

Published October 4th, 2017

Salomon to continue as Orinda city manager

By Sora O'Doherty



The Orinda City Council welcomes Steve Salomon as new city manager, from left: Inga Miller, Amy Worth, Eve Phillips, Steve Salomon, Dean Orr and Darlene Gee. Photo Sora O'Doherty

things might get done faster than otherwise" if he accepted the job.

Salomon negotiated a relatively unusual agreement: he won't be working full time, but 90 percent, he receives no severance pay and no management leave. The city was flexible, Salomon noted, because they wanted him to stay.

"I've been working with Steve for over six months now," Orinda Mayor Eve Phillips said. "I know he will do well in this job. I look forward to him leaving his imprint on the city and taking it to the next level."

His contract will run to the end of June 2019, and his base pay will be \$224,640 per year, with a possible 3 percent increase in February or March 2018. Salomon will have 90 percent health benefits, \$800 a month for a car, and other benefits.

Explaining his philosophy, Salomon said, "Part of what I hope to do is give folks in the organization the opportunity to grow and work on things they might not have under other circumstances. You have to have a certain amount of faith in the folks who work for you," he added, noting that he has tried to only get involved where he thinks he is needed.

Praised by the city council for his financial acumen, Salomon commented, "Every city that I've worked in I've tried to leave it in better financial shape than when I arrived, even if it was already in good condition."

Orinda is in a relatively fragile financial status, and has projects such as Camino Sobrante stabilization and Ironbark Circle to complete. Salomon would like to reduce costs and bring in some revenue raising matters, such as a Transient Occupancy Tax on short-term rentals, for example. "Orinda contacted Airbnb because we knew that they had agreements with other cities, and adopted a Short Term Rental Ordinance requiring registration," he said.

"I would have never guessed that I would end up being a city manager. Would have never thought about it. When I graduated from high school good in math, people told me I should go into engineering. What I learned helped me over the years, but I didn't want to work on the design of the bridge or road, but wanted to work with the people on deciding what kind of bridge or road they wanted." Salomon earned a master's in city and regional planning with a minor in public administration from Ohio State University and a bachelor's degree in civil engineering with an emphasis on transportation and public works from the University of Cincinnati.

Downtown Development

When asked about the reports on downtown development by the Urban Land Institute and the National Main Street program, Salomon noted that while both had any number of recommendations in them, both reports were done by people who don't live or work in Orinda. "Some of what they recommended may not be appropriate for Orinda, and some of it may be," he said. "Some process will be required to identify what kinds of things they want to work on. For example, daylighting San Pablo Creek would be a long-term thing, very complicated. But other things might be able to be done relatively inexpensively, if people want to do

Steve Salomon has had a successful career in local government over the past 40 years. He previously served 17 years as Visalia's city manager, was Albany's city administrator, and city manager for the cities of Watsonville and Hercules. He also worked for the city of Concord in a variety of positions and has served in numerous leadership positions within the California Redevelopment Association, Contra Costa City Manager's Group, and South San Joaquin Valley Division of the League of California Cities - City Managers' Department, and is a member of the International City/Council Management Association.

Now Salomon, who has been serving as interim city manager after taking over from Janet Keeter who retired in in late February, is Orinda's new city manager.

Why did Salomon, who might be enjoying a comfortable retirement, agree to take the job? "It was a combination of things," he said. "I have really enjoyed working with the city council, staff and community, and we've accomplished a fair amount. It got to the point where

it." One example would be to utilize Bryant Way more effectively for parking.

"People here," Salomon said, "they want it to stay Orinda; they don't want it to be someplace else." Salomon says he doesn't think there are going to be any dramatic changes right away, or perhaps even in the long term, but he does think that there are some areas where there could be consensus. "You have to work on things that are both short term and long term."

In the past, Salomon has worked in cities that have cared about their downtowns: in Watsonville right after the Loma Prieta Earthquake that pretty much destroyed downtown, and in Visalia, which Salomon says has the strongest downtown in the Central Valley, even though it isn't by the water and isn't a college town. Salomon said the residents cared a great deal about the downtown and it went from an A to an A-plus.

"They did lots of things, some of which I would have never believed when I started," he said. Visalia is near Sequoia National Park, so the city runs the transit system there. They developed a special shuttle bus from May to September as a tourism-related thing. Visalia has a trolley similar to Walnut Creek's that runs around downtown. When Visalia got a multiscreen movie theater and a grant for a children's museum, they very deliberately put them in downtown.

The number of restaurants doubled during the time Salomon was there. "It got to the point," Salomon said, "where people would come to the downtown, wander around, and then decide where to eat when. Orinda has lots of potential to work on, but you have to work on what works for the community."

Reach the reporter at: sora@lamorindaweekly.com

[back](#)

Copyright © Lamorinda Weekly, Moraga CA