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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**

Dollar Tree

Editor:
Last Monday, I attended the town planning commission's meeting discussing Dollar Tree's proposal to open a store in the Rheem Shopping Center. My general impression was that the planning commissioner, Lori Salamack, was going out of her way to appease Dollar Tree (and its landlord, Kimco). The meeting concluded with a conditional approval of Dollar Tree's application — despite overwhelming dissent from the community.
Moraga citizens primarily are concerned that Dollar Tree will: 1) diminish the value of these homes, and 2) create a health hazard for its children and residents. These concerns are serious. They are valid. They are well supported. The overwhelming majority of attendees at Monday's meeting believe that opening a Dollar Tree will harm the value of their homes. One of the commissioners explained that the town would take protective measures and enact special provisions to make sure that the "unsightly" retailer adhere to the town's standards of quality. That the commission has to enact special restrictions to ensure that the Dollar Tree does not conform to its usual "eyesore" standards makes it clear that there is a perception problem for this retailer. Perception matters in real estate — and Dollar Tree is perceived as a low-end, dump of a retailer. Statistics confirm that Dollar Tree is not a store associated with affluent communities. In fact, Moraga median home values are in the very top percentile of the 287 Dollar Tree locations in California. During the meeting, a commissioner testified that there is no evidence that Dollar Tree would harm Moraga home values—however, that commissioner has not bothered to look at the evidence. The estimated paltry sum of \$13,000 in tax revenues that Dollar Tree would contribute to the town coffers would not offset the economic harm and negative perception associated with this store.
Second, a well-prepared resident presented a lengthy list of violations committed by Dollar Tree. There is an indisputable history of neglect by Dollar Tree. Dollar Tree has sold poisonous toys to children; Dollar Tree has recalled hundreds of thousands of cadmium based jewelry toys; Dollar Tree has violated health codes; and Dollar Tree will continue its pattern of seeking profit at the expense of the public. Dollar Tree consistently ranks at the bottom of consumer protection agency rankings and has a disgraceful history of indifference to its customers.
One of the few voices of support for Dollar Tree came from Rheem's landlord, Kimco. This is the landlord that has jacked up rent on two successful locally owned retailers—Lord's Ice Cream and Lori's Swim Shop—forcing them to move to Safeway's shopping center. I fail to see why Kimco's opinion should have any weight when it has demonstrated that it is focused on its own profits and not interested in furthering the interests of the community. It is in everybody's interest to support our local businesses and shop in Moraga's establishments as much as possible. The local, home-grown stores who know my family and children are an important part of the neighborhood, of the fabric of Moraga. We don't need a sub-par national chain — with a long history of product recalls — interfering with what we have here.

Sincerely,
Jonathan Levy
Moraga

Editor:
So, the recent influx of discount retailers is trying to make a further stakehold in our town of Moraga. The holy grail tax of revenues from these retailers that we are opening our empty storefronts to are not to suit our own needs, but are from commuters from surrounding areas, such as Oakland. So much for minimizing traffic and taking care of our own needs, eh? On the daily needs front, Safeway has us, and we must go out of town to seek alternatives, ourselves. Our beloved Longs has gone glittery and gaudy on the outside, without any concern of what we seek for on the inside. What are we Moragans doing about it? What is the Town Council doing about it? Are they enabling the planning commissioners to act and not follow Salamack's/developer's wishes? Is the Planning Commission without teeth to act in the best interest of its citizens? They express concern, but turn their heads in unison, and act as puppets. Is Moraga doing enough to protect its vanishing quality of life and bucolic atmosphere? Gaudy signs, empty storefronts, declining revenues, declining home values, and we want to approve more commercial/high density housing? Where is the logic here? Where is the basic common sense?
We are fooling ourselves, burying our heads in the sand, and letting others control our destiny.
We can't even take care of what we have - try taking a walk along Camino Ricardo or Woodside without encountering trash, broken tvs and recliners, and overgrown 'landscaping' encroaching onto the cracked sidewalks.

No longer proud to be a Moragan,
Ferenc Kovac
Moraga

Editor:
Rheem does not need a Dollar store, what it needs is a decent grocery store that would challenge our Moraga Safeway. Trader Joe's comes to mind, with St Mary's college nearby, it would seem to be a good fit. Anywhere Trader Joe's has opened a store it brings more business.
The only way I can think of pushing for it is to go to their website, click on "About Us" and go to "Contact Trader Joe's", they have a drop down option for "Location Request."

Danièle L. Meilhan
Moraga

MOFD Candidates

Editor:
John Wyro, Director of the Moraga-Orinda Fire District from Division 4, has a demonstrated record of outstanding service since our fire district was formed in 1997. His experience with the fire service began even before the merger, when Orinda was an underserved unit of Con Fire.

