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## Letters to the Editor

To Our Neighbors,

Many of us who choose to live in the Bay area take pride in our region's reputation as "tolerant." White/black, Muslim/Jew, conservative/liberal, gay/straight - we, for the most part, try to get along.

So, imagine living in Orinda as a lesbian couple knowing that "traditional family values" is used as justification to restrict your rights, ala Prop 8. Imagine trying to assimilate into Orinda as a person of color knowing that 1% of the population is African American and even less is Hispanic, according to census data. Imagine being a senior citizen in Orinda and finding yourself identified as capitalizing on Prop 13 for paying your taxes, all because you are outspoken (see recent letters to the editor).

Orindans, we can do better. We can be respectful and accepting of our differences. We can and should be more inclusive. Or, shame on us.

Bob & Kim Larsen  
Orinda

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To the Editor,

The treatment Edward Vogt reported receiving from the City of Orinda (Letters to the Editor, 2/18/09 issue) illustrates just how oppressive local governments can be toward property owners. I wouldn't have believed it, had it not brought back memories of our family's experience with the Orinda planning process in 1994 when building our house. We had to endure factually incorrect and logically flawed input from Orinda's Design Review Board, which tried to force us to build our house on the lowest portion of our large hillside lot where it would have had essentially no view, despite our proposed upslope building site having had full neighbor support and zoning compliance. In their seemingly well-intentioned desire to make our proposed house less visible from afar, the Design Review Board demanded we move the house to the downhill setback despite the fact that it would have involved removing more trees and made the house far more visible from the local street. Other demands included our installation of an elevator, a dark green roof (resulting in a higher summer AC bill), and that a "certified arborist be required to supervise all grading and construction activities" - a requirement even our highly respected and seasoned arborist said was ridiculous. Only after considerable effort and aggravation did we prevail against the city, keeping the uphill view location we enjoy today, and thereby avoiding what would have otherwise been a significant loss in property enjoyment and value. Others we know of have been less fortunate and, over the years that followed, we personally saw some other unjustifiably hostile actions by the City against nearby property owners. City-imposed land-use rulings, however well-intentioned, are often made by personnel lacking in legal land-use knowledge, planning experience and impartiality, and can result in severe destruction of land value and onerous cost burdens on an individual property, that can far outweigh any purported benefits to the community. Often these rulings smack of an underlying intent to impede

development or, at best, to achieve near-perfection without any regard to cost imposed on the property owner, rather than to reduce environmental and visual impact in a balanced, reasonable manner.

Orinda, with its forward-thinking, educated, and fair-minded citizenry and city council is in a good position to start, today, to set an example of sane environmental policy balanced with due respect for civil rights, by ceasing the practice of imposing homeowner restrictions that are out of proportion with any actual benefit to the community.

Sincerely,

Joel M. Libove.  
Orinda

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Editor:

If you're lucky in your lifetime, you'll live long enough to witness one of those one-in-a-lifetime event. I was fortunate enough to witness such as event at last night's Moraga Town Council meeting. The event I witnessed was the evolution of a representative democracy into the new "selective representative democracy." This new form of democracy re-paves the conventional political organizational chart from where our elected representatives are accountable to the public to the public being held accountable to elected representatives.

This sea-change in political science occurred when the Moraga Town Council took it upon itself to enter into a new contractual agreement for a town manager without the input or solicitation of public comment. This "stealth" contract contains a total annual compensation package of nearly \$300,000. Please keep in mind that the former Oakland City Administrator was compensated nearly as much for a population of 20 times that of Moraga. To round out the night and to a stunned audience, each and every member of the Moraga Town Council proceeded to pontificate and lecture to those who were unfortunate enough to be subjected to this self-serving diatribe. One of the highlights of these personal lectures was when one councilmember opined that Moraga suffers from a negative public perception brought about by "you citizens." In fact, the negative public opinion was brought about, for the most part, by the dysfunctional and argumentative Moraga Town Council itself. The other highlight was from one councilmember masquerading as the local equivalent of Nancy Pelosi who matter-of-factly told the audience that "you elected us" and "you entrusted us" and "let's give this man a chance" and "let's welcome him." I guess I would feel welcome if somebody guaranteed me \$300,000 a year.

The irony is not lost with me. As a former candidate for the Moraga Town Council, I was privy to many personal conversations with three current sitting council members. Without exception, both publicly and privately, budget considerations were of paramount importance. However, the contrast between their election promises and their elected decisions is striking. The council reiterated the need to look at adjoining locales such as Lafayette or Orinda for comparable compensation packages. But the comparison failed to include the fiscal state of the adjoining communities budgets. Lafayette and Orinda enjoy well-managed and well-planned budgets. Unfortunately, Moraga has enjoyed neither of these qualities. I ask that colleges and universities look at this new "enlighten" version of representative democracy and see if it works for their communities.

Dennis Wanken  
Moraga

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