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Representing Orinda on Regional Issues

By Laurie Snyder

Public service, Orinda Mayor Amy Worth mused recently, is a wonderful way to help the community. The volunteer hours given so freely by so many make a genuinely positive difference for the citizens who live and work here. Observing that she and her fellow Orinda City Council members are also volunteers, she added, "We on the City Council are honored to receive the trust of our community to serve." Council members attend regularly scheduled meetings twice monthly, as well as additional special meetings throughout the year to develop the budget and strategic plans, address legal and public safety matters, and respond to residents' concerns on a diverse range of issues. In addition, council members engage with residents at numerous community events and functions, and also serve as liaisons on their behalf to commissions and committees across the Bay Area.

"As one of 19 cities in Contra Costa County, Orinda is represented on a number of local and regional boards that make decisions on issues as broad as libraries, transportation, garbage and planning," said Worth. "Because many of these issues cross city and county boundaries, over the decades regional agencies such as the Contra Costa Solid Waste Authority, the Association of Bay Area Governments, and the Contra Costa Transportation Authority have been established to enable cities and the county to work together to provide services to our citizens."

And because many key services such as the construction of the Caldecott Tunnel fourth bore, garbage and recycling programs, and the County Connection bus service are provided to residents via these regional agencies, "Council member participation and leadership on the boards of regional agencies ensures that Orinda residents have a strong voice in the decisions that are made," explained Worth.

Worth is also a voting delegate with the Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG). What exactly does a voting delegate do, and why is it important for the citizens of Orinda to have this link with ABAG?

The Association of Bay Area Governments "is a cooperative association of the Bay Area's one hundred and one cities and nine Bay Area counties," explained Worth. Founded half a century ago, "it was established to provide a forum for cities and counties to come together to address issues such as transportation, housing and economic development that spanned beyond city and county boundaries and were of importance to local governments." In addition, "State of California legislation has delegated the responsibility for long range planning in housing (the Regional Housing Needs Allocation) to ABAG," she said.

Voting delegates like Worth are appointed by each city and county to serve on the General Assembly, which votes on the organization's budget, its officers and its organizational priorities. In addition, the Contra Costa Mayors' Conference selects two representatives to serve as its representatives on ABAG's Administrative Committee, which is responsible for carrying out the organization's work as established by the General Assembly.

What regional planning efforts might the Orinda City Council be expected to engage in this year?

Reflecting on several regional planning efforts that are currently underway, Worth cited the review and adoption of the first Bay Area regional plan combining transportation, local land use and housing planning as a key area which will require the council's attention. "The coming months will represent the continuation of a public, two-year process to develop the regional plan which is required under state law." She noted that "Orinda will continue to provide its input on the plan, developed through public City Council meetings," and said that residents will be given additional opportunities this spring to learn about and comment on the plan through public hearings slated to be held in Contra Costa County.

"In addition, a number of Contra Costa efforts are under way such as the development of the County Transportation investment Plan and the Central Contra Costa Solid Waste Authority new franchise agreement and service plan." Orinda's council members provide "an Orinda voice," said Worth, "to ensure that those decisions and the resulting allocation of public resources and tax dollars reflect the priorities of our local community."

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