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Orange Paseo on path for seasonal reopening

By Tina Richards

The Orange City Council, August 10, sidled up to making the downtown Paseo a seasonal occurrence, directing staff to study the environmental issues, permitting, costs and design standards that would need to be addressed prior to making the now-temporary street closure more permanent.

The 100 and 200 blocks of Glassell St. were closed to traffic in July 2020 to make way for outdoor dining. What started as a temporary closure to boost businesses during the pandemic has lasted more than a year (as has the pandemic), and is heralded as a successful revenue booster for restaurants and the city.

The Paseo was taken down Aug. 25 to accommodate the Orange International Street Fair, but will be re-opened soon after the fair ends. The possibility of making the Paseo permanent, seasonal, or simply shutting it down, was explored during the July council meeting. Members agreed to temporarily reopen it after the street fair while the debate over its long-term fate continued. At that time, Arianna Barrios asked that the reopening be postponed for a few weeks to give Old Towne residents “a break.” The council agreed to a Sept. 24 reopening.

Outside influences

Since that meeting, however, staff learned that the street closure waiver granted the city by the Orange County Transportation Agency (OCTA) would expire if Glassell remained open in September. That waiver was granted “administratively” by OCTA staff as an emergency response to the pandemic. If the waiver expires, the city would have to seek a new one, and this time it would have to be approved by the OCTA Board of Directors. That could take several months.

OCTA advised re-closing Glassell right away to keep the original permit in place. Even if the street remained open, OCTA said it would continue to reroute bus lines through residential Old

Towne rather than revert back to pre-Paseo routes for three weeks, and then change them again.

Mayor Mark Murphy sits on the OCTA board and confirmed that was the case. “They’re not going to reroute buses for three weeks,” he said. “There will be no respite for Old Towne residents.” When asked when he thought the Paseo should reopen, Murphy said, “within a few days, a week at most.”

Barrios, who represents the Old Towne area, reiterated her opposition to reopening the Paseo early, and suggested the city just leave it closed until staff could study the impacts of a seasonal street closure. Her colleagues did not want to wait and the “within a few days” reopening was accepted without a formal vote.

Details before a decision

The purpose of the August council discussion was to direct city staff to perform an environmental review and develop design guidelines for a seasonal Paseo, not to define an ultimate outcome. Staff had recommended a seasonal presence rather than a permanent one, and most of the council agreed to that course.

But not everyone in Old Towne wants the Paseo to continue. Public speakers at the August council meeting included business owners who reported their shops, located beyond the Glassell closure, are suffering. They have little walk-in traffic, and customers can’t find parking. Residents who live on the streets where vehicle traffic and bus lines were rerouted noted their neighborhoods are now thoroughfares.

Tony Trabuco, president of The Old Towne Preservation Association (OTPA), stressed the need for a thorough environmental study to include parking and traffic, Old Towne design standards, and a review of historical conditions. He also noted that Glassell is part of the county’s master plan of highways. Any changes would raise

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Orange Acres Backbreakers 4-H triumphed at the OC Fair. Ella Rosas, center, shows Hattie, her Reserve Champion Market Goat, flanked by Project Leader Max Horan and mom Jaimee Rosas. See photos, page 10.

Tustin Costco gas station site shown to contain high levels of toxic contamination

A site assessment report on property approved to host a Costco gas station at Tustin Ranch Road and Bryan found toxic levels of perchloroethylene. This gave Tustin residents opposing the project more grounds in their appeal of a lawsuit dismissed by a superior court judge last year.

The community group Protect Tustin Ranch had challenged the city’s decision not to require an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) in court. The Tustin City Council had approved the 32-nozzle Costco gas station and granted Costco a categorical exemption from an EIR. The residents argued that the exemption was not applicable, and because the gas station was to be built within 500 feet of homes and within one mile of three schools an EIR that studied traffic, noise, air and water quality was necessary.

Unhealthy and unwise

The court found in favor of the city and Costco last October. Protect Tustin Ranch appealed; the

hearing was Aug. 19.

The levels of soil contamination identified in the April 2021 site assessment exceed human-health safety standards by 867%. Protect Tustin Ranch alleges that City of Tustin officials and Costco never revealed the site’s contamination to the public and did not disclose it during the original lawsuit between Protect Tustin Ranch, Costco and the city.

“Hopefully this latest development will help us to prevail,” Anne Lee of Project Tustin Ranch said. “The newly revealed information about the site’s toxic contamination bolsters the urgent need for an EIR. This mega gas station will have a significant negative impact on the health and safety of at-risk communities.”

The site assessment report also notes on-site concentrations of benzene, TCE and vinyl chloride that exceed human health screen-

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Annie Drews, 2020 Olympic Gold Medalist, was celebrated by the City of Orange, with Mayor Mark Murphy declaring Aug. 18 “Annie Drews Day.” She was also a special guest at the Chamber of Commerce’s ribbon cutting, Aug. 17. A member of the Team USA volleyball squad, Drews helped secure the team’s first Gold Medal, scoring 15 points in the match against Brazil. Born in Elkhart, Indiana, the Olympian now calls Orange home. From left, city Councilmembers Jon Dumitru and Chip Monaco, Annie Drews, Councilmember Ana Gutierrez, Mayor Mark Murphy, Councilmembers Arianna Barrios and Kim Nichols.



Photo by Tony Richards

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NEWS INSIDE

COMING SOON

A burger stand got city approvals based on an ordinance that didn’t yet exist.

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FACE THE MUSIC

Villa Park council members find themselves on the defense against riled up residents.

See Repercussions, page 4

DOUBLE TAKE

City of Orange reduces parking requirements in commercial zones; acknowledges not enough spaces in Old Towne.

See Parking, page 7

OUT OF AFRICA

Local merchant helps create jobs in Madagascar, selling farm to factory chocolate.

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A NOT SO WINDING ROAD

A major Orange thoroughfare got its start as a cleared path between orange groves.

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