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Letters to the Editor

Editor:

Bruce London's Letter to the Editor published in the Lamorinda Weekly on December 31 takes issue with the sensible ideas in Michael Kaplan's Practical Housing Strategy letter, published on December 17. I would have to side in this matter with Mr. Kaplan, who has a long and distinguished record as an architect and city planner.

I would share Mr. London's concerns that the Rite Aid property is not an appropriate site for the development of housing. This site is the heart of the Orinda Village commercial district and to the extent it is redeveloped some day in the future, its continued use should most likely be for commercial, not residential development.

I would disagree, however, with Mr. London's definition of village character as excluding multifamily development in downtown. Housing has been well-established as an appropriate use of real estate in villages for centuries. It is a permitted use within the commercial districts under Orinda's current zoning code.

Over the past several years, Orinda has been attentive to the need for affordable housing in our community. A strong case can be made today, however, for addressing the additional need for market-based multi-family housing in Orinda. As an example, the Phairs block, if assembled, would be a logical location for such housing (rather than the Rite Aid property). Given the reality of current land values in downtown, such a development would require greater density than the 10 units to the acre the city's municipal code presently permits. The City Council is moving in the right direction to encourage densities of 20-25 units to the acre. This density, which would enable underground parking, can be readily accomplished with sensitive design, in keeping with most Orindans' present notions of village character. This sort of zoning flexibility is in fact encouraged by Section 17-8.1 of the Municipal Code, as Mr. Kaplan points out.

Finally, I believe most Orindans would also agree with Mr. Kaplan, as opposed to Mr. London, in recognizing the financial benefits to the renewal of our tired downtown. The "vibrant community center" called for in our zoning code is one that continues to elude us. Renewal of our commercial districts is the way forward for Orinda. Resistance to change is backward-looking, and has led to the decline in our downtown we see year by year.

Tom Trowbridge
Orinda

Editor:

In defense of OUSD, I would like to play Devil's advocate in the Orinda School/mother/Storch debate. Public schools are government schools. Government makes the rules (with some local input), government draws the school boundaries, government tells you where your child must go to school and government decides how much of your tax money you get back to pay for your schools. Not all schools are given the same amount of money. The government, some time ago, decided that Orinda should be one of the low funded public school districts. To overcome that and because good schools are important to Orinda parents, they engage in what amounts to endless "bake sale" schemes and volunteerism to support teachers and to fund programs. It is not an accident that Orinda has good schools. A lot of hard work and dedication make it happen. Many people would like to take advantage of that. I worked at a business in Orinda for years and was privy to the schemes of various people to get their children into the Orinda and Acalanes schools such as using the addresses of friends and relatives to establish residency, renting apartments (sometimes temporary), honest petition etc. School officials have an obligation to the government and the community to enforce residency rules. By hiring an outside agency to check residency, it seems OUSD exercised due diligence and at the same time kept an "arms length" to prevent the

appearance of favoritism. To complicate the situation, according to reports, the mother either lied when she claimed Bay Point as home or when she later claimed Orinda (mostly) as home. Whatever the justification, lying confused the situation as did her spending a lot of time in Bay Point. It appears OUSD relied on the results of a professional third party investigation. When challenged with more information, they reconsidered the decision. The response seemed to be reasonable.

Mae C. Lewis
Orinda

Editor:

The City Ventures (CV) plan is too big for the site and violates Moraga's "semi-rural nature." The November meeting was full of residents opposing it. CV often tries to get around the laws through deception, which the town seems to go along with. The most recent deception: After years of calling this a multi-family housing (MFH) plan, CV (which specializes in multi-family housing) has suddenly decided to call this "single-family housing (SFH)." This is because the setback requirement for multi-family housing is greater than for single-family housing. The development is too large for the site to fit the setback requirements. There are 4 large buildings with 4, 5, 6, 6 attached units (several with 3 stories). The Moraga Specific Plan names 6 or more dwellings per unit "multi-family housing." In the 11/21/2012 Lamorinda Weekly article, it is described as "multi-family units," and Philip Kerr from CV is quoted "this is not Sonsara, this is multi-family housing." Ellen Clark, the planning director, admitted the setback requirement for multi-family housing is larger than single-family housing ... but then mumbled something to the effect of "perhaps this looks like multi-family housing, but maybe it might be smaller than other MFH units, so maybe we can consider it single-family housing ..." This town has admitted to cutting corners to pass this. CV violates another setback rule. The land is zoned as office/residential. Residential setbacks are required to be larger than the office's setback. The CV setback for CCD is only 4.9 feet (!), about 10 feet closer to the road than the office! Since CV cannot abide by the proper setbacks, the project is too large for the lot, and in the wrong place. The town has granted CV use of 20 feet of Moraga Way's easement to make room for a sidewalk. There will be no way to expand the road or add a common turn lane or left hand turn lane. A planning commissioner was appalled the city engineer (whom he thought should be fired) allowed this to occur and voted against the development for this reason. With all of the development the town wants to add (over 1000!) this is a terrible idea. Let's hope CV develops a plan with less density and height, more vegetation, that actually fits the site (honoring the setback requirements), and respects the semi-rural nature of Moraga and its present tax-paying residents.

Bob Valinotti
Moraga

Editor:

I want to express my great concern over the information I recently received regarding the Livable Moraga Road project. I live in Rheem Valley Manor and exit the neighborhood from Draeger Dr. to Moraga Road daily. There is no other way to say it other than this is a dangerous intersection. Turning right onto Moraga Road has its challenges regarding pedestrians and runners and bikes. Turning left onto Moraga Road has the added danger of crossing two lanes of fast traffic. There are times when the only safe way to go south from Draeger Road is to go north - proceed to the stoplight at Donald Dr. - turn left - proceed to the Hacienda and turn around - go back to the stoplight and turn south on Moraga Road.

The idea that adding pedestrians, runners, bikes, baby carriages and dogs to this already dangerous intersection defies logic and common sense.

It appears that the goal is to create a road which resembles streets in the neighborhoods - one transportation solution for all. If that is the goal, I can live with it if safety is taken into account. The difficulty with the proposed Corridor-Wide Concept is the addition of pedestrians, runners, bikes, baby carriages and dogs to a major town artery in which cars travel at forty plus miles per hour. This concept makes already dangerous intersections at Corliss Dr., Draeger Dr. and Devin Dr. worse. If this is to be a neighborhood roadway for everyone's use, where are the provisions for slowing down traffic? Will this stretch be a 25 mile per hour speed limit? Will there be traffic lights

at these intersections? I have not read about these accommodations in the literature provided by the Town.

You may say I am raising a red flag here. I have lived in Moraga since 1975 and had the experience of receiving a police call regarding my son who was riding his bicycle and was hit by a car at the intersection of Draeger Dr. and Moraga Road.

The truth is, throwing pedestrians, runners, bikes, baby carriages and dogs into fast moving traffic is not safe. It seems that the goal of connecting shopping centers with neighborhoods, schools, parks and transit has overshadowed the goal of safe travel in Moraga. I urge the Town Council to send this plan back to committee to come up with a plan that will address the safety of all who travel this corridor.

DeEtta Kay Reynolds
Moraga

Reach the reporter at: info@lamorindaweekly.com

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