

Published November 9th, 2011

## Grand Plans for Orinda's Mini Park

*Cathy Dausman*



Photo provided

also include installing an art wall/fence as a backdrop to soften the view. Cost estimates are \$50,000 to \$57,000; each participant will contribute either financially or in-kind.

Orinda's first park was officially designated a mini park in the mid-1970's. The triangular area is located at the northwest corner of Camino Pablo and Brookwood Road. Landscape architect and Orinda resident Nora Harlow drew up the park's original design as a gift to the city.

Deb Barnell, president of Montelindo Garden Club in 1975-76, remembers planting the redwoods with help from her sons. Barnell says the trees were inexpensive and were planted to hide the work yard that existed at the time.

The park was restored in 1992 with the installation of a fountain honoring Anne Pollaczek, Orinda's "Man" of the Year in 1959.

The Montelindo Garden Club began regular maintenance of the site in 1998, says past president and park co-chair Katie Creighton. Last spring the club earned the William Penn Mott, Jr. Environmental Award in part for their work at the site. Three other Orinda garden clubs also earned the Mott award for their work in beautifying the city. By Creighton's estimate the club has contributed 2000 hours of monthly maintenance (last 15 years) to the mini park, plus 350 hours of professional design time (includes city meetings) and spent "conservatively \$8000 in plants, mulch, bulbs, occasional outside labor."

In 1998, there were no native grasses in the park, the plants needed regular watering and some were not properly pruned. Care for the park consisted largely of planting annuals for color around the fountain base. Creighton says the club decided to "go beyond color" in 2004 by removing plants past their prime and introducing drought tolerant California and Mediterranean climate natives. Grasses, formiums, ceanothus and lavender were included. Roses surrounded the fountain.

The goal is to make the park a Bay Friendly demonstration site for the city. Bay Friendly gardening teaches gardeners to reduce debris, conserve water and prevent pollution (see <http://www.bayfriendlycoalition.org>). Mike Stallings, interim Parks and Recreation Director, says the city will also remove an old driveway on the property edge and re-install electrical and fountain equipment under the grade.

The city approved the two-step plan in September. The target date for its implementation is this December, but PG&E also needs approval from the Public Utilities Commission; that process could delay the start until late next year. A copy of the staff report can be found online under item I-2 from the October 4 City Council minutes at <http://tinyurl.com/44s9t2j>. Montelindo Garden Club (<http://www.montelindogarden.com/>) members volunteer regularly at the mini park every 4th Thursday of the month from 9:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. (10:00 a.m. to noon, winter hours).

When 1960's era eastbound Highway 24 traffic exited into Orinda, drivers encountered a stark, industrial first impression of the city- a "welcome" sign supported by a chain link fence, and dwarfed by the signal light, telephone and utility poles surrounding it. A photo of the area is featured in William Bronson's book, *How to Kill a Golden State*, and is a measure of just how far the city beautification project has come.

Today that site, a designated mini-park, features mature redwoods, park benches, a fountain, several memorial plaques and drought resistant vegetation-and it is on the verge of an update. The city is collaborating with PG&E, which owns the property, the Montelindo Garden Club and the owners of Theatre Square with plans that include removing some redwoods, which interfere with PG&E transmission lines, and two nearby magnolia trees, which have outgrown their street boxes; replacing the redwoods with strawberry trees and the magnolia trees with crape myrtle, beefing up native plants and grasses, raising the landscape rockery, and installing an illuminated, arched metal sign on the west side of the clock tower. Discussions



Photo from How to Kill a Golden State provided by Katie Creighton

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