

Published July 10th, 2019

Orinda icon loses lease for barn and pasture on PG&E land

By Sora O'Doherty



Bobbie Landers and her horse. Photo Sora O'Doherty

Bobbie Landers, former mayor of Orinda who was instrumental in the incorporation of the city and founded the Fourth of July Parade, must find a new home for her 27-year-old horse, Nevada. For 33 years Landers leased land from the Pacific Gas and Electric Company. Originally she and her husband leased it jointly with another couple, John and Marylou Fazel, and they housed their two horses on it. The two men worked together to build a barn on the land. Two years ago, Landers invested about \$6,000 on maintenance of the property, including repiping.

Over the years, Nevada became the only horse to occupy the barn and pasture. Landers, who is 90 years old, says they are both too old for riding, so the horse just grazes in the quiet meadow adjacent to the PG&E Sobrante substation on Bear Creek Road. Landers visits the property twice a day to care for Nevada.

Landers was recently notified by PG&E that they would not be renewing her lease. She reached out to William Johnson, president and CEO of the utility, explaining what a hardship it will be for her to relocate, given the advanced age of both herself and the horse. She suggested a compromise, offering to reduce her presence to just a quarter of the 4-acre parcel. She thought that perhaps they could have a double gate, with one side leading to the barn and pasture, and the other for PG&E use.

PG&E has refused this proposal, however. When contacted, PG&E spokesperson Tamar Sarkissian provided the following statement concerning the situation:

"The safety of our customers and the communities we serve is our most important responsibility. With significant safety work planned for the area, it is now essential PG&E utilize its property on Bear Creek Road. As we understand Ms. Landers shared with the news media, we reached out to Ms. Landers early this year to inform her that we will not be renewing her lease. Additionally, we have been working with her to find an alternative location for her horse and have allowed her to use the property, free of charge, since the lease expired in March. We apologize for the inconvenience and are working to make this transition as smooth as possible for Ms. Landers and her horse. As we continue to work with Ms. Landers to help her find an alternative location for her horse, we have pushed the deadline to August 1."

Sarkissian further explained, "There are multiple functions we have planned for this property. First and foremost, it will be used by our vegetation management department and tree contractors as a staging area as we work to ensure wildfire safety in the area. We also have several other requests from both the gas and electric teams to use the property for safety and reliability projects. We want to avoid renting elsewhere in the Bay Area, which would ultimately cost our ratepayers and could impact neighboring properties. Given there will be heavy equipment coming in and out of the area, it would not be safe to have a customer in the vicinity."

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