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Orinda Council and Planning Commission Review 2010

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Orinda's City Council and Planning Commission met recently to review the performance of the Planning Department and the status of pending projects, and to discuss the downtown planning efforts. Planning efficiency and customer satisfaction improved in 2010, and the Council and Commission emphasized the need for comprehensive public outreach regarding the downtown planning process.

According Planning Director Emmanuel Ursu, the Planning Commission examined 50 project proposals in 2010-a net increase from 2009's 37 projects-and approved 46. Wilder, a 245-home luxury home development off Gateway Boulevard, represented over half of the applications submitted. Ursu separately reviewed 55 minor projects, all of which were approved.

The average time from application completion to a decision by the Planning Commission decreased by 58%, to 11.1 days. (A minimum 10-day public notification period is required for development projects.) City staff also highlighted results from the Planning Department's client surveys. 83 responses have been received since the program's inception in 2007, and performance scores have increased steadily year-over-year.

Ursu provided an update for four housing projects that are currently in the planning and development process. Construction at Wilder is underway, though it is likely the developer will be unable to complete two ball fields by June and a maintenance facility by October as originally planned. Ursu said he believes the developer of Pulte Homes, a mixed-use village style development of 73 homes on Altarinda Road, is waiting for the housing market to improve before proceeding further. J & J Ranch, a 13-home development and the site of the Joaquin Moraga Adobe, and the Lamorinda Lane project, which includes 8 residential lots, are expected to go before the Planning Commission for approval in June. And, the Eden senior housing project, a 71-unit affordable housing facility planned for the old Library site on Orinda Way, is expected to undergo design review shortly; overall funding for the project has not yet been fully secured.

City officials noted that younger people and families have been underrepresented at City planning meetings regarding Orinda's Downtown planning process. Planning Commissioner Nick Kosla said only two people under 45 years of age were present at a community meeting that he attended.

Regarding the status of the Planning Process Review Task Force (PPRTF) recommendations, which were developed to simplify the planning approval process, Ursu reported that 30 of the PPRTF's 61 recommendations have been adopted, one rejected, and 30 await evaluation.

Orinda's City Council will meet next on Tuesday, May 17th, at 7:00 p.m. in the Library auditorium.

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