

# Lafayette resident simplifies self-storage

By Pippa Fisher

A Lafayette resident has come up with a unique start-up – a concept so simple, it’s brilliant.

The company, Stash-It, provides a platform to match people looking to store their belongings (Stash-it users) with neighbors (hosts) who have unused space available, such as a garage, eliminating the need for more expensive, conventional public storage facilities for any items ranging from a box of clothes to an RV or boat.

Stash-it Founder Kurt

Winter explains that the idea came to him as he searched for his own storage dilemma. Winter had parked his boat outside his Lafayette home but, threatened with fines for code violations, he looked to a local storage facility only to discover the high cost of storage and restrictions of longer-term contracts.

Knowing he was not the only one facing these frustrations he began to look for a different solution. As he researched it dawned on him that there are empty spaces all over neighborhoods so why not rent the unused

space your neighbor might have in their garage, barn or on their driveway, shed or even storage closet? Winter says this makes Stash-It a local, green, efficient solution to self-storage taking advantage of storage space that exists already, rather than paving over dirt.

Winter acknowledged that it is easy to love your own idea, but says that everyone he spoke to also loved it. “Stash-It solves a problem,” he says. “Many startups today are a solution looking for a problem.”

About three years ago Winter hired Stash-It Presi-

dent Jeremy Hass. Together they explored the concept further, looking at the process of contract, examining nuances around city ordinances and developed the platform that could break into the \$32 billion storage industry. The company launched its working product last year.

Stash-It’s goal is transparency with hosts and Stash-It users. Rates are established upfront, agreed between both parties with 20% retained by Stash-It to keep the platform up and running. Mandatory background checks are done on all hosts. Both parties are present during the storage

drop off and pictures are taken of contents to be stored and uploaded to the app.

With hosts and users currently in California, Texas, Ohio and Tennessee, Winter says Stash-It is growing monthly at a rate of 100%. He points out, “As a host, who wouldn’t want to make a little money with their empty garage? And as a Stash-It user, who wouldn’t want a personal, local storage space for their extra stuff?”

More information is available at [www.stashitselfstorage.com/](http://www.stashitselfstorage.com/)

# Orinda city council candidates respond to questions

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Miller added that as a former newspaper reporter she is committed to striving for improved transparency and also to maintain public confidence that the Orinda city council is working to continue to make Orinda safe.

**Lamorinda Weekly on private roads:** Approximately 20% of Orinda residents live on private roads. That being said, the private roads arose from very different sources, some were inherited by the city when it incorporated in 1985, some have been the product of deals done with the city in order to bring new residential developments to the city. Private road residents have become much more vocal, especially since the Miner Road sinkhole disaster. Do you have any ideas about how to satisfy residents of both public and private roads in the future?

**Candidates:** Gee has been the city council member most obviously sympathetic to the plight of residents of private roads. She believes that ultimately all Orinda roads desiring inclusion should be included in the City public system. “While most cities have some private roads,” she said, “the scale and history of Orinda’s situation is very unusual.” While she believes that Orinda’s patchwork system often results in time and costs to the city that she believes waste resources, she also acknowledges that there are very real costs to adding private roads and drains to the public network that the community at large would need to be willing to share in some manner. Gee recommends a number of steps, the first being to again

revise Orinda Resolution 59-18. Gee notes that she was the only “no” vote in 2018 when the city council “took action to make it virtually impossible to adopt private roads into the public system.” Second would be to ascertain which private roads want to remain private. Third would be a field survey of the private road conditions by the city, excluding Wilder and the Pulte developments because they are so new as to already be rated in excellent condition, conducted in the same manner as the public roads.

Gee wants to establish an accurate cost estimate of bringing the private roads up to good to excellent condition – recognizing any extraordinary costly issues such as landslides, failing structures, unusual drainage etc., initiating a city-led pilot program for incrementally bringing the private roads to a condition where they could be adopted under a revised Resolution 59-18 – starting with about 8 to 10 miles of older roads that had previously been offered but not accepted as public roads by the county.

