



Letters to the Editor



Share your thoughts with our community! Opinions in Letters to the Editor are the express views of the writer and not necessarily those of the Lamorinda Weekly. All published letters will include the writer's name and city/town of residence -- we will only accept letters from those who live in, or own a business in, the communities comprising Lamorinda (please give us your phone number for verification purposes only). Letters should be 350 words or less; letters of up to 500 words will be accepted on a space-available basis.

email: letters@lamorindaweekly.com; Regular mail: Lamorinda Weekly, P.O.Box 6133, Moraga, CA 94570

Editor:

I hope that the plan to reactivate the Park Theater does work. We need a movie theater in Lafayette. What we don't need is a theater like Rheem or Orinda who are poor re-runs of Walnut Creek and Pleasant Hill, where at least the screens are large and the theaters comfortable. This side of the hill needs a good arts theater, one that replaces the Cinearts, where good art and foreign films are shown and changed frequently. (Before the Park died, films ran for weeks.) The Elmwood in Oakland is a good model. There is a good audience out there for this type of venue. I know many people who bemoan the loss of Cinearts and would readily come to Lafayette.

Leonard Dorin
Lafayette

Editor:

I am a longtime resident of Orinda, an avid environmentalist and recycler. Along with my neighbors, every week I place my leaves, grass clippings and green waste in my green bin, along with the food scraps I save to be recycled and turned into compost. Imagine how devastating it was to hear that Lamorinda's yard waste is not being composted at all, but is, instead, being sent to local landfills and being used to cover the daily garbage. Republic, the waste hauler that is supposed to be composting our yard waste, is under contract with the Central Contra Costa Solid Waste Authority to compost Lamorinda's green waste at its Newby Island composting facility. But according to the California Compost Coalition, there is no record of any of our green waste being composted at this location. Our citizens should demand a full investigation and halt any talk of giving Republic a new contract until we can get to the bottom of this fiasco.

Rick Needoba
Orinda

Editor:

Is the MOFD Board of Directors properly managing our medical transport and fire protection services? Consider these facts presented recently by the District's financial manager.

- General Fund revenue is not sufficient to pay for General Fund expenditures due to a structural deficit.
- The District's General Fund was required to borrow from the Capital Projects Fund at June 30, 2013.
- It is projected Capital Projects Fund resources will be depleted during 2016/17.
- In addition, as resources in the Capital Projects Fund are depleted, the District may not be able to properly maintain and replace capital assets.

In sum, if the Capital Fund is bled dry in 2016/17 by excessive operating costs, then we may still have fire fighters, but insufficient funds remaining to buy fuel for the fire engines.

So, what's the Board's plan of action? According to the Draft Budget Development Policy document recently presented to the finance committee, the plan is to develop a preliminary 2014/15 budget in February/March and eventually adopt it in June. In other words, there is no intention, as of yet, to address the structural problem, viz., District revenues cannot cover on-going expenses. As stated by the financial manager, the problem is structural. This means either costs must be lowered (salaries and/or services) and/or revenues must be increased to maintain current service levels.

When this crisis began to intensify a couple of months ago, the Board directed the new Fire Chief to come up with a quick plan to cut overtime costs by reducing staffing from 19 firefighters and paramedics on shift to 17. That helped lower costs but it didn't address the overall problem. Continuing to pass deficit budgets year after year leading to financial collapse in 2016/17 is shortsighted, to say the least.

MOFD Board members are neighbors of ours volunteering to handle what's become a very challenging task. Three of them will come up for re-election this November. I won't be surprised if none of them offer to re-enlist. For the past two elections cycles, none of the MOFD Board elections were contested. So, where are we headed? What say do District residents have in this? By what process can we as an overall community come to reconcile our expectations and our offerings with the cost of doing business? If the MOFD Board doesn't offer a proper forum for community discussion, who will?

Jonathan Goodwin
Canyon

Editor:

The new senior housing complex being built on the old library site in Orinda is a monstrosity. Not even complete, it's height and bulk already loom over and dominate that whole end of Orinda Village, mocking even the concept of "semi-rural character" called for in the general plan. In fact, this development is exactly what the plan was designed to prevent. It's hard to imagine what the city council was thinking of when they approved it, but it certainly wasn't the best interests of Orinda.

Bill Brown
Orinda

Editor:

This is in response to Mr. Keith Jacobsen's January 29th letter. I hope all who read his comments will recognize them as those of an unhappy Orindan who actually wants others to pay more

than their fair share of the fire and emergency medical services the Moraga-Orinda Fire (MOFD) provides. He and his fellow members of FAIRS's Steering Committee have a favorite hobby—blasting the MOFD. His own Orinda City Council has not taken any action on FAIRS's reports for good reason: Their analyses are flawed and their number just to not add up!

