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Letters to the Editor

Orinda holds out on Community Choice Energy

Dear Editor,
At the Orinda City Council meeting on Tuesday, May 16, nine people spoke during the Public Forum in support of Community Choice Energy and requesting that it be put on the agenda for the next council meeting. Additional people were in the audience in support of CCE and approximately two dozen emails were sent and numerous phone calls made to the mayor and city manager in support of CCE.

Council member Inga Miller moved to discuss CCE at the next council meeting. In spite of the strong show of public support no other council member would second the motion. The audience was surprised and shocked. There is no direct cost to the city to join a CCE provider. Indirect costs may include legal review of documents, but since Contra Costa County and most of the cities in the county, including Walnut Creek, Lafayette, and Moraga have joined, acceptable legal documents already exist. Staff time for approval would similarly be minimal.

Joining a CCE provider gives residents a choice of energy sources with more renewable content than PG&E at the same or lower cost. Residents can opt out of the CCE to stay with PG&E. Orinda is disallowing its residents and businesses a choice of energy sources.

As Carolyn Knoll wrote in a letter to the editor on May 17, "Why the delay? What's stopping the council? What are their concerns?"

Jim Ulrick
Orinda

Quick fix for Canyon bridge

Dear Editor,
Until a more permanent temporary solution is installed, how about letting people walk across the Moraga-Canyon bridge? It could be made perfectly safe by installing two steel cables, one for each direction. Those walking across would put on a harness clipped to a ring on the cable. In the unlikely event that the bridge collapses further while someone is walking on it, they'd just end up in the air. Parents could shuttle kids to school and others could rideshare or taxi into town. Hiring someone to oversee it wouldn't be too expensive. Let's harness (sorry) Lamorinda creativity!

Larry Zulch
Lafayette

Roundabout works

Dear Editor,
Now that the roundabout at Olympic and Pleasant Hill Road has been in service for a few months and now that we see clearly demonstrated that this was an effective, if not inspired design for

improving this intersection, and that, in fact, chaos has not ensued and Rossmoor-bound cars are not strewn in the medians like errant bocce balls or stacked in the center like cord wood, is it possible that just one of the many naysayers who brayed doom at community meetings and on Nextdoor and in this very paper about the coming rounda-pocalypse might write a brief note that maybe, just maybe, they were wr-wr-wr-wrong?

I know, probably asking too much.

Dave E Dondero
Lafayette

PG&E needs to look at its own safety measures

Dear Editor,
The grass-roots, loose-knit organization my wife and I started in April called Save Lafayette Trees began as a push to stop the unnecessary cutting of 272 trees in Lafayette. After talking with many informed Lafayette citizens and conducting basic research, we have realized that there are more gas pipeline questions than answers.

It appears the gas transmission pipeline in Lafayette has not been successfully pressure tested for leaks since the year after it was built in 1963. Its many twists and turns, along with a pressure rate only 17 percent of its capacity, means state-of-the-art sensors that could measure defects from within the pipe are rendered useless. From what we've read, these are the two best methods to determine the integrity of a gas pipeline.

PG&E told us in person that they instead "walk" the line with handheld leak detectors on an annual basis. Apparently the City of Lafayette has no records of when and if this was done. In fact, one four-foot section of the pipeline stands exposed along the trail, a fact pointed out to the surprised members of PG&E's customer outreach team.

The only other method of pipeline inspection they mention is Cathodic Protection, which is basically an electric charge put on the pipeline to reduce corrosion. Our Public Request Act resulted in the discovery of PG&E's admission to the city that they had 670 instances of inadequate CP that were left unremedied along their lines. Their errors were discovered in 2012, and as of 2017 they still hadn't completed repairs in 243 locations. In another failure discovered by our PRE, PG&E was fined \$5.45 million by the California Public Utilities Commission five months ago for using unqualified contractors to perform other corrosion testing. It's unclear how much Lafayette is impacted by these discoveries.

Meanwhile, PG&E is spending \$500 Million across the state to cut trees down to stumps saying this is a "proactive" step should they later decide that trees

are an issue. We strongly recommend that PG&E instead focus on investing their time, money and personnel on proven safety measures that may be lacking in our community now.

