth of bicycle and pedestrian facilities, intersection improvements, and bike and natural surface trails to be constructed over the next 20 years. While the council members acknowledged that the City funds available to implement the plan's recommendations are extremely limited, they were committed to developing a vision for improving bicycle and pedestrian access throughout the City.

"It's a plan. You are not committing City funds, and you are not bound to it," explained City Manager Janet Keeter, noting that the Master Plan will enable the City to pursue grants and other sources to fund the proposed infrastructure projects.

While the 261-page document was comprehensive in approach, City Council members felt the Master Plan fell short in conveying to the community the vision for safer routes to school, better access to the BART and downtown areas, neighborhood walking paths, and more hiking trails. "The document is not just for planners and professionals," stated Council Member Amy Worth. "It's for the community to read and understand."

Worth, who serves on several local and regional transportation committees and commissions, provided insightful comments for improving the Master Plan and making it more accessible to residents. She emphasized the need to tie the Master Plan to the individual needs of the City's various demographic groups. She distilled these needs to three areas: bike and walk to school; bike and walk to work/BART/downtown; and recreational walkers and hikers in neighborhoods and on trails. Worth felt the opportunity to improve bike and pedestrian access to BART should be highlighted as a significant opportunity, but she also stressed the importance of neighborhood walking paths that would allow seniors and others to better enjoy their immediate surroundings.

The BTW Master Plan was a year and a half in the making.

Consultants from Alta Planning + Design were retained to develop

Graphic provided

the plan with public input gathered at several community meetings, a survey on the City website, and walking audits of all six public schools.

The Technical Advisory Group, which is comprised of Orinda residents, guided the process, and the Parks and Recreation Commission and the Traffic Safety Advisory Committee provided additional feedback. With the goal of making Orinda more bicycle and pedestrian friendly and improving the hiking trail system and access to regional trails, the overriding concern shared by the community was to improve safety for those who walk and ride bikes around the City.

Several council members questioned how to best prioritize the many walkway and trail enhancements proposed. As currently outlined in the Master Plan, projects are ranked by a variety of criteria and grouped by time to completion: near-term (within 5 years), mid-term (within 10 years), and long-term (within 20 years).

"When it comes to limited dollars, this is the challenge the Council faces," stated Council Member Steve Glazer, who felt that a demand model or usage criteria were necessary. Council Member Victoria Smith raised the issue of how evenly the proposed projects were distributed across the City, and echoed Worth's comments regarding the need to include neighborhood walking paths in the mix. The members of TSAC did not agree with the ranking system that was applied as well and felt that cost and feasibility must be taken into account.

A second workshop on the BTW Master Plan, during which the specific walk and trail projects will be discussed, is to be held in January.

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