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Orinda Continues to Flex Muscles Regionally

By Laurie Snyder



Appointed to additional leadership roles, Orinda Mayor Amy Worth and Council Member Victoria Smith help regional governing bodies grasp Lamorinda's perspective on everything from recycling to transportation. Photo Ohlen Alexander

because they benefit not only the region, but improve Orindans' quality of life.

Worth has not always been on the same page with her MTC colleagues; for example, she voted against the purchase of the San Francisco office building that has recently rankled many. "Granted we have to deal with federal and state laws" and "the state mandates that we have," she said when discussing the interactions between the many governing bodies which can impact a city's operations, but the "decision making process is a cooperative process ... there's a lot of discussion that goes on before a decision takes place."

"I'm first and foremost elected by the Orinda voters. They're very important to me," stated Worth.

Her city council colleague, Victoria Smith, is also playing an enhanced role. Elected to serve as the Vice Chair of the Contra Costa County Mayor's Conference (ccmayors.com) in January 2013, she could conceivably be elected Chair in 2014 since the individual chosen must either be the current vice chair or a mayor of one of the conference's member cities.

Cities pay dues and rotate meetings monthly. Delegates discuss matters of county-wide, regional interest - the progress of construction on the Bay Bridge and the Caldecott Tunnel, K-12 education funding, county higher education programs, Delta water diversion, and California's prison realignment which is funneling inmates back to county facilities.

It's important, said Smith, for a town's elected representatives to work together with other cities which have similar missions - "especially when you come from a small city." In addition, "It really gives us an informal venue to check best practices."

One of the most critical things "is that conference members make the appointments to the regional committees," such as MTC and the Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG). "Those regional committees make the kinds of major decisions that affect many areas in significant ways."

Smith and fellow council member Steve Glazer also represent Orinda on the Contra Costa County Solid Waste Authority. And on Feb. 15, she was part of a delegation that met with California Senator Mark DeSaulnier and other legislators. In prior sessions, delegates discussed local impacts of Proposition 13 and cuts to redevelopment funding.

"We are mightier together than we are separately in terms of getting our point across," said Smith.

Not content to be named America's second friendliest city by Forbes Magazine, Orinda's star continues to rise. The Metropolitan Transportation Commission (www.mtc.ca.gov) will likely name Orinda Mayor Amy Worth as its next chair today - Feb. 27. While MTC representatives would not officially confirm by press time, Worth is believed to be the only nominee for the position - a reflection of the respect she has garnered for her work in helping to turn the fourth bore of the Caldecott Tunnel from commuter dream into federal and state budget priority.

Mid-way through her second four-year term with the MTC, Worth explained recently that she is "elected by the mayors of Contra Costa County to represent the county's cities." Because the county is one of the Bay Area's largest, it has two MTC representatives, one appointed by the board of supervisors and one appointed by the Contra Costa County Mayor's Conference. During her MTC tenure, Worth has chaired the FasTrack committee and assessed express lanes and other freeway efficiency issues. In addition, she has served as MTC's Vice Chair for the past two years.

"For me as an Orinda City Council member, it's important that those freeway and transit systems work efficiently," said Worth. "We are an exporter of employees ... a lot of families that are commuting for their jobs." The new fourth bore and BART extensions are vital

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