

Published December 12th, 2018

New assistant city manager is familiar face: Larry Theis

By Sora O'Doherty



Larry Theis Photo Sora O'Doherty

Orinda's director of public works has been named assistant city manager. The city council affirmed the appointment at its Nov. 27 meeting. The role will be in addition to Larry Theis's regular duties and carries with it a 5 percent differential increase in his salary.

Theis is already known to many Orindans because he is responsible for Orinda's roads and drainage issues, so he is often out and about on the streets of the city. Although he works on average 40 to 50 hours as public works director, Theis says that he strives to maintain a good work/life balance. He lives in Concord, where he grew up, with his wife, Kirstin, and two children, Maddy, 7, and Desmond, 4. When he must attend night meetings, on average three times a month, he tries to get home for dinner with the family before the meeting.

In order to take on his new duties, Theis says that he will lean on his staff more and will possibly use consultants more. Plans are for him to transition gradually to areas of broader city interest as he assists current City Manager Steve Salomon, who undertook his position based on an agreement limiting his work to 90 percent of full time.

Both of Theis' parents are Japanese, and were born in Japan. They married in Los Angeles, where Theis was born and lived until he was about 3 years old. His German name results from the fact that his father was

adopted by his grandmother, who was married to a merchant marine. Theis has only limited family in the United States, but has many cousins in Japan, which he visited with his brother twice when they were younger.

Theis attended Diablo Valley College and earned a bachelor's degree in engineering at UC Berkeley in 2000. He was hired by Caltrans, where he worked until 2002 when he was hired by Contra Costa County. He joined the staff in Orinda in 2013, and was named director of public works in September 2016, after the retirement of Chuck Swanson. He'd only been in the job for a few months before the Miner Road sinkhole happened in January 2017.

At public works, Theis works most closely with the planning department. While public works is responsible for roads and drainage, it is actually the parks and recreation department that is responsible for maintenance of the city's buildings.

The 2019 road paving program will be his highest priority in the new year, and he is looking forward to the completion of that massive program, as next year is its final year. Beyond that, Orinda has several bridges that require seismic retrofitting, including the bridge at Miner Road (below the site of the sink hole), and a bridge on Bear Creek Road.

Insofar as downtown development goes, Public Works will be involved with the streetscape and is currently working on parking programs. Theis will report to the city council on the city's experience with the Brookwood Road parking program on Dec. 18, when the council is also scheduled to get an update on the easement at 53 Rheem Blvd. In addition to its other duties, Public Works is also taking over parking enforcement from the Orinda Police Department.

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