Certainly the MOFD's Board has made some major mistakes, in my opinion. Those include the purchase of a property in Lafayette for a proposed fire station (43/16) for which they hope to find a partner some day. I'm not holding my breath on that one! Another was the purchase of a new fire engine a year or so ago at a cost of \$1/2 million, instead of refurbishing an older piece of apparatus that could easily have lasted a few years longer.

Mr. Jacobsen contends that Orindans are paying \$2 million more per year for services than they should. That's nonsense! In his calculations he has willfully chosen to ignore the fact that there are three MOFD fire stations in Orinda but only two in Moraga. Moreover, the first-due service areas of both Moraga fire stations include portions of Orinda, while no Orinda station is first-due into Moraga. Moragans have also shared in the costs of completely replacing an Orinda fire station, the remodeling of another Orinda station and the purchase of new fire apparatus to replace the broken down, barely serviceable units that the old Orinda Fire District brought with it to the new MOFD. Because Orinda's residents have twice chosen not to pass tax measures to replace their antiquated water system and improve fire flow to Orinda's hydrants, the MOFD purchased a 3500 gallon water tender at a cost of over \$350,000 to help supplement water delivery. That Orinda-based apparatus was also partly paid for by Moraga taxpayers. My point- which I could easily extend with multiple other examples- is that Orindans have, in fact, greatly and equitably benefited from their participation in the MOFD.

To remedy his imagined inequities, Mr. Jacobsen is now advocating that the MOFD Board increase the Fire Flow Tax in Moraga, Canyon and a significant portion of South Orinda by five (5) times, while leaving the Fire Flow Tax rate for Central and North Orinda at its present level. That would amount to an estimated \$400.00 per year increase for each affected household! That would indeed be inequitable!

I served on the 1996-7 Moraga-Orinda Fire Study Committee whose work led to voters approving the MOFD formation and since then, the chief beneficiaries have, in fact, been the residents of the former Orinda Fire District. In the bargain they gained paramedics, ambulance service, new equipment, safer stations, and improved fire insurance ratings. There's nothing inequitable about that!

Gordon Nathan
Moraga

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If you have significant knowledge about an issue facing Lamorinda or one of its cities that requires more than the 350 words to which we must limit Letters to the Editor, don't despair! You can submit your letter to our Public Forum section. Just send your letter to letters@lamorindaweekly.com and let us know you'd like to be considered for the Public Forum.

Civic News Moraga

Will TSAC Rise from the Ashes?

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Residents asked for the installation of speed bumps along Corliss Drive to slow down vehicles. The town engineer, Edric Kwan, presented figures from a traffic and speed study he obtained from the police. "We concluded that the speed is within acceptable limits," said Kwan, who advised against the speed bump, recommending instead targeted police survey of the area, especially around school time.

A resident from the Rimer neighborhood, Shirley DeFrancisci, challenged the result of the speed survey. "You use speed tubes that are very visible, so drivers will slow down when they see one," she said. DeFrancisci had come to present a request that additional, more visible, speed signs be installed in the Rimer-Whitethorn-Cedarwood loop, where a similar apparatus had been used to conduct a speed survey.

That loop, formed by three neighborhood streets, is used daily by parents dropping their children at the back entrance of Joaquin Moraga Intermediate School off Rimer Drive. Neighbors claim that parents speed on the streets and pay little attention to pedestrians and cyclists. There again, the measured traffic and speed did not warrant special treatment – but TSAC members still wanted some action taken. In addition to the targeted police enforcement proposed by staff, TSAC asked that the school community receive educational information about speeding. They also asked that the neighborhood around the back entrance of JM be made an official "Safe Route to School," which will qualify the area for possible grant money for street improvements.

The last topic on TSAC's agenda

also had to do with parents anxious about the safety of their children in the same general area of town. Resident Trent Watkins and neighbors expressed concerns over speeds along Tharp Drive, from Camino Pablo to Rimer Drive. They asked for the installation of additional stop signs at the upper intersection of Deerfield Drive and Tharp Drive to reduce speeds. Kwan explained that stop signs are installed to control traffic, not reduce speed, and that the data collected did not warrant additional stop signs.

Residents indicated that the measurements had not been done where the highest traffic is observed. Parents expressed distress over the speeding of neighbors who do not show any concern for the lives of others; they say that they have to drive their children to school because there is no sidewalk and they don't think it is safe for the kids to walk or bike.

TSAC asked that additional measurements be made and the issue be brought back at the next meeting.

The question is, will there be a next meeting? The Town Council will consider the committee's fate again in March. According to the town's police chief, Bob Priebe, if there is no TSAC then the town will revert to its previous process – when a problem arises, residents can contact the police department that will work with public works to analyze the problem and find a solution. If the solution offered does not satisfy the neighbors, they can appeal staff's decision to the Town Council. Priebe cited the example of the former police chief, Mark Ruppenthal, who conducted a traffic study along Corliss Drive years ago that led to the construction of sidewalks.



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