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Letters to the Editor

Editor:

It did not surprise me that the Burton Valley remodel was denied although it met all zoning requirements of the City of Lafayette.

When our family moved into the Lafayette public school district nearly 14 years ago we had one requirement, we would not buy a house in the city limits of Lafayette, Moraga, or Orinda. Both my wife and I had lived in Contra Costa County our entire life and knew the meat grinder these three cities put homeowners through when any type of construction is involved.

We found it idiotic to pay big money for a house and let various city employees, commissions and neighbors determine what we could do on our property even if we met all the legal requirements. At the time most of our friends thought we were insane but have come to the realization that our thoughts were not "extreme" but right on the money. Over the last 13 years we had a friend on a level lot on Springhill Road come under the ridgeline ordinance when they tried to expand the rear wall of a ranch style house. A second family went through hearings, revisions and hostility by City employees when they tried to build a 5,500s/f house on over two acres on Silver Springs. In this case I believe most of the opposition came from envy. A third case on Camelia Lane involved a huge dispute over the protection of a "shrub" or "heritage tree", depending on your perspective.

In the 13 years we have lived in unincorporated Lafayette we have had one addition, redesigned the front of the house, along with kitchen and bath remodels. All 4 permits were obtained the same day we applied with Contra Costa County. It was simple, if we met the zoning and engineering rules, they issued a permit. That's the reason for written requirements.

I would encourage homeowners to push back hard when cities try to deny you the right to improve your property based on subjective claims when all legal requirements are met. It's time to eliminate arguments such as "it's out of character", "the roof is too tall", "the roof is too short", "it's a McMansion", "it's 10 pounds of house on 5 pounds of lot". It's the homeowner who is putting the time and money into the renovation, not the neighbors or city employees or commission. If a house meets all the legal requirements it should be approved, period.

It's ironic that with all the oversight, Lafayette has a manufactured house at the main exit from Highway 24 when heading west. If that type of house is allowed how could anything be denied.

Sincerely,

Mickey McGoldrick

Unincorporated Lafayette

Editor:

This morning at 1:35 am my automobile was taken by thieves from my driveway in Orinda.

My wife heard the sound of a car idling outside, my car engine turning over, and tires screeching. She woke me up and went outside to confirm that my pickup was gone.

I called 911 immediately and after giving my information and hanging up, I noticed cars travelling at a high speed coming up the street. I ran outside and saw my pickup, followed by a 2-door automobile speed by, headed towards the nearby access road to the freeway.

I grabbed my wife's keys and followed in the direction I guessed the culprits would go. Soon I came upon flashing lights from four police cars driving next to my vehicle travelling west on Highway 24. The group of cars slowed and the police apprehended the thieves near the Wilder Road exit, as I pulled in behind.

Of special note was the quick action of the K-9 unit. The Orinda police dog (Chef) was out in a flash, deterring the suspects from trying to escape by foot.

There were two Orinda police cars at the scene, one the K-9 unit, one from Lafayette, and a Highway Patrol vehicle. It must have been less than 4 minutes from the time I called 911 that the local on-duty officers had the area cordoned off and able to recognize, pursue and recover my vehicle. It is fortunate that the car thieves decided to take a route away from the freeway initially, but the entire drama unfolded in a very few minutes.

I wish to take note of the efficiency and professionalism displayed by the officers given the duty to protect our community.

Officer Gogo of the Orinda Police Department took my report. This incident occurred starting at approximately 1:30 am Wednesday, November 3, 2010.

My heartfelt gratitude goes to the dispatcher and all those involved in the recovery of my car. If the thieves had made away with it, I question if I would have ever seen it again, or in any condition to keep.

Relieved and Grateful,

Paul B. Bogle

Orinda

Editor:

The cost of your gardener could at least double if the Orinda City Council approves a ban on the use of leaf blowers by gardeners. The Council will consider a ban on leaf blowers on Tuesday night, November 16, and vote on it. If you don't want your gardener's bill to double, attend this meeting and speak and say "No" to any leaf blower ban. The

meeting is in the Orinda Library auditorium and begins at 7 p.m. Pick up a yellow speaker's slip at the back of the auditorium, fill it out and deposit it in a box next to the desk and microphone at the front of the auditorium.

