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Wilder Things Are Happening

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Following on the heels of public hearings this past spring in which the Orinda City Council determined that OG Property Owners, LLC (OGLLC) had fallen behind in its work to complete the playfields and maintenance facility associated with the Wilder development, OGLLC Project Manager Michael S. O'Hara offered an update and revised timeline to the Council on September 6.

To date, two major targets have been completed ahead of schedule - the installation of bleachers and construction of stairs. The installation of light poles and fine grades of playfields are also finished.

However, the inability to irrigate the playfields continues to be an issue. In response to City staff concerns that water meters are not yet connected, O'Hara advised the Council that East Bay Municipal Utility District (EBMUD) fees have been paid, water pipes have now been installed, and meters should be connected before the end of October.

O'Hara also explained why the company was unable to meet its initial target goals for several additional elements of the project.

The developer had been making good progress, he said, toward meeting the August 8th target for completion of the maintenance facility. With the City Planning Department's approval of the construction plans in May 2011, OGLLC moved quickly to submit those plans to the Contra Costa County Building Department by June 8th but was forced to regroup when County staff requested more data on August 8th. The additional information was submitted on August 25th, but the County has not yet responded.

Planning Director Emmanuel Ursu observed that it was unusual for the County to take so long to respond to a developer's request for a building permit. "This puts them (OGLLC) back a month," said Ursu, adding that because the County's concerns are minor and unlikely to affect the construction process, the City would contact County staff and urge them to approve the permit.

With respect to additional target items projected for September completion, Ursu noted that the mowbands have been completed for playfield one and are also nearly completed for playfield two. City staff will visit the site to assess the progress made to the planned creek enhancement.

Freeway Maintenance Agreement and Park-and-Ride Lot

City staff also secured permission from the Council to revise the existing 1965 Freeway Maintenance Agreement (FMA) with Caltrans. The improved FMA will clarify the terms of transfer, from Caltrans to the City, of responsibility for planned landscaping upgrades to the Wilder entryway.

The developer and the Wilder Home Owners' Association (Wilder HOA) are responsible for the installation and cost of the landscaping; however, if either organization fails to fulfill its obligations, the City will have the authority to remove the landscaping so that it will not be required to assume the expense of maintenance.

Because several of these improvements will be made within a paved Caltrans right of way, an existing park-and-ride lot on the south side of Highway 24 will be displaced by the landscaping. As a result, OGLLC must mitigate this situation as well by replacing the 22 parking spaces lost near the Wilder exchange.

OGLLC plans to relocate those spaces to the graded parking lot currently used by the California Shakespeare Theatre (Cal Shakes) - a concept supported by Cal Shakes, Caltrans, and EBMUD, which leases the lot to Cal Shakes. Since the lot is located outside of the City's jurisdiction on land owned by EBMUD, the City will incur no expenses. Thirty-seven additional striped spaces will also be made available in the Caltrans right of way on the north side of the interchange.

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