

Letters to the Editor



Share your thoughts with our community! Opinions in Letters to the Editor are the express views of the writers and not necessarily those of the Lamorinda Weekly.

All published letters will include the writer's name and town (please give us your phone number for verification purposes only), and should be 350 words or less.

email: letters@lamorindaweekly.com; Regular mail: Lamorinda Weekly, P.O.Box 6133, Moraga, CA 94570

Editor:
Moraga has a new town manager, our seventh in about 15 years, if we include two interim managers. Wouldn't the public interest be better served if we could reduce that rate of turnover? Our two most recent town managers were surprised by the acrimony in our community. I believe that we can improve the situation if more Moragans will become productively engaged in public affairs instead of letting a few complainers have disproportionate impact. This will require that more citizens become knowledgeable about civic affairs.

The unfortunate pattern in Moraga is for some residents to become exercised rarely and briefly over hot-button issues. Emotions are vented, a lack of understanding is exhibited, and then those citizens return to the sidelines, not to be heard from again for a long time -- if ever. When the next controversy arises, a new batch of initiates performs on the stage before disappearing. What we need is an ongoing commitment to become familiar with laws, structures, and procedures, so that we gain over time at least a basic grasp of how things work. Emotion has its place in human experience, but knowledge and rationality are preferable in public discourse.

Many of the concerned citizens who expressed an interest in the Dollar Tree issue were of working and child-bearing age, and my comments are directed primarily at you. Regardless of how you feel about the outcome, I hope you will now transfer your energy and concern to other issues, such as whether the Town of Moraga will have enough revenue to remain an incorporated municipality. The Town Council is attempting to engage with the public on this important issue. I urge you to respond to this outreach. Read the report of the Revenue Enhancement Committee, ask questions, attend meetings, make suggestions. My generation is fading from the scene. Moraga's future requires your participation and your leadership. Build on what we have done. Make Moraga as good as it can be.

Dale Walwark
Moraga

Editor:
Baloney sandwich, anyone?
With Mayor McCormick as point man, the current Orinda City Council has publicly, or in some cases, more obtusely in this election year, advocated the support of high rise, high density, mixed use, condo village re-development of the Theatre Square district and other downtown districts, with the logic that more downtown residences mean a jump in retail sales tax revenue, which in turn, means better quality roadways for Orinda.

"Not so much", says Steve Wahlstrom, an award-winning, independent, urban planner, with more than 200 municipal projects on his resume. At the September 7 city council meeting, Mr. Wahlstrom presented his Retail Sales Tax Leakage Report for Orinda, based on his April 2010 research. When asked how much retail sales tax revenue would jump with an influx of downtown residents, Mr. Wahlstrom held up his thumb and fore-finger in the universal symbol for a skoch, and advised that projecting a meaningful retail sales tax increase to justify the construction of high rise, high density, mixed use, condo village, re-development, was flawed reasoning.

An incredulous city council proceeded to ask Mr. Wahlstrom the same question, multiple times. And they kept getting the same answer. Mr. Wahlstrom elaborated that a broader range of retail offerings, in line with national chain, box stores, would be needed to meaningfully increase Orinda's retail sales tax, but deemed such a solution as unviable. His explanation? Orinda's narrow mountain canyon topography, especially in the Theatre District, precludes a development site that could accommodate the minimum square footage and associated parking requirements, mandated by such national corporate retailers.

Clearly, the city council expected and wanted a different answer from their anticipated ally. Now, some city employee might subsequently take Mr. Wahlstrom to the woodshed, and instruct him on how to "play ball" for his \$10,000 consulting fee, but the truth is out in the open and the truth is clear. If this current city council professes that high rise, high density, mixed use, condo village re-development is the prime rib panacea for all that ails Orinda, then why does it smell so much like baloney?

And how does a city council that pleads it is too poor to be able to afford an independent, professional survey of what Orindans want from their downtown, still find the funds for a Retail Sales Tax Leakage Report, plus the facilitation firm for the upcoming workshops on the Downtown Proposed Plan? Why is this city council so intent on spending public money to sell a proposal, which is founded on erroneous assumptions, instead of scientifically surveying its citizens or putting the Proposed Downtown Plan to a vote of the citizens?