As a member of the Board of Directors, he has been very well aware of the fiscal issues facing the fire district and our community. He has been at the forefront of the efforts to reform the pension system. In the face of falling tax revenues, he and the board have succeeded in retaining a balanced budget while maintaining full fire and medical services for our community.
I have had the dubious opportunity to experience emergency medical services both before and since the formation of MOFD, and I can state unequivocally that there is no comparison. Orinda was able to acquire paramedics trained and equipped to provide advanced life support, as well as modern ambulances and fire engines, only after the separation from Con Fire and merger with Moraga.
John Wyro played a large part in MOFD's development and its outstanding reputation today. When re-elected, he will serve as next year's president of the MOFD Board of Directors. He has that combination of experience, fine judgment and the ability to get things done that mark the ideal candidate for that position, and I urge the voters of Division 4 to re-elect him.

Gene Gottfried, M.D.
Orinda

Editor:
I support Bob Jungbluth for Moraga-Orinda Fire District Director. MOFD needs change and it needs a director who will strongly represent Orinda and its tax payers' interests. Orinda pays 65% of MOFD's tax revenue but only holds 2 of the board's 5 seats.
Does this make a difference? Yes it does. Right now Orinda is subsidizing Moraga with about \$1 million in the funding of MOFD. This has been going on since the district was formed. The MOFD board has contended that this was equitable because firefighters from Moraga serve Orinda with no reciprocal service. Recent analysis of district operations has determined that this is not so.
Orinda is served by 11 of the district's 19 firefighters. For this it should be paying 58% of the district's \$17.9 million of property tax revenue, or \$10.4 million. Instead it is paying \$11.5 million. Orinda is subsidizing Moraga by over \$1 million this year; it has been subsidizing Moraga since the inception of MOFD; and it is projected to continue to subsidize it by ever increasing amounts into the foreseeable future. This subsidy could triple by the time Wilder is fully built.
I believe that Bob Jungbluth will stand up for Orinda's rights which John Wyro has neglected to do for 13 years. Bob will insist that the inequity question be answered and will press for an equitable solution of the problem working with MOFD, the City of Orinda and the Town of Moraga.
We cannot afford NOT to elect Bob Jungbluth.

Steve Cohn
Orinda

Moraga Candidates

Dear Editor,
Dave Trotter is committed to Moraga and I encourage Moraga residents to re-elect him to another term on the Town Council. He has an excellent, 20-year record of service to our Town as a member and Chair of the Planning Commission, a director of the Moraga Historical Society and Moraga Park and Recreation Foundation, as a coach for youth sports teams, and for the past four years as a member of the Town Council and as the Town's mayor in 2009. I work with Dave on the Save Mount Diablo board of directors. He is committed to the preservation of open space and is an articulate and thoughtful advocate for it. He will uphold the Moraga Open Space Ordinance and work to protect other important open space and ridgeline areas in accordance with the Town's General Plan. Moraga needs councilmembers who not only run on a platform of protecting the Town's semi-rural character, but then vote to protect and preserve these values. Dave has consistently done this.
As our Mayor and as a former Chair of the Planning Commission, he has shown the ability to encourage full and open discussion of controversial issues, respecting the viewpoints of all speakers. Through work on the Save Mount Diablo Board of Directors, I have observed his ability to think independently and reason his way through difficult problems. These are important qualities which will continue to serve the Town well on the Council. Please vote to re-elect Dave Trotter to the Moraga Town Council on November 2.

Malcolm Sproul
Moraga

Orinda Candidates

Editor:
I have had the privilege of working with Sue Severson on a regular basis often as co-chairs of philanthropic events. Sue Severson is a woman of uncommon foresight, fortitude, energy, passion who always, always, puts the well-being of our community first. We are truly fortunate to have such a talented and compassionate person willing to represent us as a member of the city council for another term.
Sue deserves to be re-elected for all that she has done to benefit Orinda in her numerous positions of leadership: as our mayor, our school board rep, president of Miramonte Parent's Club, and her endless volunteering. If you were to spend a week following Sue around observing all she does for our city you would be overwhelmed at the amount time she dedicates to our community and the passion and professionalism with which she goes about making a difference. For years, Sue and her family have donated their time and money in a magnanimous and anonymous manner to many worthwhile local organizations, all because they believe it is the just thing to do. In short, Sue has done so much for us and will continue to be there for us well into the future, it is now, our turn to reward her by doing something for her; please join me in helping to re-elect Sue Severson to the Orinda City Council.

