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Third Time's the Charm

By Cathy Dausman



Orinda's First City Council at the 1985 Fourth of July parade. Back, from left: Aldo Guidotti, Bobbie Landers and Dick Heggie; front: Bill Dabel and Joe Harb Photo courtesy of the Orinda Historical Society

because of what she said are the city's "multiple people and diverse interests."

Joyce Hawkins served on the city council as both member and mayor between 1992 and 2004. She remembers co-chairing with two others and a "huge" committee to promote the city's vote for incorporation in 1984. Hawkins moved to Orinda in 1970 and began work on the Orinda Association planning commission, which held an advisory role to county government.

Hawkins said the big catalyst for incorporation was to gain planning control. Prior to 1985, the jurisdiction of Orinda's modest 12.8 acres rested in Martinez, the Contra Costa County seat. At the time, Hawkins said Orinda won most battles with the county over residential development but lost out on commercial development. She remembers Martinez meetings lasting until 2 a.m. Then developers sought to tear down the Orinda Theatre and erect a five-story building in its place.

"We lost that battle [originally]," Hawkins said, until a law firm stepped in to provide pro-bono help. The first step to incorporation was to raise money for a Local Agency Formation Commission study, which, if approved, would allow Orindans to vote on becoming a city. When the study was approved, the committee went to work, "diligently" promoting the idea of Orinda as a city.

Simultaneously, 19 candidates began campaigning for one of five seats on a city council, assuming Orinda incorporation passed. This would be a last attempt at incorporation.

Ironically, one of those working against incorporation was Aldo Guidotti, who was elected to the first city council. Results of the March 1985 election was 60 percent for incorporation, a "spectacular victory," Hawkins said, adding "after that, it became much more difficult to incorporate."

Orinda was the last of the Lamorinda communities to incorporate, after Lafayette in 1968 and Moraga in 1974. "It was an exciting time [for Orinda]," said Hawkins.

To celebrate its birth as a city, the Orinda Association began hosting a Fourth of July parade. Strangely enough, the biggest issue 30 years ago was city road conditions; although Hawkins recalls that the county spent far less on repairs than the city has done since. Perhaps the road to self-governance is paved with good intentions.

Independence Day takes on double meaning in Orinda this year, as its residents celebrate the 30th anniversary of its incorporation July 1 along with the nation's Fourth of July celebration three days later. In historical perspective, it almost didn't happen. There were two failed prior attempts - one in the mid-1950s and a second in 1967 before "the vote for incorporation won hands down," said Bobbie Landers in remarks to this paper in 2010.

Landers was one of Orinda's five original city council members, having moved to Orinda 20 years before it became a city because of "the niceness of the town."

"People wanted to captain their own ship," Landers said. Fortunately for incorporation fans, the third time was the charm. Landers said what made the difference was that "we had more information and facts [in the 1980s]."

The Orinda area also wanted better police protection and more say in planning, she said. Landers has seen what she called "very, very positive things" happen with the city since 1985

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