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Former Military Contractor Takes Over as New Orinda Planning Director

By Nick Marnell



Drummond Buckley Photo Ohlen Alexander

Back in 2013, Drummond Buckley picked a good day to arrive late for a lunch date.

"I was lucky," said the new Orinda Planning Director, who was doing urban planning as a defense contractor for United Research Services at the Forward Operating Base Salerno near Khost, Afghanistan in 2013. "There was a huge blast. The explosion was so big that when you opened the office door, all you could see was dust. Alarms went off. They have sounds that tell you what kind of emergency it is, and we knew from the sound of the siren that attackers were on the base." At lunchtime, a suicide bomber had blown up a truck outside the dining facility, and six armed attackers stormed the military base, killing two and injuring many.

"I was waiting for colleagues to arrive from another base. Otherwise, I would have been there," Buckley said.

After his next government contract ran out - working in design development in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia - Buckley returned to the Bay Area just in time to slide in to his current position. He had worked in the Orinda planning department in the late 1990s before he left to take outside consulting jobs.

Buckley listed the immediate goals for his department. "We need to revisit the general policies for downtown development," he said. "What is the process we need to go through? How do we get started?"

With more development agreements coming up for the Wilder subdivision, Buckley said the city has to coordinate all of the different standards that have been adopted over the years into a user-friendly handbook. "Plus, we are going through a design review process," he said.

And he plans to beef up the city code enforcement process. "Different parts of the municipal code can be affected by a complaint," he said. "The complaint could violate a zoning code and a building code, for example. Which agency will be responsible for enforcing which section?"

With a master's degree in urban planning from UCLA, and perspective he has acquired from working all over the world, Buckley comes across as unflappable.

"Planning can be stressful," said Buckley. "But all I can say is that this job is not as bad as working in a war zone."

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