Michael and Gina Dawson
Lafayette

Urge Orinda to consider joining a CCE

Dear Editor,
Daily, we read articles about the fast approaching devastating effects of climate change — drought, fish extinction, flooding, extreme temperatures. We need to take action to lower our carbon footprint. One simple way, is for a community to join a Community Choice Energy program. At little or no cost, our communities can reduce our carbon emissions by 10 percent while supporting local jobs and building the clean economy.

Unfortunately, with the exception of Inga Miller, the Orinda City Council refuses to even consider providing Orinda the energy choices that are being provided to other Contra Costa County communities including Lafayette, Danville, Moraga and Walnut Creek. I call upon fellow Orinda Citizens to contact Orinda City Council members to ask them to put the discussion about joining a CCE to the agenda.

Tandra Ericson
Orinda CA

Lafayette should appoint fact-finding group for tree removal

Dear Editor,
PG&E stated in a May 17 letter to the City of Lafayette that their planned removal of 272 trees at the Lafayette Reservoir and along the Lafayette-Moraga Regional Trail could begin as soon as mid-June. The city has signed an agreement with PG&E authorizing removal of these scenic trees (some as old as 200 years) after PG&E agreed to pay \$500,000 in compensation to the city.

The reason given for removing the trees is gas pipeline safety. But PG&E's explanations of the

safety hazard presented by the trees has continued to evolve, as has the number of trees that pose a hazard. For example, in 2015, the number of Orinda trees requiring removal under the same PG&E program was reduced from 305 to 11 (96 percent reduction). Two years later, we see the same reduction pattern in Lafayette, from 1000 trees to 272. The standards that apply and why they are changing to this degree is disturbing. At the May 8 Lafayette City Council meeting, many concerned residents challenged PG&E's assumptions and asked for more information about the plan.

What's needed is the appointment of a fact-finding group that includes residents, city government, PG&E and other stakeholders. Many of the majestic heritage oaks to be removed along the trail preexisted the pipeline by many decades; the pipeline has been in place for more than 50 years. Yet PG&E's current plan is to remove the trees, not move the pipeline by a few feet. I recently asked PG&E and the city council to participate in the creation of the fact-finding group described above. Let's take the time to ensure all feasible solutions to Lafayette pipeline safety have been carefully considered before sending in the chain saws.

David Kusters
Lafayette

Clarifying ULI's report

Dear Editor,
I wish to respond to Nick Waranoff's recent letter commenting on the ULI Technical Assistance Panel's preliminary report regarding downtown renewal.

1) The TAP did not recommend 240 housing units downtown. Here is what their preliminary report stated:

- "Orinda Can Create Value"
- Housing is highest value use
- Consider pooling the current 10 residential dwelling units per acre
- Allocate pooled units to property owners willing to dedicate creek right of way
- Would allow for up to six 40-unit residential/

mixed use projects • Permit flexible (35' to 55') height limit to be measured from curb on Orinda Way • Determine value capture from modest increase in density for tangible community benefit."

As I read its report, the TAP simply stated the total number of housing units currently zoned for downtown and suggested that the City consider pooling some of that zoning capacity to use as a trade-off for those property owners willing to dedicate creek right of way. It did not recommend a full build-out of currently permitted housing.

2) The inevitable sale of homes to young families by Orinda's older residents who want to downsize would occur whether they move downtown or somewhere else. The availability of downtown housing won't affect that natural outcome. And, providing an option for these individuals to remain in Orinda would allow them to continue to enrich our community.

3) The projected school population for OUSD is flat to declining. The base funding for the district, which is governed by the Local Control Funding Formula, increases when the total student population grows. This increased funding allows the district to retain and augment academic enrichment programming. It is also worth noting that all new development is required to pay a development impact fee to our school districts which they are required to set aside to build additional capacity should that be needed. In any case, the school districts are best equipped to address the question of the impact of development on their school populations and budgets and will be offered that opportunity when an Environmental Impact Report is prepared in connection with a Downtown Specific Plan.

The task of ULI is to provide options. It is up to the citizens of Orinda and their elected representatives to decide which, if any, of these options are right for our city.

Dan Palmerlee
Orinda



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