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Mayor Victoria Smith Looks Forward to 2011

By Andrea A. Firth



Photo Ohlen Alexander

As she enters her seventh year on the Orinda City Council, Victoria Smith will serve as Mayor of the City (her second time in the post) throughout 2011. In this article, Smith provides her outlook on some of the key issues facing Orinda over the next year.

When starting your first term as Mayor (in January 2008), you identified fixing Orinda's crumbling roads as the City's primary focus. No immediate solution has been forthcoming. What next?

I worked hard, along with many, many others, to pass two road bond measures; unfortunately, although the majority of Orindans voted for them, we were unable to achieve a 66% vote. Ultimately, I think we will need to turn to a tax measure to come up with the \$100 million dollars that we need to rebuild our roads; whether the time is ripe for that in the current economy, or whether we need to wait for our citizens to feel more economically robust, is an open question. In the meantime, we continue to pursue federal and state grants, and to improve our coordination with the utility companies in order to maximize the dollars available to all the agencies that work in our roads to make more road repairs.

Given the condition of the State's economy, do you feel this will negatively impact the City's financial picture over the next year or longer?

We have done a good and prudent job at the City in cutting costs and expenditures in accordance with our flat revenue over the last two years. Although we had furloughs last year, we were able to avoid them in the current fiscal year. What we can't control is the fact that the State may be motivated to look for all revenues, which it will try to appropriate from the local governments; if that occurs, then services in Orinda will be reduced.

Orinda shares fire service with Moraga through the Moraga-Orinda Fire District (MOFD). What do you feel is the best way for Orinda to maintain fire service?

I support the local fire and emergency services provided by the MOFD. In talking with citizens, I have heard over and over that the reasons that Orinda joined with Moraga several years ago to form the MOFD are still valid and are key values for Orindans; paramedics on each truck and local ambulance service. Those who have called for Orinda to break away from the MOFD and contract with the Contra Costa Fire District have ignored that fact that ConFire is in serious financial difficulty, is now closing a Walnut Creek fire station 50% of the time, and is talking about closing a Lafayette fire station. We are fortunate to have local control over our own fire tax dollars and services, and I encourage all concerned citizens to take their ideas for cost-effectiveness and service improvement to MOFD Board meetings and to work with their locally elected fire board officials and staff to review these issues.

In 2008, the downtown revitalization initiative was focused on keeping sales tax dollars in Orinda. Given the results of a the recent sales tax leakage study which found 2/3 of Orinda's retail dollars are spent outside of the City and the commercial vacancy rate is low, what do you feel is or should be the focus for revitalizing downtown?

All Orindans would like to see additional shopping and dining opportunities in Orinda. For me, the focus is not on a tremendous increase in sales tax revenue-although we would certainly like to see an increase-but on planning for a downtown that will provide services and businesses that our citizens would like to patronize.

Residents' views are divided regarding the City task force's recommendation to allow increasing the building height in parts of Orinda's downtown districts above the current 35-foot limit. How do you feel about an increased building height up to 55 feet?

I attended both of the Downtown Planning Workshops that were facilitated in October and December, and was impressed by the passion and creativity expressed by the many, many residents who participated. I look forward to more outreach to the community over the coming months and to hearing the results of the workshops at an upcoming council meeting. I want to see the community have a continuing dialogue and reach a collective vision for

what the downtown has the potential to become over the coming years.

The affordable senior housing development proposed for the old library site on Irwin Way is moving forward slowly. Do you feel this a positive development for the city?

The senior housing project at the old library site has been in the planning stages for the last decade, and I believe that it is a great project for that site. It's important to understand that about half of our annual paving budget is money that we receive only if we are working to be in compliance with the housing requirement that the State imposes, so our road repair money is directly contingent upon building affordable housing. Beyond that, I think it is simply the right thing to do, to plan for an accessible senior housing project when we know that there are older Orindans, as well as Orinda families with older relatives who would like to move to Orinda, but who can't live on their own in a single-family residence any longer.

Are you looking forward to serving as Mayor again?

We are so fortunate to live in Orinda, in such a beautiful, safe and neighborly community. I am looking forward to the opportunity this year to give back to the community, which has given so much to me and to my husband and sons. I want Orinda to preserve the great things about Orinda that drew us all here, and at the same time to make thoughtful improvements so that we will always continue to be proud of this East Bay jewel that we live in.

Smith's Vital Statistics

- Resident of Orinda for 22 years
- Husband, Wick, attended Miramonte High School (Class of '73) as did sons Will ('03) and Daniel ('07)
- Has an undergraduate degree from Cal and JD from Hastings Law in San Francisco
- Registered Assistant Scoutmaster, Boy Scout Troop 237
- Manages a real estate law practice based in Orinda
- Served two years on the Planning Commission
- Currently serving her second term on the City Council and second time as Mayor

Some of her favorite things about Orinda: "The Farmer's Market, the Library, the 4th of July Parade, the December Chamber of Commerce/Hospice Tree Lighting event, our 'green' city hall, having our own bookstores in town, each Eagle Court and Gold Award Ceremony marking the achievements of our teenagers, and the interesting variety of restaurants that we have in town."

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