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Cohesive New Look for Orinda

By Jennifer Wake



Illustration of new signage by Square Peg Design City of Orinda staff report

whole unit but even if you try to do that, you're still going to have to define the two sides because it's a physical fact. You have the 24 freeway and the BART station that splits it down the middle," he said. Signage for both districts would have different names, but have a common look.

In September 2014, Orinda received \$151,100 in TLC grant funds through the Contra Costa Transportation Authority (Measure J) for improvements around the Orinda downtown leading to the Orinda BART station, according to documents included in the staff report. The city will provide an additional \$25,000 from Tree Mitigation funds for the project.

Square Peg Design took several factors into consideration when creating the project's conceptual design. It focused on the importance of education in the community, using illuminated letters such as those found on gilded manuscripts in the design, and on the environment, using a color palate signifying the surrounding hills. The firm presented two distinct designs to an advisory group, which suggested the two ideas be blended to feature illuminated letters "T" for Theatre District and "V" for Village District. The letters, entwined with oak leaves, will be featured in the soft colors of spring and summer.

The design included a sign added to the dark gray wall across the pedestrian bridge from the BART station, which would welcome residents and visitors as they exit the freeway. "Guests coming into Orinda would have a quick guide so they can make decisions whether to go to the left or right, to the Village or Theatre District," said Cuyler. The sign would include metal routed letters through the sign's aluminum face and be acrylic backed so they could be backlit and would light up the wall - something Orr, who walks that underpass frequently, was happy to hear.

Durability and longevity, as well as placement, were also important considerations in the design, said Cuyler. After reviewing a map suggesting sign locations throughout Orinda, Orr asked Cuyler to ensure new signs didn't conflict with other recently installed signage, such as the one recently installed near Safeway on Camino Sobrante.

Council Member Eve Phillips wanted to look at balance and be sure the placement wasn't as cluttered as it looked on the map provided them. Cuyler said as the project moves forward the firm will review the locations again, and it plans to do mockups and place prototypes around town, so people have an idea of the design as well as placement. Some of the signage will also include historical elements such as photos and information about Orinda's past.

With a downtown dissected into two by a freeway and BART tracks, finding a way around Orinda can be a difficult task for some without proper signage, according to Scott Cuyler, creative principal and co-founder of Square Peg Design. Cuyler presented the conceptual design for the Orinda Crossroads Area and BART Wayfinding Signage project at the May 18 city council meeting, outlining how the project would create cohesion between the two parts of town - the Village District and the Theatre District.

Newly appointed mayor, then council member, Dean Orr expressed his concern about focusing on the two distinct areas. "As a council, we are constantly working on actions to try to unify both sides of the freeway," he said. He asked, instead of two districts being highlighted, why not just Orinda?

Cuyler said creating cohesion is challenging, to say the least. "Everyone defines Orinda as a

"Sign posts on wood stanchions would give directional information on two sides, and on the third side we'd work with the Historical Society to bring out the imagery and history of Orinda," Cuyler said.

Vice Mayor Victoria Smith asked that Square Peg Design also meet with the Historical Landmarks Committee as well when developing this idea. "Signs with the photos may be a great Eagle Scout project," she added.

The council approved the conceptual design, and the firm is now moving forward with a final design. Construction is expected in late 2015 or early 2016. For more information about the project, visit the City of Orinda website at cityoforinda.org.

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[back](#)

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