Gee believes that the city needs to evaluate a fair methodology for how costs might be shared to bring the road to a condition that it could be transferred into the public system. “For example,” she says, “private road residents should be credited for the garbage truck impact fees they pay but are not able to use toward their road maintenance, but the public should not be unfairly burdened with road maintenance issues private road residents may have ignored for years.”

Private roads should be added to in stages so the city

can plan to take on the additions from a legal and workload standpoint as well as ensure the ongoing maintenance costs are incorporated into future funding plans.” The city should also allow any new future developments or subdivisions to allow public roads from the beginning. Additionally, Gee believes that infrastructure should be community asset that is shared by the residents for the benefits of all, not as a liability to be argued over.

Miller agrees that the city’s policy on private roads needs revision. “I believe the city should hold a public meeting to hear whether residents as a whole believe we should lower the standard – perhaps to the average condition of existing roads in Orinda – and whether we should have more flexibility in cases in which there is significant public benefit to the community.” However she sees the adoption of private roads to be a very expensive endeavor that would displace other items in the city’s capital improvement plan.

Miller gave an example of a resident who lives on a private road that terminates at a walking trail, serving as a significant shortcut from a hillside between Orinda Woods and Camino Sobrante to the Orinda Village, who said that many more people in North Orinda could walk to Orinda Village on city right of way if the private road was made public. Miller suggested that this might be a significant public benefit and might warrant the city investing in some or all of the cost of road and drainage infrastructure to bring the road up to city standards in exchange for the ac-

cess this road would then provide pedestrians.

Malkani, on private roads, said, “There are some rules, but often there is no rhyme or reason why some Orinda roads are public while others remain private.” She understands that many private road residents perceive an inequity, and have requested a low-cost study on the extent of needed repairs. From there, she says, “I can’t tell you exactly what the long-term solution looks like because it would need to address revenue generation, cost sharing, and conversion of private to public roads,” but adds, “What I can tell you is that the city can’t continue to ignore this complicated mess and hope it goes away – the study is a reasonable step to understanding the scope of this problem.”

**Lamorinda Weekly on Downtown Development:** Orinda’s downtown has been pretty static since the development of Theatre Square expansion in 1989, over 30 years ago. Given the pressure to build housing coming from the State legislature, what are your goals for the redevelopment of Orinda’s downtown?

**Candidates:** Council Member Miller is one of the two members of the Downtown Subcommittee. She has met with city leaders in San Luis Obispo to learn how they have protected their creek while providing opportunities for Creek-side dining.

“The Thursday night Food Truck gatherings spearheaded by our What’s Up Downtown Orinda leaders in concert with our Planning Director Drummond Buckley shows what we can do when we work together and how much we Orindans

value the opportunity to be together,” she said.

Miller believes that downtown housing is necessary and she is committed to doing the hard work to analyze impacts of more people living downtown on things like traffic, emergency evacuation, parking, parks, our library and schools. “State intervention into land use means the city has to be diligent in utilizing the tools that are available, such as utilization of objective design standards to retain and enhance the look of downtown.”

Malkani said that she has seen little downtown development during her 16 years living in Orinda, but finally that is changing. “I know many Orinda residents join me in their excitement to see our downtown become a walkable, connected, vibrant community space,” she said. We should move forward with the Downtown Precise Plan’s vision of updating objective design criteria for mixed-use and residential land uses. I support moving forward sensibly but promptly with smart, sustainable growth that builds on Orinda’s existing splendor to create vibrant, bustling community spaces and housing.

Gee’s first goal is the completion of an excellent Downtown Precise Plan in 2021. Her second goal is for the City to build a much more active, ongoing dialogue with the downtown property owners and the Chamber. “We also want to facilitate industry communication that shares a renewed vision of Orinda without sacrificing the elements that so many residents appreciate.”

Candidate Forums via Zoom, presented by the Orinda Association, will feature Orinda City Council candidates and MOFD candidates 6:30 to 8 p.m. Oct. 8.

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