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Orinda to Continue Downtown Parking Discussions

By Laurie Snyder

“Surface and garage parking is currently inadequate to support the local business community,” wrote small business owner and Orinda Chamber of Commerce vice president Rick Kattenburg in a recent letter to the Orinda City Council. “Businesses complain. Employees complain. Citizens complain. People miss their appointments or are late, many consumers go elsewhere to shop. Business owners seek alternative parking solutions for their clients and employees.”

Kattenburg and fellow chamber members Victor Ivry and Richard Westin have, since March 2012, been meeting with Orinda Vision, police, and city officials to try to find a workable solution. Local businesses were surveyed and, according to the staff report for council’s Feb. 19 meeting, results were delivered with a recommendation that the city establish a downtown employee parking program featuring permits that would allow all day parking on streets in and

around the Crossroads area that currently have a four-hour parking limit. Up to 50 downtown business employees might be parked at any one time.

Instead, staff proposed a smaller, one-year trial for Crossroads employees to park only on Bates between Davis and Muth.

In its deliberations, the council considered the chamber’s study which found, among other things, that most business owners “focused on ways to eliminate BART riders and carpoolers from the downtown area.” Roughly half of owners did not want parking meters installed, saying meters would not “fit with Orinda’s friendly, small town environment” and might drive customers away.

The council then also reviewed resident input. In one letter, new Orindan Sheri Scott articulated the plight of the average working mom – there is “no physical way to drop my daughter off at school” and still get a BART parking spot, plus no shuttle service or parking available

within a mile’s walk to the station. Owen Murphy wrote to suggest that 20 underutilized spaces at Wells Fargo and 10 in the Mechanics Bank upper lot might offer relief. He worries the city will change spaces from two to four-hour use by employees – a problem since those spaces “are needed to accommodate residential parking, gardeners with trailers, appliance/delivery repair vehicles, [and] UPS delivery trucks.”

Council Member Steve Glazer was surprisingly pessimistic, noting that the city does not have jurisdiction over BART’s Orinda station. Council Member Dean Orr said the community’s thinking must shift from a downtown merchant versus BART perspective – to not only consider employee needs, but those of residents who must be able to park on their streets. The council voted 4-0 (Sue Severson excused) to table the pilot. Future meetings will be scheduled to allow for additional public input.

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