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Orinda's Sign without a Home

By Andrea A. Firth

The subject of the historic Orinda sign was back before the City Council at its March 1st meeting-this time purportedly to determine the best color for the green sign, which is parked in the triangular garden at the intersection of Orinda Way and Camino Sobrante. Following review by the Public Works Aesthetic Review Committee, the Historic Landmarks Committee, and local garden clubs, the groups had collectively agreed to recommend the slightly darker 'Charleston green' as the best color to paint the 75 year-old sign, which previously adorned a small real estate office that was located on the same plot of land from the mid-1930's until the late 1960's.

However it was the location of the sign, not its color that concerned several residents who live along Camino Sobrante and on the surrounding streets. "None of us signed up for a gigantic, round, arched, green Orinda sign at the entrance to our neighborhood," said Nancy McCaulou-Bernatz, a resident of Camino Sobrante who grew up in Orinda. "It's not appropriately placed...Nobody wants this sign," she added.

The City Council approved the placement of the sign in the landscaped triangle across from Orinda Motors in November of last year pending approval of the color and mounting mechanism. Subsequently, a petition signed by 139 Orinda residents requesting that the sign be moved elsewhere was submitted to the City in December. "The taxpayers have signed a petition. They've signed on the dotted line," said Andrea Restrepo, "Every neighbor near that sign does not want the sign."

"I hope we don't have to go back and discuss location any longer," said Carl Weber, Chair of the City's Historic Landmarks Committee (HLC), noting that the sign had been situated at the same spot in a much more prominent location, on top of a building, for 25 years. "I thought we were here to talk about the color, not the location again," concurred longtime resident and HLC member Bobbie Landers. "For 25 years, I've been trying to find a location for that sign which is beloved," said Landers, adding that she is happy to drive by the sign each day as she travels to and from her home in the Country Club neighborhood. "To have the sign publicly displayed now is a dream come true," she said.

Although all the Council members seemed amenable to the new color choice for the sign, three of the four present were sufficiently swayed by the neighbors' protests to revisit the sign's location. Noting that he was not on the Council when the sign's new location was originally approved, Council Member Dean Orr stated that the sign is partly hidden by landscaping and positioned awkwardly. Council Member Steve Glazer acknowledged that the neighbors in the area seem well informed about the sign issue and that there may not have been full community notification at the time the location was chosen. "There seems to be disconnect to place [the sign] where the neighborhood does not welcome it," added Council Member Sue Severson. Mayor Victoria Smith disagreed and suggested that the location and new color be tried for a period of time. Ultimately, the Council voted three to one, with Smith dissenting, to postpone any decision regarding the sign color and to bring the issue of the sign's location back for further discussion.

It's not appropriately placed...Nobody wants this sign."

"Every neighbor who lives near that sign does not want the sign," said Andrea Restrepo

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