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Eve Phillips: Lamorinda's Prodigal Daughter on the Orinda City Council

By Victor Ryerson



Newly appointed Orinda mayor Victoria Smith with Eve Phillips, the newly appointed vice mayor at the Dec. 1 City Council meeting. Photo Ohlen Alexander

com), she has the seasoning and self-assurance one would expect of someone far more senior in the business world. She is also an accomplished athlete who has successfully completed 30 marathons, including the Boston Marathon that was the target of the terrorist bombing two years ago. The pace of her life does not appear to have fazed her a bit.

After graduating from high school, Phillips earned bachelor's and master's degrees in computer science and engineering from MIT, doing internships on Wall Street and at a venture capital firm in England as part of her education. When she completed her work at MIT, she landed a job at Trilogy, a "very entrepreneurial" Texas-based company that joint ventured with Ford Motor Company on ways Ford could engage in e-commerce. She traveled extensively and worked with the fervor of an Olympian. Then the dot-com bubble burst.

"I was ready to come home," she says - but apparently not all the way home. Joining a private equity firm in San Francisco, she moved to Palo Alto to earn an MBA at Stanford, then returned to San Francisco, and finally moved to Orinda in 2012, where she started her online mental health care company with a respected psychiatrist.

She started to become interested in local politics the following year. Her decision to run for the council seat was motivated by "what was and wasn't going on in the city," she says. She was troubled by specific decisions being made by the council about land use matters, as well as questions of "process transparency." Examples of the former included the way the Monteverde senior residence was approved with relaxed height limits and parking requirements, and the denial of permitting for a Montessori school in the Phair's Building. Her explanation of her concern about the city's approval process is that the council "forgot that people on the 'outside' were unaware" of how these decisions were made. "Decisions were made without (public) understanding of why," she says. She wanted to get more involved and improve the community, particularly its downtown center, and to improve communication with the public. "You can never communicate too much," she says.

Never one to sit still collecting proverbial moss, Orindan Eve Phillips decided to run for a City Council seat in 2014, two years after she returned to the fold from a peripatetic career in the tech world. She won the seat. And now she is Orinda's new vice mayor to boot.

A Moraga-raised graduate of Miramonte High School's class of 1995, she is clearly also Orinda's youngest council member. As such, she is the representative, willing or not, of the generation that will inherit the future of Orinda. She celebrated her most recent birthday by attending the Dec. 1 council meeting, at which she was chosen for her new office by her fellow council members, a definite vote of confidence in her vision and governance skills.

Do not let Phillips' youth deceive you. She has packed more education and experience into her years to date than most people do in a lifetime. A successful entrepreneur and the CEO of her own Internet company (www.empower-interactive.com),

On Phillips' want list is another downtown grocery outlet and more restaurants. She cites the petition recently presented to the council as a demonstration of the community's desire to bring in these services. She works out of her home office, and would like to see co-working spaces in Orinda, perhaps with associated daycare facilities. Recently married, she and her husband are expecting their first child in the coming year.

She is interested in transportation and parking issues, and serves as the council's liaison to BART. There are "multiple problems to talk about" in this arena, including an overflow parking issue and the need to optimize the parking situation, particularly with the capacity on the Village side. She also acknowledges the increasing push for four-hour parking zones on the Crossroads side, and although she is opposed to parking meters for Orinda, she concedes that they will very likely be reviewed as one of the options she will have to consider in the city's current parking study.

She also says Orindans "obviously have to raise more money for roads," but at the same time warns that the community should be looking very carefully at whether it is exercising good stewardship of its finances.

An avid user and supporter of sports facilities and open space, Phillips believes that there is always a need for more ball fields, and is "glad some are coming in soon." She stresses the need to be sensitive in creating access to such community facilities as the Moraga Adobe, balancing the desire to preserve and protect buildings and open space with the interests of residents who live nearby.

Phillips wants to be a governmental leader, but not in a directive way. She says her governance philosophy is to be a facilitator, and to encourage business and property owners to resolve economic development issues while respecting their property rights. But within the parameters of the Orinda General Plan, it is really about what the community wants, she says. "There are a lot of places that have lost their soul. I wouldn't want to see that here."

With two years left in her current term of office and the strong possibility that she will serve as Orinda's next mayor, Phillips will have ample opportunity to test her approach to leadership and governance. Given her track record since she walked out of Miramonte High School 20 years ago, she appears well equipped to take on the new challenges of her office.

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