Owen Murphy
Orinda

Editor:
The current Crossroads beautification project is surely the most fouled-up public service job in the history of our little town.

Thousands of man-hours and woman-hours of delays have hit us already. Worse, the job will eliminate several badly-needed parking slots in Orinda. Of course, if the City Council proceeds with the plan to tear down Crossroads business buildings we won't need those parking places anyway. The whole job of repaving Moraga Way was supposed to be complete by August 17. And it would have been, without these little islands of nonsense at the corners. Now we will be lucky if the Swisher Co finishes pouring concrete by Christmas.

Our City Council has again wasted badly needed money (for fixing roads, maybe!) on frivolities. We need a change.

Chuck McCoy
Orinda

Lafayette Candidates

Editor:
"Higgle-dee-piggle-dee," our town's not based on a grid, I used to say when giving directions to people in Lafayette. But look at us now!
The fall city newsletter got me to thinking about the thoughtful, community-driven improvements that have happened in the 27 years I've lived here. Walk the length of our town to see tangible reasons to be proud of Lafayette: The reservoir, the Veterans Memorial Building, the center medians planted with beautiful sustainable landscaping and decorated with sparkling twinkle lights, the seasonal banners, the convenient and unobtrusive BART station, the hill of crosses that represent a community that never forgets what's going on in the world, the variety of stores and restaurants indicative of entrepreneurship and excellent food.

A charming central park, the statue of Marquis de Lafayette (look closely, someone may have put a pair of sunglasses on him), our new library, its beauty embracing both the tangible and intangible, a visual and intellectual triumph, a place that came into being because of a true public-private partnership, its community hall purposely placed with its tall windows on the

major corner so that citizens can see into City meetings and feel welcome to attend and give input. The service businesses, the elegant hotel, our excellent schools, a town that loves its coffee so much that I've heard us called Latte-ette. (Instead of sunglasses, give that Marquis a latte!) Don Tatzin's thoughtful inclusive leadership is a constant factor in helping Lafayette become the place we enjoy today. His approach to good public policy, developing community and hiring excellent city employees provide intangible reasons why Lafayette has become a "gem."
I ask you to vote yes to re-elect Don Tatzin to City Council.

Hilma Wikander Jones
(Has anyone seen my sunglasses?)
Lafayette

Editor:
In this year's Lafayette City Council race, Don Tatzin offers years of experience and brings demonstrated commitment, innovative solutions, a history of careful land-use planning, and a prudent fiscal management style to the position.

Don knows that good schools are a critical element of a successful community and sought greater cooperation with the school districts. At the request of the Lafayette School District Governing Board, Don participated in the recent strategic planning process.

Don conceived of the first citizen Financial Review Committee in the 1990's, which resulted in the Council improving the efficiency of government services. During the past decade, the City has put more money into police services and roads while maintaining a balanced budget.

We have lived in Lafayette since 1968 and have seen the downtown become more vibrant with improved public landscaping and more shopping choices. Simultaneously, neighborhoods are protected from excessive development and the views of largely undeveloped ridgelines remain. Don chaired the Hillside and Ridgeline Committee that created enhanced protections for our most visually attractive ridges.

We support Don because he will bring four more years of thoughtful leadership to the Council.

Carol and Bob Singer
Lafayette

Orinda Candidates

Editor:
I'm supporting Tom McCormick for re-election to Orinda's City Council. In a nutshell, McCormick has the intellect, and management skills to deal with a variety of tough issues that confront Orinda—and future issues that will likely be more challenging.

As a past volunteer for the Planning Process Review Task Force (PPRTF – I was on the Process subcommittee.) and current volunteer on the Planning Commission, I worked closely with Tom over a two-year period and through dozens of meetings. He had a good understanding of the issues, and was willing to give everyone a shot at explaining different perspectives. While we did not always agree, I always felt I had a fair shake—that Tom listened, was willing to adjust, and made the task force work toward good, consensus decisions to benefit all of Orinda.

