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## Orinda Nature Area closed due to storm damage



Photo provided

**Giant trees fell during recent strong storms, forcing closure of the Orinda Nature Area.**

By Sora O'Doherty

Early in March, the Orinda Nature Area was so badly damaged by winter storms that, in consultation with the Orinda Union School District, the Friends of the Nature Area agreed to close it, canceling all scheduled spring classes as well as the upcoming summer camp season. Bill Hudson, a naturalist on the Friends of the Nature Area Board, said that everyone was very sad, because they had in fact been looking forward to even greater use of the nature area, but the safety of students and personnel was paramount, and it was difficult to even survey all the damage yet.

Naturalist Toris Jaeger is currently not working, as the classes she teaches have been canceled. The nature area is locked up, and Jaeger cannot access the greenhouse even to water seeds that were newly

planted before the storms hit. The storms in early March brought down large old oak trees and bay laurels as well as undercutting the banks of the San Pablo creek as it crosses the nature area and another, smaller creek. This resulted in the trails along the creeks becoming very narrow with possibly dangerous banks. Every Sunday, prior to the closure, the nature area welcomed volunteers to help maintain the area and its plants. Jaeger says that until the closure there had been regular attendance of up to 26 volunteers, and she has had requests from students to reopen the nature area for volunteers, although it is not within her power to do so.

"The nature area is a place that heals people," Jaeger says. "Volunteers love working together and talking to each other about school and life."

Recently, since the OUSD took a more active role in the nature area, there had been

more successful programs, including the very popular summer camp program. Many children were interested in the camp for the upcoming summer, and teens wanted to work at the camp.

When the trees first came down, Reg Barrett, a member of the Friends board, tried to deal with the fallen trees with a chain saw, but the trees are too big to be handled that way. Hudson says that the friends have gotten together with the district, which owns the property, and were very excited to start working on more activities in the nature area. However, as a result of the strong winter storms, it was decided that there were too many unknowns on the property for people to be allowed in. "We don't want anybody to get hurt," Hudson said, "although we are very disappointed" not to be able to proceed with plans for the spring and summer, including a festival planned for April, which may be rescheduled in the fall.

Hudson believes that it will be necessary to wait until the ground dries out somewhat before it will even be possible to fully survey the damage. The district may also be able to secure some funds for dealing with the nature area from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).

For Jaeger, it is the first time in 45 years that she isn't teaching, and she also isn't getting paid, which she admits is a great financial hit. Jaeger will celebrate her 80th birthday in August.

## Orinda council is enthusiastic about BART site grant, not so much about MWELO

By Sora O'Doherty

Not wanting to suffer any potential ill effects of failing to meet the State of California requirement to adopt a Model Water Efficient Landscape Ordinance (MWELO) the Orinda city council agreed to adopt the state model ordinance on March 21. The matter will return to the council for a second reading and final action at a later date.

Council Member Brandyn Iverson called the state law "particularly poorly written," and Council Member Latika Malkani pointed out that the city can adopt the ordinance now but amend it in the future if needed. One question that remained unresolved is whether the restriction of the ordinance apply to public parks and golf courses. Staff may have additional information upon the second reading of the ordinance.

The city council was very enthusiastic, however, to support an application for a \$200,000 priority development area (PDA) grant submitted to the Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC) to work towards housing development on the site of the Orinda BART Station. The grant would provide funds to work towards a memorandum of understanding between the city of Orinda, BART and Caltrans regarding a path for-

ward for future transit-oriented development at the BART site.

In 2008, the city established downtown Orinda as a PDA. The PDA program is a voluntary partnership between local governments, the MTC and the Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG) to identify future housing and job growth areas served by transit.

The grant application was filed by Orinda on Feb. 15, but requires a resolution of support by local decision-makers by April 15, which was what the council adopted. The item was introduced by Planning Director Drummond Buckley who pointed out that the site has a number of constraints, such as high voltage lines running across the property, which is owned by Caltrans and not by BART.

The grant is intended to help the city work through the issues that need to be addressed before the development of housing on the site

can be considered. Vice Mayor Darlene Gee inquired what the agreement between BART and Caltrans says, but Buckley said it was a very old agreement and actually did not say a lot. Council Member Brandyn Iverson, who recently joined the city council after serving on the Planning Commission, said that she is very excited. "People would like to understand what might be possible," she said, although she acknowledged that it may be a very long, complicated process.

Council Member Latika Malkani was also excited by the prospect of moving forward, and Mayor Inga Miller noted that the BART station and its parking lots are at the center of the Connect Orinda project.

Buckley stated that BART also supports the city's application, and Gee said that if the city does get the grant, they should publicize it. The resolution of support was passed unanimously.



**City Council Regular Meeting:**  
Tuesday, April 11, 6:00 p.m.  
**Planning Comm.:**  
Wednesday, April 12, 7:00 p.m.  
**Supplemental Sales Tax Oversight Commission**  
Wednesday, April 12, 6:30 p.m.

**April 15th**  
**9 am to 1 pm**

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