The selfish folly of the proposed leaf blower ban is shown by the complaint of one of the leaf blower ban proponents that she can't have outdoor parties on Saturday because her four neighbors use leaf blowers. Why not have the parties on Sunday? Why should her neighbors double their gardener bills to suit her convenience?

Be there on November 16 and speak. Check with the City Clerk to be sure leaf blowers are still on the Council's November 16 agenda.

Clyde Vaughn
Orinda

Editor:

Orinda taxpayers do subsidize Moraga's MOFD costs.

I am frustrated that Ellen Dale would tell Orinda taxpayers (letter 10/27/2010) that there is proof that they do not subsidize Moraga in the funding of MOFD. She is very wrong. She has willingly accepted an invalid MOFD analysis based on simplistic assumptions rather than facts.

The facts are: Data from the County Controller's office shows that Orinda taxpayers pay \$11,470,000 annually in property taxes to MOFD while Moraga pays \$6,249,000. This translates to Orinda taxpayers paying \$1,040,000 per firefighter in the Orinda stations (11), while Moraga taxpayers only pay \$780,000 per firefighter in Moraga stations (8). Therefore, Orinda taxpayers are paying over 15% of Moraga's emergency services costs; subsidizing Moraga taxpayers by \$1,200,000 in this year alone.

The allegation that Orinda taxpayers SHOULD pay part of Moraga's costs because they are served by Moraga-based firefighters is a fabrication created by MOFD officials and accepted blindly by Mrs. Dale. A detailed examination of all 5,000 equipment operations performed by MOFD in 2009 determined that (a) out of 2,000 ambulance operations, Orinda was recipient of only 18 operations in excess of its 50% fair share and (b) Orinda-based fire units and Moraga-based fire units provided exactly the same number of mutual aid operations to each other and to outside the MOFD service area.

Orinda receives no more service from Moraga than it gives back and its taxpayers should not be liable now, nor in the future, for any of Moraga's emergency services costs. Further, if this inequity is not addressed, the annual subsidy is projected to grow to as much as \$3,000,000 ANNUALLY within the decade. This is money Orinda taxpayers cannot afford to give away.

Steve Cohn
Orinda

Editor:

I want to personally thank Bekki Van Voorhis-Gilbert for running for OUSD board and for bringing many important issues into the public realm. I also applaud her courage before and during the race itself. Knowing before she declared her candidacy that there would be many individuals and groups opposed to her election, Bekki displayed great poise as the only candidate publicly attacked, falsely accused, and enduring multiple acts of vandalism. I have made this a lesson in adversity and bravery for my children.

Orinda parents by the hundreds have made a clear statement in this election: we are the primary stakeholders for our children's education, and the OUSD board is accountable for its actions. I hope she will find our support a continuing source of strength. Bekki, please continue your fine work to move the district towards greater transparency, fiscal responsibility, and responsiveness to parents and teachers for the benefit of our children.

Warmest regards,

Robert Lowe
Orinda

Editor:

I thank the citizens of Lafayette for entrusting me with another term on the City Council. I am humbled by the broad show of support I received. During the past few months, I walked through many neighborhoods meeting old acquaintances and new residents. All the people I met share a fondness for Lafayette as a special community. I do too, and will work to improve Lafayette during the next four years.

I thank the many volunteers who sent letters on my behalf to their friends and neighbors, hosted events, walked with me, placed signs on their lawns and made generous contributions. Their efforts made my candidacy successful. Being an effective council member requires having contact with citizens. I hope that each of you takes time to communicate with the City Council regarding what you do and do not like about Lafayette, as well as your opinions regarding the issues before us. That information helps us make better decisions.

I appreciate the voters' decision and will work to earn your continued support.

Don Tatzin
Lafayette

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