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## Public Forum

To the Editor:

On March 30 you published a letter in your Public Forum column by Ann O'Connell-Nye that among other misconceptions brought into question the motives and competence of the two architects of the Orinda Vision plan. Since I am one of the two, I appreciate the opportunity to respond.

The Orinda Vision does not advocate tearing down blocks of buildings, but rather replacing them - when their owners elect to - with something better that has a sense of coordinated civic development, synergy and elegance. Our children and grandchildren deserve a better downtown than we have today. We should discern the opportunities at hand to achieve that goal. Toward this end we are supporting and contributing ideas to the City's Planning Process Review Task Force hearings now under way at the Planning Commission.

We should learn how other cities around the world have successfully evolved. There are valid reasons why so many of us visit them and why so few of their residents visit us. The Spanish Steps in Rome are known as one of the great examples of urban design in the world. We use the reference to the Spanish Steps to evoke a lively, sunlit, open, civic gathering place. Why shouldn't Orinda have another great example - scaled and detailed appropriately to Orinda?

Ms. O'Connell-Nye's concern for the movie business in Orinda is well-placed. Its continuance, however, is in the hands of Hollywood, Netflix and Orinda theater-goers. We have all observed that California has a plethora of vacant or underused art deco theaters (particularly in "semi-rural" downtowns). We would do well to recognize this fact when contemplating the means of reusing historically significant buildings, which the theatre is.

Using the tools at hand with urban design, the Orinda Vision proposes a new focal plaza in front of the theater, wide enough and elegant enough to attract people, with space for gathering, landscaping, civic art, and appropriate lighting. This would contribute to a new and fitting vitality for the principal iconic symbol of Orinda. By reinforcing the civic interest and commitment to the theater, we present the most realistic, long-term salvation for the theater building itself. Again there is ample precedent for this approach.

With respect to the historic bank building on the theater corner, our concept would be to convert the present blank wall facing Orinda's most important commercial corner to a more street-oriented, inviting and lively use. Ms O'Connell-Nye's reference to a Xerox store there is inaccurate.

I can assure Ms. O'Connell-Nye and your readers that OrindaVision is a highly motivated, pro-bono civic effort undertaken with no expectation of reward - other than grateful future generations. Our group of seven long term Orinda residents is experienced and well qualified in a number of relevant disciplines. We believe we fill a visionary void in Orinda's current planning efforts. A significant number of knowledgeable and motivated Orindans share our concerns and support our efforts.

Thank you for the opportunity to respond and correct any misunderstandings.

Sincerely,  
Peter Hasselman, FAIA, Orinda

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