Thanks,
Richard Westin
Orinda

Editor:
For the last 6 years, I have had the pleasure of working with Dean Orr, Chair of the Orinda Planning Commission. I write to ask Orinda voters to join me in voting for Dean Orr for Orinda City Council.
Dean is smart, does his homework, and works really hard to listen to all citizens and to build consensus. His background as a community volunteer, and as a designer of both outdoor and indoor living and communal spaces, will serve Orinda well as we work together as a community to create a vision of Orinda, and our downtown, that will serve our residents well today and into the future.
Dean supports the need to work collaboratively with the other local agencies that serve our small city—the fire district and the utility districts—in order to keep our tax dollars and emergency services local and to maximize infrastructure improvements. As the father of two small children, Dean works hard to support our recreational opportunities and our local schools—and he is one candidate who has been endorsed by key school leaders, and most former Mayors.
In this election we have unfortunately seen negative campaigning in statewide races; here in Orinda, it is important to keep our focus on what unites our community, rather than what could divide us. Dean seeks no preconceived outcome, but does have the consensus-building leadership skills to bring us together and to help our city build a positive future! Please join me in voting for Dean Orr on November 2nd.

Victoria Smith
Orinda

Editor:
I had the great privilege of meeting Sue Severson while serving as President of Orinda Arts Council (2002-03) and was struck immediately by her depth of character, sincerity, poise, and willingness to hear every voice and concern. Sue balances her volunteerism between civic duties, work in the schools, support for the arts, and family life. Her generosity of spirit and humanity are insurmountable. Our community has been the lucky recipient of her positive presence, practical solutions, and experience. She understands and believes fiscal responsibility as priority and supports ongoing respectful communication between our community members and leaders. Sue Severson is a leader of utmost integrity who richly deserves to be re-elected for Orinda City Council.
Please join me in supporting Sue Severson for Orinda City Council.

Elena Pang
Orinda

Editor:
The November Orinda City Council election is very important. None of the three incumbents: McCormick, Severson or Worth support a vote by the citizens on having our own fire district (the only way we will get road repair funds) or on keeping Orinda's downtown semi-rural. Let the citizens vote. Incumbent Amy Worth is trying to buy the election with expensive mailings. The incumbents have no interest in restricting the Moraga Adobe development to protect Orinda from a fire storm such as the Great Oakland Fire. Scott Zeller is running for the City Council. He is in favor of retaining Orinda's semi-rural character and opposes raising the downtown height to 55 feet (80 feet to some roofs). He is in favor of letting the citizens vote on major issues such as downtown remodeling and Orinda forming its own fire department. He is in favor of protecting Orinda's history and Orinda's safety in the Moraga Adobe development.
I recommend that you vote ONLY for Scott Zeller in the election. If you feel you must vote for two candidates include Dean Orr.

Clyde Vaughn
Orinda

Editor:
Experience, dedication and clear vision; these are the traits that Sarah Butler offers and why we support her for the Orinda Union School District Board of Trustees. Sarah has volunteered extensively over the last 12 years at the elementary and middle school level, adding her insight and positive attitude to her positions as the Co-chair of the Las Trampas Creek PTA Legislative Council and on Glorietta and OIS Site Councils. Her personal goals are those needed to keep OUSD on track during the current financial challenges: improving communication and collaboration between parents, schools, district and community; fiscal responsibility, continuing strategic improvement; and attracting and retaining quality teachers. Sarah is a conscientious straight talker who can work on a committee in a constructive manner. She has a unique ability to analyze details while being mindful of the ultimate objective to keep excellence in education alive in Orinda's schools. She makes it her purpose to know all the money facts and instructional programs of Orinda's schools. As a leader on the Legislative team for Orinda schools, Sarah has extensive knowledge of the workings of the school budget situation in Sacramento. She has knowledge, vision and passion to lead OUSD through the financial impacts of the budget crisis on California's schools. Please join us in voting for Sarah Butler on November 2nd, 2010.

Robin Bradley and Vee Hoff
Orinda

Editor:
I have known Julie Rossiter in a variety of capacities for more than five years. She has been associated with my daughters' swimming teams and schools. In addition, she has been instrumental in solving school issues. She worked extremely hard on the passage of Measure A, volunteered with the Del Rey Annual Fund Committee, and is currently the Del Rey legislative representative to the Las Trampas Creek Council.
Julie is organized, efficient, extremely competent (did I mention she has a law degree), and has an excellent rapport with all of the people she has worked with. Her communication skills, both verbal and written, are excellent. Her best asset may be her ability to cross the divide, and work with those with differing opinions to come to an amicable solution that will benefit the whole rather than the extreme.
In summary, I highly recommend Julie for the position of Orinda School Board trustee. She will prove to be a valuable asset to the Orinda students, teachers, and administrators.

Respectfully submitted,
Randy DeVecchi
Orinda

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