

Eden Housing Meets Orinda Community

By Andrea Firth



A view of the proposed senior housing building looking across the Community Park. A drawn rendering with photographs of the park and landscape superimposed. Image provided by Eden Housing.

"This project is something the city has been thinking about for many years," stated Woody Karp, a Senior Project Manager with Eden Housing, the developers of the proposed affordable senior housing building in downtown Orinda, during the first of two community meetings to be held this month. Eden Housing, which is California's oldest nonprofit affordable housing developer, had several members of its project team on hand to present the housing project proposed for the old library site, city-owned property at the corner of Orinda Way and Irwin Way, and to answer questions.

Karp noted that with the projected influx of people moving to the Bay Area over the next 25 years, Orinda's population will grow by almost 8% and most of this growth will be among seniors over 65-years old. Seniors currently comprise 14% of Orinda's 17,800 residents, and by 2035 there will be an estimated 3,878 seniors representing over 20% of the city's population. Cities throughout California are required to plan for the projected housing needs of the community at all economic levels, and compliance with the State's housing elements law is a prerequisite to the City's receipt of transportation funds. This senior affordable housing project, which has 70 one-bedroom units and one additional unit for a manager onsite,

would fulfill Orinda's current housing obligation for very-low income residents (those at or below 50% of the area median income) said Karp.

"It's an absolutely beautiful site," stated Sean Reynolds, an architect from the Dahlin Group that is working with Eden, in describing the heavily treed and fairly sloped property. "One of our main design goals was to retain as many trees as possible to maintain the screening of the property and soften the site," said Reynolds. The proposed building is mostly two to three stories tall, and due to the steep slope, four stories in one part reaching 52 feet at its highest point, he explained. To fit with the eclectic mix of traditional and modern architectural styles in Orinda's downtown area, the proposed building has lots of glass, heavy corbelling, and an exterior with a combination of wood siding, stucco, and stone accents. The building has a flat roof, which Eden hopes will translate to some energy efficiency savings. "We want to put solar panels on the rooftop to the extent that we can pay for those up front," stated Karp. In addition to the 71 one-bedroom units, the design includes a community room, library, and exercise room.

The creation of community connections to the adjacent Orinda Senior Village and the downtown district were also integral to the design. Eden has proposed to add a sidewalk along Irwin Way and a

pathway that extends through the property from the edge of the Senior Village parking lot to a stairwell leading to the sidewalk on Orinda Way. The potential synergy between the Orinda Senior Village and the proposed senior housing project is one of the most attractive elements of the location, noted Karp. "We are hoping to be able to work with Orinda Senior Village to create co-ordinated programs and interact fully," he added.

One resident questioned whether the 37 parking spaces in the proposed design were sufficient to accommodate the residents, staff members, and visitor needs. An Eden representative responded that the ratio of .6 parking spots per unit has been an adequate parking ratio for their

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other senior residences, noting that many seniors no longer drive. The parking in the Orinda Senior Village, which has 175 units and 74 parking spaces, was cited as an example.

Another resident asked if story poles for the proposed project would be installed. Karp explained that the project is scheduled to go before the City's Planning Commission in September. To minimize the time that the parking lot next to the Community Park tennis courts is

closed, he said story poles would probably be placed about a month prior to the Commission's review.

To identify and qualify residents, Eden will open the apartment lease process to the community six months prior to the completion of construction, explained Jan Peters of Eden's Housing Management Company. A third party verifies the applicants' income and assets, and Peters noted that there is very little fraud. She added that new properties

usually fill up within a month of opening and often within a few days, and the vacancy rate is generally about 1%. Although the units can legally accommodate up to three people, Eden finds that the vast majority of units house just one senior.

The second community meeting regarding the proposed senior affordable housing project will be held on Thursday, June 17th starting at 7:00 p.m. at the Orinda Community Church.



A view of the proposed senior housing building standing at the firehouse and looking across Orinda Way. A computer-generated image of the building with photographs of the existing street and landscape superimposed. Image provided by Eden Housing.

Story Poles to Show Downtown 55-foot Height Limit

By Andrea A. Firth

The Planning Commission meeting held on May 25th once again attracted a larger than usual crowd. Continued discussion of the recommendations for development of the downtown districts was on the agenda. And although the Commission did not plan to specifically review the building height recommendation, the issue addressed in the majority of the public comments to the Commission was about 55 feet high.

"Your job is to advance the best land use opportunities for your community," stated Ted Urban, an urban planner who previously served on the Planning Commission for seven years. "Don't get hung up on heights," said Urban, "The qualitative standards should guide our process." Urban advocated identifying the city's land-use needs, noting that housing options for young people returning

to the community are limited.

The Planning Commission is currently evaluating a city task force recommendation to allow increasing the building height up to 55 feet in two defined areas of the downtown districts to encourage commercial and residential development. The task force recommends building height at the street frontage be lowered from the current 35-foot limit to 27 feet and allowing portions of buildings setback from the street to reach 55 feet based on design review and compliance with the qualitative standards.

Regarding the potential for 55-foot tall buildings in downtown Orinda, resident and former Theater Square commercial tenant Herb Brown stated, "You are about to change the whole character of the city." He added, "The last thing you want to see from a fairway is a 4-story build-

ing with balconies," referring to the possibility of taller buildings along Orinda Way across from the 16th fairway of the golf course at Orinda Country Club. Brown also questioned the placement of local developers on the city's task force and raised the need for an independent consultant to guide the development process.

"The work of the task force has been open and well-vetted. The Chamber of Commerce supports the work of the task force," countered Orinda-based architect Rick Kattenburg. "We want to see more vitality in the downtown. It is hard to keep and attract businesses in this city," he stated adding, "Many of us have been waiting a long time to see some of these changes occur."

Longtime Orinda resident John Fazel, who is President of the Orinda Senior Village, suggested that story poles be in-

stalled in the downtown areas to give residents a feel for the impact of the proposed increased building height. Members of the Planning Commission supported the idea, but there was some concern that the story poles would be interpreted as a specific building project. "There are no proposals for anything in downtown," stated Commissioner Bob Jungbluth. Ultimately, the Commission directed Planning Director Emanuel Ursu to explore the installation of story poles, and he recently confirmed that the city will install story poles on two downtown properties by mid-June; the poles will remain up for about three weeks. (See sidebar.) The Planning Commission will continue its review and discussion of the building height recommendation at its meeting scheduled for Tuesday, June 22nd.

Story Pole Locations

Three story poles will be erected near the Village Court Building located at 23 Avenida de Orinda. This building is located behind the former Phairs parking lot and northwest of 1 Camino Sobrante, the building block that houses FedEx and Starbucks. A line will be tied across the poles at the height of 55 feet, and the tops of the poles will be visible when driving down Camino Pablo.

Four story poles will be installed on the Phairs Building located at Orinda Way and Avenida de Orinda. Two poles will be attached to the front of the Orinda Way facade of the building at a height of 27 feet (currently the facade is 16 feet tall). Two 55-foot tall poles will be attached to the building approximately 25 feet back from the Orinda Way frontage. The poles will be painted red and white in 10-foot alternating increments, and the tops of both sets of poles will be connected with ribbons.

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