



Published November 29th, 2017

Business registration program on its way to Orinda

By Nick Marnell

Orinda moved a step closer to collecting an annual registration fee from most businesses in the city when a split city council voted to introduce an ordinance establishing a business registration requirement at the Nov. 21 city council meeting. The stated purpose of the registration program, for which the city conducted public outreach in the fall, is to identify and maintain an up-to-date list of businesses in the city. Planning Director Drummond Buckley presented the main benefits of the program to the council: A structured way for the city to communicate with businesses; building a data base of businesses and commercial activities, including home-based businesses; increased sales tax revenue since distribution of sales tax money by the state can be monitored more closely; and improved economic development, as simple as letting businesses know about community events from which they might benefit. Buckley said that Orinda, Lafayette and Moraga are the only municipalities in the county with no business registration license or requirement.

"It is not a tax, and it is not a permit," Buckley said. Certain businesses would be exempt from the discussed \$50 annual fee, including businesses that gross less than \$10,000 a year, nonprofits and religious organizations. The city would outsource the administration of the program.

Orinda Chamber of Commerce President Roy Hodgkinson, who supports business registration, cautioned that the \$10,000 annual revenue figure was too low. "There are people in high school doing website businesses who would achieve that threshold," he said.

Not so fast, suggested Orinda resident Richard Colman. "It's a fee, it's a tax, call it what you want," he said. "It takes more money out of the hands of business and perhaps adds to higher prices."

Mayor Eve Phillips remained wary of the program benefits. "I agree with some of the letter writers that this is a solution chasing a problem. The benefits listed could be achieved in other ways," she said. "On the economic development side, (not having a business registration program) certainly hasn't hurt Lafayette." The motion to introduce the ordinance passed 3 to 1, with Phillips voting no and Council Member Inga Miller recusing herself because she owns a business in Orinda. The ordinance, which will include a proposed registration fee and a start date for the program, will return for adoption at the Dec. 5 city council meeting.

Reach the reporter at: nick@lamorindaweekly.com

[back](#)

Copyright © Lamorinda Weekly, Moraga CA