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Orinda Considers Downtown and General Plan Updates

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The Orinda City Council was asked at its June 5 meeting to establish a new Ad Hoc General Plan Update Advisory Committee. According to the staff report, "Staff suggests that the objective of the committee is to guide the process of updating the General Plan as it pertains to downtown. However, as the General Plan is a comprehensive planning document for the entire city and downtown is an integral part of the community, the General Plan update will necessarily include areas outside the downtown."

Staff also recommended that the committee's composition include: Council members, Planning Commissioners, architects, developers, property owners, residents, and Chamber representation. Applicants would be asked to outline their business and volunteer experience, and describe their visions for downtown Orinda's future, as well as their thoughts on how they would influence the General Plan via a statement of interest form, the draft of which is also included in the report.

Per Government Code 65300, California law "requires each city to 'adopt a comprehensive, long-term general plan for the physical development of the ... city,'" which addresses: land use, circulation, housing, conservation, open space, noise, and safety. Orinda's plan, adopted May 20, 1987, was organized into three sections: Land Use and Circulation (land use, circulation, parks, open space, schools, utilities), Housing, and Environmental Resources Management (safety, noise, conservation).

A fourth element - Growth Management - was added after the plan's adoption to comply with Measure C, Contra Costa County's Transportation Sales Tax Expenditure Plan. That element was amended in 2009 when voters reauthorized the County's sales tax under Measure J.

Although this plan has been amended 18 times since its adoption, staff advised Council members to take this action now "to ensure that [the General Plan] still reflects the land use values and long-term vision of the community" and because "there has not been a comprehensive review and update of the General Plan since it was adopted in 1987." Mayor Steve Glazer expressed his wish that more residents had been present. The two residents still in attendance were both critical of the potential new committee with one commenting, "I don't see a groundswell for a change in the general plan."

Council Member Victoria Smith voiced concerns regarding the committee's potential make up. Vice Mayor Amy Worth commented that Council needs to hear from residents about how they want their leaders to address SB 375, the Sustainable Communities and Climate Protection Act of 2008, before creating a new committee, and asked staff to investigate how Lafayette and Moraga are responding to the legislation: www.arb.ca.gov/cc/sb375/sb375.htm.

Council members Dean Orr and Sue Severson also felt more information was warranted. Staff will return at a later Council meeting with an updated presentation.

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