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Orinda's First GHAD

By Cathy Tyson



Photo provided by Keadjian Associates, Vallejo

Elevation and site plan of one of the four single family homes that were approved by the City of Orinda in December. This particular home is two stories and features an inner courtyard. Architect Robert Hidey Architects, Landscape architect Hart Howerton and Master developer Brooks Street

At the Orinda City Council Meeting on February 5, staff recommended that a hearing to consider the formation of the Wilder Geologic Hazard Abatement District (GHAD) be set for March 4 at the Library Auditorium. Interested residents are welcome to attend.

This will be the first GHAD in Orinda. According to Jason Keadjian, Spokesman for Wilder, "It's intended to set aside money and fund proactively long-term maintenance for slopes, retention ponds, storm water systems, in the event of a landslide or earthquake. It provides a budget that's funded by homeowners. The City deserves credit for requiring it as part of the Development Agreement."

"The site is geologically complex, including highly folded volcanic and sedimentary rocks. Geotechnical challenges at the site include highly expansive soils, existing undocumented fills and steep cut slopes associated with an abandoned quarry," states ENGEO, Inc., Wilder's provider of geotechnical engineering.

Only residents of Wilder will pay the assessment. It will appear on their county tax bills. Funds will go toward annual monitoring, maintenance and a plan of control by a certified engineer geologist.

GHAD's are actually a relatively new phenomenon, the Beverly statute, enacted in 1979, provided for the formation of local assessment districts for prevention, mitigation, abatement or control of geologic hazards: like landslides, land subsidence, soil erosion, and earthquakes, either actual or threatened.

Orinda won't be the only city in Contra Costa County to have a GHAD. Canyon Lakes, a subdivision of over 1,000 acres near Danville formed one in 1985. The City of San Ramon formed a GHAD in 1990 in the Dougherty Valley area, that when totally built out will encompass 11,000 housing units making it possibly the biggest GHAD in California. Because of the number of residential units within this particular GHAD, the assessment is only \$111. this year per unit, and is

adjusted annually for inflation.

Senior Engineer with the City of San Ramon, Robin Bartlett said, "Coming up with the assessment amount is a bit of an art. It's somewhat analogous to figuring out insurance risks. Every GHAD is different depending on area soils, likelihood of liquefaction, landslides and other factors." Once a per home assessment is determined, it will be divided among the projected maximum of 245 homes in the development.

Funding for the Wilder GHAD will be set up in perpetuity to provide a long-term reserve indexed for inflation for prevention, monitoring, maintenance, mitigation and large-scale repairs for basically any kind of earth movement, or potential movement.

A GHAD is beneficial because it's a type of insurance policy against geologic hazards and it protects the property of the City collectively rather than through a homeowners association.

When the original presentation was made, City Council members were concerned if there would be a fiscal impact for the City. There were assured by Wilder's Geotechnical Engineer that the answer is no.

Wilder's "Ranch House" sales office is currently being built and will be open later this summer. The developer is in the process of finalizing a sales program and will begin initial sales in the next several months. The first of four architectural plans were extremely well received by the City of Orinda. Over 1400 people have expressed an interest in the project, so far.