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Nonprofit group ready to build more senior housing in Orinda

By Sora O'Doherty



Site of new senior housing in Orinda Photo Sora O'Doherty

When it came time to refinance the Orinda Senior Village in order to achieve savings on interest, the organizers realized that they could pull out enough equity to possibly make another senior housing project in Orinda feasible. Thus, with \$14 million from the first project, the Orinda Senior Village has begun planning a second senior housing project to be located on land leased from Orinda Community Church. The land in question is the highest parking lot, rarely used by the church, which borders a PG&E easement for high voltage towers.

On the other side of that easement are the homes on Watchwood, whose residents would be the most directly affected by the new building. Mark Roberts, president of the Orinda Senior Village and the Orinda Senior Housing Foundation, said that they are working with the neighbors on adjacent streets to address their concerns.

Unlike Orinda Senior Village, the new project will not be a Section 8 development for very low-income seniors, but will be intended for low- and middle-income seniors. Orinda Senior Village has 150 units, while the new development may be 35 to 40 units of varying size from one to two bedrooms, available on an annual lease basis. The property would be managed by the same company, Walnut Creek-based Barcelon Associates, which manages Orinda Senior Village as well as about 20 other senior housing developments.

The project would have to be economically feasible, and studies are currently underway. Whereas OCC originally donated the land for Orinda Senior Village, for the new project a lease will provide an ongoing income stream for the church and lower expenditures for OSHF. OSHF is being assisted by consultant John Wyro, who has decades of experience, and Dahlin Group Architects. In addition, OSHF is looking at an environmental study and is working with the Orinda planning department.

Roberts said that he knows a lot of people with mobility concerns who would be interested in downsizing in Orinda. The proposed project will probably be five stories terraced into the hillside. A shuttle would be provided to take residents into downtown Orinda. He also noted that the project will require a general plan amendment. Senior housing overlay provides for somewhat higher density. In addition, the church property would need to be subdivided.

As for traffic, Roberts said that Orinda Senior Village opened about three years ago with no noticeable increase in traffic. Also close to the Orinda Community Church is Monteverde senior apartments, which won the Orinda Mayor's Award for Architectural Excellence in 2016 and provides another 67 one-bedroom units for seniors.

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