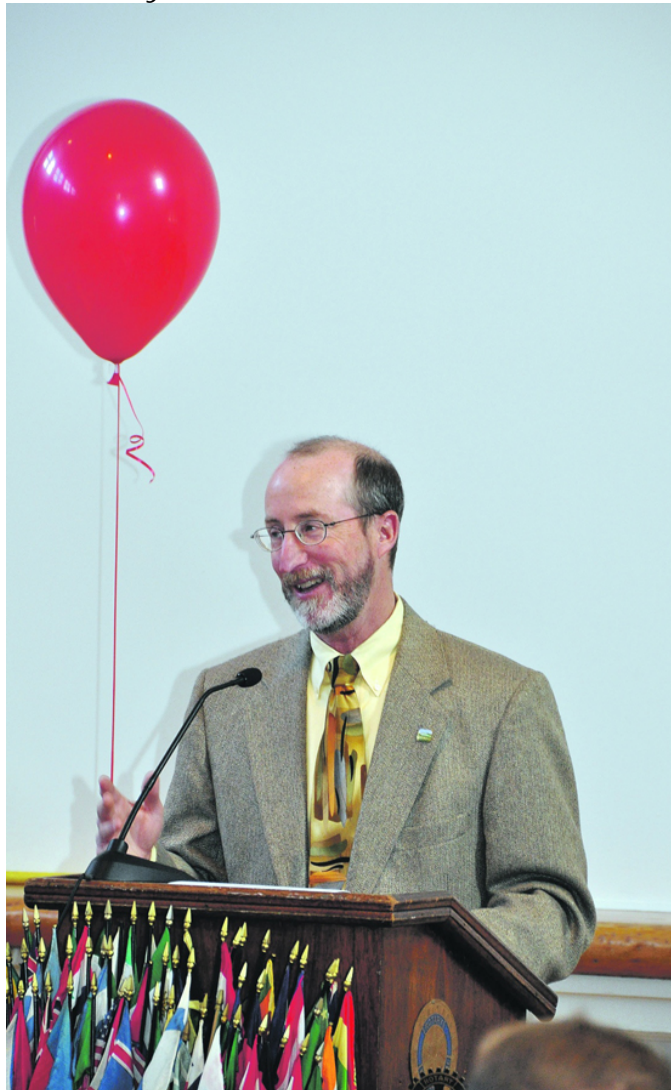


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Assessing the Health of the Community's Heart Orinda Mayor presents State of the City Address

Laurie Snyder



Mayor Steve Glazer Photo Andy Scheck

"There are many ways to examine the health of our town," said Orinda Mayor Steve Glazer in his State of the City address presented March 28 to members of the City's Rotary and Chamber of Commerce.

The health of any town - sprawling or small - is typically measured by assessing the health of its vital organs - the community's economic vitality, the achievements of its students and schools, the level of crime versus residents' sense of safety, the stability of the local government's budget, residents' environmental and social awareness, including charitable endeavors and their support for the protection of civil rights, as well residents' "general friendliness."

Noting that Orinda's "level of community engagement and connection continues to be robust," Glazer pointed to the number of residents active with service, parent, and garden clubs, as well as elementary classrooms that are "teaming with involved and engaged parents" in a town of 17,500 "overseen by five elected volunteers" and "guided by 54 additional volunteer citizens serving on various committees and commissions."

But Glazer also warned that Orinda's current level of peace and tranquility may be shaken over the next few months. In addition to downtown development discussions that may raise the temperature on an already simmering pot of community discontent, two projects "likely to create debate in the coming months" include the J & J Ranch and Lavenida Lane subdivisions.

The Bruzzone family has proposed turning its 12 acres between the J & J Ranch project and the back of Miramonte High School into eight home sites. Orinda's Planning Commission will hold that public hearing April 12.

And possibly as early as June, Commissioners will review proposed development of a 21-acre site near Del Rey Elementary and Miramonte, which is home to the Contra Costa County's oldest adobe building. Built in 1841, the Moraga Adobe, according to Glazer, will "under the proposed subdivision plan ... be restored and used as a club house for residents of the proposed 13-lot subdivision with the

possibility for periodic public access."

Other issues Glazer described as "not so controversial any more" include the Orinda Grove by Pulte - a 14-acre project which will require the relocation of City-owned ball fields while creating 73 small lot homes and new Orinda Union School District administrative offices; Wilder - the largest of all which, when completed, "will contain 245 single family residences, five ball fields, a public art and garden center, public maintenance facility, private swim and fitness facility," and trail network "connecting to the regional open space areas ... and approximately 1,300 acres of open space;" Orinda Oaks - a 12-lot subdivision that will likely be developed on 23 acres atop Stein Way; and the Eden Senior Affordable Housing program.

Pulte, said Glazer, hopes groundbreaking will begin in June - the same month Wilder's playfields are slated to open. Additionally, Wilder's private swim facility and clubhouse are now complete.

Signature Homes' latest plans for Orinda Oaks will likely be approved in mid-2012.

Eden Housing "has obtained [with the exception of building permits and other minor items] all of the approvals from the City of Orinda necessary for the development of 67 senior affordable residences on the former library site," and is awaiting word regarding its request for California tax credit financing.

Glazer also stressed that "road and drain failures continue to plague our town" as he talked finance. "We have reduced staff, frozen positions and required six furlough days for employees this year and may require up to ten ... for next year. We are one of the few cities that does not have a defined benefit pension plan.... Our employees invest their retirement contributions on their own. Our employees also do not have post retirement medical benefits."

Heartening news included Orinda's ranking by the F.B.I. as America's fifth safest city, completion of environmental remediation on the old Mobil station site across from the Library, and a rise in Orinda's sales tax revenues by 5.2 percent as of March 12.

When asked, during the question and answer period, how large a role sales tax actually plays in the City's operations, City Manager Janet Keeter noted that sales taxes comprise roughly 10 percent of Orinda's budget.

Several members of the audience urged Glazer to consider seeking further savings by sharing staff and services with the City of Lafayette and Town of Moraga. When Glazer responded that Council and staff have looked at this and found it unworkable, one audience member commented sotto voce, "They're not going to fire themselves."

Reach the reporter at: laurie@lamorindaweekly.com

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