



Independent, locally owned and operated!

www.lamorindaweekly.com 925-377-0977

[Home](#) | [Read Online](#) | [Archive](#) | [Links](#) | [Advertising](#) | [Contact](#)

Published May 13th, 2009

Orinda Wilder Project On Hold-Again

By Andrea A. Firth

After twenty years fraught with setbacks and delays, development in the pastoral Gateway Valley just east of the Caldecott Tunnel and south of Highway 24, currently known as Wilder, has been put on hold-again. The Orinda Wilder project was placed into Receivership at the end of April. Work at the project site had halted prior to the start of the winter rainy season, and Merrill Lynch Mortgage Lending filed a notice in order to protect its position in the project earlier in the year. As the property owner, Orinda Gateway LLC, continues negotiations with the lender and other stakeholders, the Receiver hopes to have some resolution of the situation within 60 to 90 days, but the timeline is unclear.

Many Orindans seem to have developed a seasoned patience when it comes to development of the Gateway Valley, although (once again) they hope for the project to move forward as soon as possible.

"I think the City of Orinda is disappointed with the current turn of events," stated Orinda Mayor Sue Severson, but she remained optimistic that something could be worked out to get the project back on track in the near future.

The hold on the Wilder project presents a couple of logistical and financial issues for the City. With the site's infrastructure (roads, utilities) incomplete, Orinda Planning Director Emmanuel Ursu acknowledges that this is a less than optimal time for the project to stall. However, he does not anticipate that the City will face any long-term, negative financial impact due to the delay. Although the City looks forward to the property tax revenue that will be generated once the development is completed, the current unpaid tax liability to the City is nominal. The City is owed approximately \$100,000 in development and attorney fees, but Ursu anticipates these charges will be paid in due course. Although the delay is unfortunate, Ursu does not see the loss of six months to a year as catastrophic. "It's still probably the most desirable development project in the Bay Area," states Ursu.

With the Pulte development project moving forward, the City is also faced with where to relocate their maintenance facility. The proposed park and recreation facility designed to support the Wilder development includes space to house the City's maintenance operation. For the short-term, the equipment and staff will be temporarily housed on the old Library site, but a long-term solution will need to be developed, according to Severson.

Residents of the Sunrise Hill neighborhood recently met with the Receiver and had the opportunity to get informed and voice their concerns about the delay. Masaye Nakamura whose property abuts and looks directly onto the development, describes the view from the back of her home as a 'moonscape.' "They cleared the

land and took away all the greenery and have not yet replaced the landscaping," stated Nakamura. She and her husband, who have lived in their home for over 47 years, take a small pleasure in a patch of lupine that has bloomed this spring within their view. The Nakamuras and other neighborhood residents would also like to see the unsightly black plastic fencing used to demarcate the property removed until the construction project moves forward again. The plastic has holes to allow the protected whipsnake to escape from the dangers of the construction site and retreat onto the Sunrise Hill side of town. While the project lies in limbo, maybe that snake can stay where it is.

Reach the reporter at: andrea@lamorindaweekly.com

[Home](#) | [Read Online](#) | [Archive](#) | [Links](#) | [Advertising](#) | [Contact](#)

[back to top](#)

Copyright © Lamorinda Weekly, Moraga CA