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An Orinda icon, Nation's to move across the street, remodel

By Sora O'Doherty



Image provided by mihmic Architecture

After 50 years in Orinda, the well-loved hamburger restaurant, Nation's, is moving. But not very far: the new restaurant will be right across Moraga Way from the original location, taking the space at 65 Moraga Way, last occupied by Taverna Pelligrini, which closed during the COVID-19 pandemic (next to Peet's Coffee at 63 Moraga Way). Nation's has worked with Peet's to design a harmonious facade for both businesses.

The design, by architect Michael Hannah, won approval from the Orinda Planning Commission on June 28. In the new plan, Peet's canopy, which currently reads "Peet's Coffee & Tea," will be removed and replaced with a brand new canopy with illuminated letters spelling out Peet's Coffee, as Peet's has recently dropped the addition of "& Tea" in its signage. The existing columns on the building's facade will be removed, and there will be a new facade treatment with vertical aluminum slats with a wood texture.

On the Nation's side of the building, there will be three new projecting architectural features. The name "Nation's" will appear on the awning in lighted letters. At the request of the planning commission, the architect agreed to reduce the overall size of the letters by about 20%, working with the Planning Department. On the front of the side of the building at one side will be a structure that resembles a tall sandwich in its three-layer construction. On the front, near the top, it will bear the Nation's logo, which will be in color and subtly illuminated. The illumination is the "meat" in the sandwich; the soft lighting will illuminate the front logo and also, down the side of the "sandwich," the letters spelling out Nation's will appear vertically, and will also be gently illuminated.

One area of controversy was the height of this structure with the company logo. The architect presented two options, based on previous work with the planning commission. The features of the facade in option A were bigger overall, and the structure bearing the logo projected higher than the roofline. Option B had smaller features, and the logo structure did not project above, but was even with the roofline. The fact that the structure rose above the roofline was controversial, and, as well, neighbors whose houses are behind the restaurant objected to the fact that the back of the structure would be translucent and gently lit.

Hannah agreed that he could easily add another layer to the sandwich, covering the translucent panel with an opaque one and thereby eliminating any illumination from the back of the sign. He explained to the Planning Commission that his idea with having the company's illuminated logo above the parapet was to echo the theme of the iconic Orinda Theatre, with its towering neon-enhanced sign. While the theatre is near the north end of the Theatre district, Nation's will be at the south end, so that the taller signs would bookmark the Theatre district, he suggested. Hannah pointed out that Orinda Theatre itself could not be approved today under current requirements. His arguments persuaded the commission, which voted unanimously to allow the lighted logo to rise five feet above the parapet. The other conditions of approval were that the back of the sign not be illuminated and the reduction in the size of the letters on the canopy.

All windows and doors on the adjoined buildings will remain the same. The exterior material will remain stucco. The facade will be touched up in areas where the stucco is eroding. The brick material on the west wall of the building will remain. The burnt orange stucco color and black window framing will remain the same. The wood patterned aluminum slats and canopies will be a "Knotwood" color. No new light fixtures will be featured on this building. The only form of lighting on the exterior of the building will be the subdued indirect LED lighting for the building's signage.

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