As a result of the public response over the 55' building height limit that was proposed by the PPRTF, the City, rightly so, has promised a restart of the downtown review through a series of meetings to try to find out what Orindans really want. Tom McCormick is the one that pressed for these additional meetings to get a full understanding of what Orinda wants and needs. While some may associate this upcoming review (which surely will be interesting), as a disappointment in the PPRTF, it is not. McCormick's leadership of the PPRTF was successful in establishing a vision and basis, and most of the solid recommendations from the Process and Residential subcommittees have or will be implemented. Most important, finally we have many more Orindans starting to engage their local government, and hopefully refine the vision to preserve our town's character while being mindful of the need to encourage business and services, and avoid urban decay. Listening to, developing, and implementing intelligent and workable perspectives of the local citizenry are critical roles for the City Council.

Whatever people think about the PPRTF proposal for revitalizing downtown (mostly on down sloped lots), I doubt the low-income senior housing +50' high structure across from the Fire House, (which is proceeding in isolation to the new downtown review process) on an up sloping lot, fits the "PPRTF image." If constructed in an envelope similar to what is outlined by the current story poles, many Orindans, who objected to the PPRTF [and some who did not], will be more than surprised.

Bottom line, there are many forces trying to reshape Orinda. As a 30-year resident, count me in the camp that favors a strong local government that listens to and acts on what Orindans want—and one that is not overly influenced by special interest advocacy groups. I think Orindans need City Council members with critical skills, who listen, analyze, and do what is best for Orinda, and can make tough decisions that may not be "politically correct." That's why I'm voting to re-elect Mayor Tom McCormick.

Chris Kniel
Orinda Planning Commissioner

Dear Editor,
My first encounter with Sue Severson was over 20 years ago. Sue held the first of many meetings for "Earthquake Preparedness" for our schools. This project was one of many commitments to the town of Orinda, where Sue has shown vision thinking and energy to match.

We now are in a much better position at each school, with food, first aide, and support equipment in the event of a natural disaster. When we started in 1990, the only items that were available were a few World War II first aide supplies. Sue has a real talent to bring ideas together with respect for everyone's opinion and then finalize the goal and move forward. During her years on the School Board, you would find Sue walking around school sites to be available to those that wanted to talk to her about all kinds of issues.

Bonnie Jo Hodge Quist
Orinda

Editor:
We invite Orindans to join us in support of the 3 candidates who will bring Respect, Enthusiasm, Consideration, Integrity, Knowledge and the real meaning of Volunteerism to our Community.
We need proven leaders of whom we can be proud and, therefore, are endorsing: Amy Worth, Sue Severson and Dean Orr for Orinda City Council!
Join us!

Dick Heggie and Bobbie Landers
Orinda

Editor:
Fiscal Responsibility:
Sue Severson has been instrumental in keeping Orinda fiscally solvent during these rough economic times. Her personal commitment to making sure that Orinda sets priorities and plans that are fiscally sound have helped keep Orinda on budget despite increasing costs and decreasing revenues. She has also come up with creative ideas to find alternative financing for arts and community programs that the city can no longer afford to fund. Sue was instrumental in setting up the Orinda Community Foundation which organizes great events such as the Kids Triathlon and the Orinda Golf Tournament, the proceeds from which help fund other Orinda activities such as the Fourth of July Parade, Orinda Idol and arts programs. We are fortunate to have such a talented city council member working so hard to keep Orinda a great place to live. We urge you to join us in supporting Sue Severson for Orinda City Council.

Nancy & Rick Booth
Orinda

Editor:
We have been residents of Orinda for over fifty years. We remember well when Orinda was incorporated with Dick Heggie as our first Mayor. Since that time we have seen many fine men and women serve on the city council. Sue Severson is one of the most dedicated and talented workers we have ever had. We are supporting her for another term in office.

Sincerely,
Ann and Lee Sorenson

Editor:
Chairman Mao Tse-tung, describing guerilla warfare, said in 1936: "The enemy advances, we retreat; the enemy camps, we harass; the enemy tires, we attack; the enemy retreats, we pursue."

