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Letters to the Editor

Editor:

Is a financial and ecological debacle possible in Orinda? The answer is yes because Orinda is not showing proper leadership in the area of supplying housing for low-income senior citizens.

Current California law mandates that California cities build a certain number of apartments for low-income senior citizens. Orinda has decided to use land at 2 Irwin Way (across the street from the Safeway) to build about 70 apartments -- possibly high-rise apartments -- for low-income seniors.

Orinda's plan seems well-intentioned. However, what would happen if few or no senior citizens wanted the planned apartments?

For years, I have been suggesting that Orinda oppose the current law that requires California cities to build housing for low-income seniors. I favor a more efficient process: giving these seniors vouchers to be used at an apartment of choice.

Unfortunately, the Orinda City Council does not have the will to oppose current state housing law that applies to low-income seniors. Worse, Orinda plans to hire an organization called Eden Housing, located in Hayward, to build the Irwin Way apartments.

Eden appears to be in shaky financial condition. I have obtained copies of Eden's 2008 and 2009 federal income tax returns. Between 2008 and 2009, Eden's investment income dropped 90 percent, profit decreased 73 percent, and income fell 50 percent.

In November 2010, I wrote Janet Keeter, Orinda's city manager, asking her if she had copies of Eden's tax returns. In a January 10 letter to me, Ms. Keeter, stated: "The City of Orinda does not have copies of Eden's tax returns." Unless Orinda has evidence that Eden Housing will not go broke in the midst of building the Irwin Way project, Orinda should avoid doing business with Eden.

Moreover, if Orinda -- perhaps in conjunction with other cities -- had worked to create a voucher program, there would be no need for Orinda to get involved with a presumably financially unstable organization like Eden.

Orinda, then, might be able to concentrate on one of its main problems: fixing the city's horrible roads.

Richard S. Colman

Orinda

Editor:

I read in the press that fire stations are going to be shut down in other cities because there is not enough money to keep them open, but then I read that Orinda taxpayers are paying \$11 million in taxes to MOFD. Isn't that the same size as the entire Orinda budget? Does it really cost that much to run a fire department?

One letter writer says Moraga only pays 3/4 of what we pay per fire fighter. Is there a reason for this? If we only paid 3/4 of \$11 million that would be a lot of extra money for things we don't have.

At the same time, while the city is doing a great job fixing our big roads, our little roads keep getting worse and worse and the Mayor says this is because we won't vote in a new tax. Are we handing out money with one hand but begging with the other? Is anyone asking these questions?

I see letter writers suggesting that we have a citizen task force to review these questions. We certainly have a lot of smart people in this town who could probably figure it out. Why not give them a try? What can it hurt?

Bill Criswell

Orinda

Editor:

After all the meetings and letters concerning the equity balance of the MOFD, it appears we have yet to achieve any unbiased, complete report. Clearly Moraga and the MOFD believe their best interests are served by maintaining the status quo. Both Moraga Councilman Metcalfe and the MOFD Directors expressed at the September Tri-Agency meeting that "This is Orinda's problem".

So what are the facts? Is Orinda really paying \$1 million per fire fighter, but Moraga only \$750,000 per fighter? Why, if Orinda indeed pays more, which does not seem reasonable, is the fire service to Sleepy Hollow and Orinda Downs way below acceptable standards? If the water pressure of our hydrants is also substandard, why after all these years has the MOFD failed to even start addressing the problem? Has there ever been any serious effort to work with EBMUD to do so?

Approximately a year ago, the Orinda City Council conducted a survey to determine support for a bond to raise money for road repairs. Forty percent (40%) indicated a wait-and-see stance until the MOFD report was completed. Apparently it has been impossible to garner any balanced perspective of the facts since Moraga and the MOFD strive only to protect their self-interests. Thus, perhaps it is time, as expressed in recent letters, for a proposed Orinda Citizens Committee to investigate all of these claims to be sure our self-interests are protected. Much money is at stake, and in the meantime, our roads continue to deteriorate and the quality of our fire protection remains questionable.

Bob and Joan Daoro

Al Sisto

Orinda

Editor:

The City of Lafayette has money designated for new offices in this years budget.. I wonder when they are going to spring the news to the public? I hear they want to put Road Tax #4 on the ballot soon. They must be waiting until after that election.

They have already spent \$2,264,950 for land for a parking lot across the street. They are planning to spend another \$53,657 on it. There's no mention of the cost for the traffic light that will be needed for pedestrians to cross Moraga Road.

The projected cost to purchase and convert the old library building into city offices is \$4,081,664. Add that to the parking lot expense and the bill is \$6,400,271.

Someone might squawk if they knew about it. Someone might suggest finding an office building that doesn't need a \$2,000,000+ overhaul.

Having an office with adequate parking on the same side of the street would make sense. But Lafayette is the city of bad ideas. You will be told about their plan, after they sign the contract.

(P. S. The numbers are on pages 112, 113, & 136 of the City of Lafayette Final Budget & Workplan FY 2010-11.)

Bruce R. Peterson

Lafayette

Editor:

Moraga residents are not going to like what they see when grading starts on the Rancho Laguna development. Town Council members who voted for the project may say what they like about "protecting" the ridge by trying to make the houses "invisible" from Rheem. But to so they are letting the developer carve off the ridge itself and build a road right on top. The road cuts in the ridge will reach 30 feet - that's the height of a three-story building, and good enough for a first down in the Super Bowl. The next time you drive along Rheem past the Rancho Laguna site, look up and imagine a 30-foot slice off the top with cars driving along it. Not nice. And not what most people want for the Town.

Residents put a General Plan in place to control such destructive development practices. How can we make developers follow the rules when Council members cut them deals like this? If the Town Council and the Planning Commission continue to sell out the provisions of the General Plan every time they want to fix a road, can we trust them with the future of Moraga?

Sincerely,

Dan Smith

Moraga

Editor:

The 2-1 vote by the Moraga Town Council last month to approve the ridge-ruining Rancho Laguna project was nothing less than a page out of Alice in Wonderland. I'm referring to the insistence by Councilmember Howard Harpham and Mayor Karen Mendonca that the Town's General Plan admonition to "protect ridgelines from development" didn't really mean that at all; they both agreed "protect" didn't mean "prohibit." It was classic Lewis Carroll:

"When I use a word," Humpty Dumpty said, in a rather a scornful tone, "it means just what I choose it to mean- neither more nor less."

"The question is," said Alice, "whether you can make words mean so many different things."

"The question is," said Humpty Dumpty, "which is to be master-that's all."

Yes, well, I wasn't surprised that Harpham bent that part of the General Plan. In 2008 he ran on a pro-development platform and stayed true to his word. Can't say the same for Mendonca, though. A top campaign priority of hers was open space and ridgeline preservation. She argued forcefully for Measure K (which would have protected Rheem Ridge) and was the top vote getter (making her mayor) thanks to the vigorous support of the open space community.

Months ago Councilmember Dave Trotter proposed a compromise that would have moved the offending houses off the ridgeline and still allow for a reasonable project. Inexplicably, Mendonca rejected it and instead sided with the developers. Politically, this vote was an integrity test; she failed it.

In the past I've likened Moraga's physical beauty to an East Bay oasis, but now that Rheem Ridge has been conquered, our remaining unprotected ridgelines will soon come under assault by developers. The only way to stop this is to elect people to the Council who have the backbone to reject this kind of unacceptable development by following both the letter and spirit of our General Plan.

Two years ago I supported Karen Mendonca and urged others to do the same. I won't be doing that again.

Moragans: next election, please remember this Council vote.

A. Richard Immel

Moraga

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