



ORINDA

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New Orinda mayor to bring her message to the people



Mayor Inga Miller Photo Sora O'Doherty

By Sora O'Doherty

For new Orinda Mayor Inga Miller, it's all about communication.

Miller, council member since 2016 and selected by the council as mayor for 2019, intends to hold office hours at city hall the second Wednesday of each month to meet with constituents. She

also plans to send out a mayor's newsletter, in addition to holding the monthly mayor's liaison meetings with representatives of Orinda organizations.

Miller is a fan of Orinda's fiscally conservative history. "Fiscal reserves," she notes, "allowed us to have an emergency fund" which enabled the city to move swiftly to fix the Miner Road sinkhole. She'd like to continue that tradition as the city works through its next budget and looks at how to maintain its roads and perhaps to add new facilities.

Miller took part in the recent wild-fire evacuation drill on Moraga Way and found it fascinating. "One cool thing," she mentioned, was that the city was partnering with Google and Apple so that their maps were refreshed every minute. She also cited the involvement of the Lamorinda Area Radio Interest Group and the Community Emergency Response Team in the drill that involved some 530 homes in the Moraga Country Club area. "It seemed to work," she said. There will be another drill in Orinda in the future.

Miller is a strong supporter of downtown development. She views the Streetscape Master Plan as very important for recharging downtown. "Our

council has said, 'we're open for business, please come. Our city manager and planning director would love to talk to you.'" This is a change, she believes, adding that the city has been working hard to see that fees for development are reasonable. "I don't think that it is overly optimistic to believe that we'll see some changes," according to Miller, who would like to see façade improvements and more locally serving businesses.

More housing is needed, Miller agrees, but she sees recent state legislation as "arrogant." She has looked at other areas to see how local redevelopment has worked out—or not worked out. To build Dodger Stadium, she noted, Los Angeles used redevelopment funding to wipe out a neighborhood. She is not in favor of allowing BART, which she says is in huge financial trouble, to be in charge of development. She is also concerned about any plan that would allow development without assuring that there are sufficient services, such as schools, streets, police and firefighters.

Miller is very enthusiastic about working with new Vice Mayor Darlene Gee, who takes charge when the mayor is unavailable. Gee was appointed to the council shortly before Miller was elected.

Master transportation engineer joins Orinda council with an eye on downtown development

By Sora O'Doherty

New Orinda Council Member Dennis Fay says that the city has a responsibility to assist the Bay Area to shoulder some housing needs, but, he adds, "tailored to the needs of Orinda."

"I can't tell you how many people I spoke to during the campaign who want an option to have an 1,800- to 2,000-square foot condo with services." He's not talking about low income options, but of people living in Orinda who want to downsize from their larger homes and who are ready to be close to downtown to enjoy the services available there. He is also concerned about housing for people who serve the community but currently cannot afford to live here. "It would be wonderful to have teachers and city staff living within our community," Fay says.

Fay doesn't believe that the downtown needs multistory buildings, but he supports a maximum limit of three stories at street level, which, he notes, may allow for more stories going



Photo Sora O'Doherty

Council Member Dennis Fay

downhill from Orinda Way. He thinks that what matters is the impression of mass, and supports buildings that step back and also retain the village character. He thinks that Orinda could look

to European villages for inspiration. For example, he traveled through villages in Spain and France and thinks that the use of stone could create a European feel in Orinda. He admits that he doesn't favor the California Spanish look.

Turning to the issue of private roads, Fay thinks that it isn't much of an issue where the roads are maintained by a homeowners association, but notes the concern for private roads not maintained by HOAs. He believes that the public policy should be discussed and believes that the issue will return to the city council. "The big issue is money," he says. Perhaps, he muses, residents of private roads should be exempted from future parcel tax measures. Most of all, he believes that it is important that people feel that they are being heard and thinks that there may be room for some accommodation.

Another issue that concerns Fay is fire safety. "Wild fire prevention really is important to me," he says, and suggests that he'd like to see cities part-

nering with the fire districts." "As an engineer," he says, "I want to prevent things." He talks about how, in the recent Paradise Fire, superheated ash was sucked into attic vents setting homes on fire, and how engineering solutions could prevent that in the future.

Fay was previously a member and chair of the Citizen's Infrastructure Oversight Commission and has been involved in Orinda's effort to repair its roads since the first report on road repair prepared in 2006.

His family has lived in Orinda for more than 20 years, and his children attended Orinda schools. Fay noted that all of his family members have earned master's degrees.

Fay retired from a career of over 40 years in transportation planning and engineering, having served for nearly 20 years as the executive director of what is now called the Alameda County Transportation Commission. Earlier, he was the transportation planning manager for Alameda County.

New council member Kosla brings development experience to the table

By Sora O'Doherty

Although there have been a lot of negative comments about developers during the current attempt by Orinda to update its downtown, Nick Kosla was very open during his campaign about his experience in development and with developers. He believes that his message resonated with the electorate, which chose him over former council member Eve Phillips, who often expressed doubts about developers during the process of working with the Urban Land Institute and Mainstreet America on the city's streetscape project. Kosla holds a master's in public policy and administration, land use policy.

Kosla said that during the campaign, he often heard, "Nick, our downtown needs a lot of help, not just a little help. It seems like in some of the other communities their property

values are going up because the downtowns are thriving." Kosla's priorities are to take advantage of San Pablo Creek, which he sees as a huge amenity. He wonders, "Can we open it up?" He wants to get more retail in downtown, but to focus on Orinda for Orindans. "If you have the right type of development you can get people out there," he believes.

Growing up in Orinda, Kosla always loved the creeks; he loves to fly fish. He wants the creek to be more accessible for people to walk by, for children to learn from. "Most of what I've worked on are very large, complicated projects, he says, such as Oak Knoll in the Oakland Hills. He also worked on the redevelopment of the Alameda air base and has experience working with the Army Corps of Engineers, and U.S. Fish & Wildlife. He is excited to bring his expertise to the city council.

"I feel like our real estate values could be higher than they are," he says. "Lafayette has four grocery stores, including Whole Foods and Diablo Foods, and now has Philz coffee. People aren't willing to pay more for the amenities we have," he adds. Kosla said that he has been told that last year housing prices in Lafayette exceeded those in Orinda, and that this trend is continuing. When people move to Lafayette, he says, they choose Lafayette because it has more amenities, a more vibrant downtown, and they are willing to pay more for that. While he doesn't want Orinda to become Lafayette, and he doesn't believe that Orinda could ever support four groceries, he thinks that there is a happy medium which will bring about a locally sustainable economic engine, and see a revitalization of downtown Orinda. In turn, he says, that will raise real estate values.



Photo Sora O'Doherty

Council Member Nick Kosla

... continued on next Page