Something similar to guerilla warfare is going on in Orinda. For many months, members of the City Council and the Planning Commission have been sponsoring a scheme to construct high-rise buildings, luxury apartments, and a hotel in downtown Orinda.

Now, some City Council candidates who have supported downtown development -- such Tom McCormick, Dean Orr, and Amy Worth -- are, as Chairman Mao might have predicted, retreating.

At a recent television debate, "McCormick, Worth, and Orr offered no positions on the [downtown] recommendations . . ." (Contra Costa Times, Sept. 7).

McCormick and Worth are City Council incumbents. Orr is head of Orinda's Planning Commission.

One candidate for City Council, Dr. Scott Zeller, is opposed to constructing high-rise buildings in downtown Orinda.

Orinda's semi-rural and village-like character make Orinda an extremely enjoyable place to live. Keeping high-rise buildings out of downtown should increase the demand -- and prices -- for housing in Orinda.

Please vote for Dr. Zeller and keep Orinda from becoming the next Walnut Creek or Manhattan.

Richard S. Colman
Orinda

Editor:
Vote for Scott Zeller for the Orinda City Council. He is the only candidate strongly and openly opposed to a change in our downtown building height.

The current Orinda City Council is considering amending the Orinda General Plan to allow downtown building heights of 55 plus feet on both sides of the freeway. Our Mayor, Tom McCormick, who is running for re-election has come out strongly in favor of raising our height limit. Council Members Sue Severson and Amy Worth, who are also running for re-election, won't tell us their position on the height issue. Dean Orr, running for election to the city council, hasn't told us his position.

This is the most important issue that has faced our community since incorporation. We became the City of Orinda because of building height issues during the development of "Theater Square". To amend the general plan to allow five story buildings downtown is a major step backward. The citizens of Orinda didn't want large multistory buildings at that time and we don't want multistory buildings now. We have one of the most pleasant semi-rural towns in the U.S.

Vote ONLY for Scott Zeller. Do not cast votes for those running for election who want to change Orinda. Do not cast your vote for those who won't tell us what they think. Cast one vote only, for Scott Zeller.

Save Orinda!

Kent Hagen
Orinda

Editor:
Mayor Tom McCormick has worked diligently these past four years to earn our support for another term on the Orinda City Council. Tom will continue to work for our community and keep Orinda a wonderful place to live and thrive.

Tom passionately believes that government should be open and responsive to its citizens. He spent endless hours revamping the entire planning process and wouldn't accept anything less than a complete change--one that is kinder, simpler, more understandable, and dramatically more user-friendly. He was the driving force and deserves full credit for "making it happen." He never opted for the easy way out by just making improvements around the margins. During the numerous public hearings, Tom showed us all what he is best known for...common sense. He always asked, "Is this the best we can do to make the planning process simpler, faster, fairer, and more transparent?" He pushed the process forward until he accomplished these worthy goals, and for that and so much more, we owe Tom our acknowledgment of a job well done. I know that he will take this same common sense, can-do attitude into the next four year term which is why I am asking you to vote for Tom McCormick.

But Tom is by no means a one trick pony. Not only has he challenged the City staff to be more responsive to the needs of Orinda residents, but he has been fiscally conservative, implementing City employee furloughs in order to keep our budget in balance and re-organizing the Administrative and Financial Services departments which resulted in saving some \$75,000 of taxpayer money. Tom, as part of a more open and inclusive style of government, has expanded the Mayor's Liaison meetings to reach out to more community groups. He has also helped foster the superb Art in Public Places program in a continuing effort to improve all facets of life in Orinda. Lastly, Mr. McCormick is a strong supporter of environmental programs to make Orinda a greener city and to help residents embrace more sustainable living options.

In short, Tom is working hard for the betterment of our community. He is open, sensible, hard-working, and willing to deal with issues important to all of us in Orinda. Please return Tom to Office...he has earned our support.

Richard Westin
Orinda