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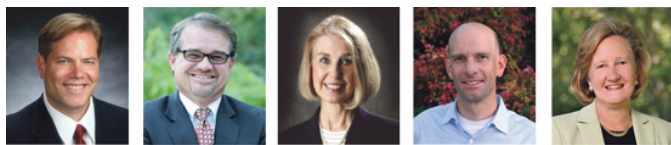
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Orinda's City Council Candidate Forum

By Andrea A. Firth

About 150 residents filled the Library Auditorium to hear from the five candidates running for three seats on the City Council. Here's a snapshot of what the three incumbents, Amy Worth, Sue Severson, and Tom McCormick and the two challengers, Scott Zeller and Dean Orr had to say during the two-hour event. Go to www.lamorindaweekly.com for complete coverage of the candidate forum.



Amy Worth (Incumbent)

Amy Worth, who is completing her third term on the City Council, often shared a historical perspective on the issues and highlighted her experience as the Contra Costa County representative to the Metropolitan Transportation Commission. She stressed that Orinda's plans for downtown must be tailor-made and representative of a collective vision, and she supported the senior affordable housing project proposed for the old library site. Worth stated that it is probably not a good time to pursue a tax measure to fund road repairs. She wants to build on the synergies of Orinda's existing businesses and not try to be Walnut Creek.

Photos provided

Dean Orr

Having served 5 1/2 years on the Planning Commission, Dean Orr displayed a depth of knowledge regarding local development issues. He emphasized the need for absolute transparency in the Council decision-making process. Orr feels Orinda will benefit from a variety of housing options and downtown market-rate residential units will serve groups other than seniors. Regarding the affordable senior housing development, Orr said, "I believe that is a project that we will all be proud of." He proposed exploring alternate ways of packaging and bidding roadworks projects to reduce costs and the need to more actively pursue small businesses that meet residents' needs.

Sue Severson (Incumbent)

Completing her first term on the Council, Sue Severson espoused a roll-up-your-sleeves attitude with a community built on collaboration, consensus, and inclusiveness. "My approach [is] one of respect for people, open communication...and fiscal prudence."

Severson supported some housing in downtown stressing Orinda's obligation to meet state housing requirements. She suggested additional community workshops to look for solutions to pay for Orinda's crumbling infrastructure. Severson wants to change Orinda's anti-development reputation. She does not support dissolution of the Moraga Orinda Fire District (MOFD), but she hopes the MOFD will address the issue of low-pressure fire flow.

Tom McCormick (Incumbent)

Mayor Tom McCormick, who is finishing his first term, emphasized his work on the audit committee, his efforts to revise the budget process, and the continued need for fiscal responsibility. McCormick stated the creation of housing units in downtown is an important option for older residents. He described the zoning changes in Theater Square and the recommendations of the Planning Process Review Task Force (PPRTF) report as changes that will help support businesses in Orinda. McCormick does not support dissolution of the MOFD. He said, "I do think there are some issues of fiscal responsibility that the MOFD should be looking at."

Scott Zeller, M.D.

A newcomer to Orinda's civic environs, Scott Zeller stated that as a physician he oversees a larger budget and staff than Orinda's and that he regularly interacts with police and fire service agencies. "I love the way Orinda is," said Zeller, and he questioned why building height should go beyond the current 35-foot limit. To address Orinda's infrastructure needs, Zeller mentioned benefit assessment districts and suggested that the City solicit more ideas from the community. He does not support dissolving the MOFD, but he said he has spoken to many residents about the issue, and he questioned whether fire service could be delivered in another way.

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