

Letters to the editor

Gina Dawson for City Council

I am supporting Gina Dawson for Lafayette City Council as I have great confidence in Gina's abilities, work ethic and collaborative style. She has demonstrated her impressive skills through her work with the City Council and PGE on behalf of Save Lafayette Trees and the Lafayette Gas Safety Alliance. Gina does her homework and shows amazing knowledge of whatever the issue is, and however heated the discussion becomes she remains calm and professional.

I agree with her goals for our City, which I am outlining here. For more details please go to Gina's website www.GinaDawson2020.com

Gina will continue to work to hold our public utilities accountable, supports safe bike and pedestrian paths and emergency preparedness.

Gina is an advocate for affordable and inclusive housing opportunities as part of the General Plan update and of monitoring State housing legislation.

Gina will continue to work on protecting our open spaces and tree canopy, and advocates for one or more downtown parks.

Gina will collaborate with the Chamber of Commerce and business community to accelerate business recovery and downtown revitalization.

As a longtime member of Sustainable Lafayette, Gina supports environmental programs and strategies promoting a sustainable community.

Gina Dawson would be a great and hard-working asset to our City as a member of the Lafayette City Council.

Alison Hill
Lafayette resident for 51 years

Downtown development opportunities

In the 25 years since I first laid eyes on Orinda, not much has changed! When my family moved here and I started attending Glorietta Elementary, Theatre Square was newly redeveloped. The new library and redevelopment of its former site are the only significant changes I have seen since.

There's nothing really wrong with Orinda having stayed so sleepy, except it's a bit out of touch with what's happening in our region. In these last 25 years, the Bay Area has grown by almost 1.5 million residents! Just looking down the road to Lafayette or Walnut Creek, you can see dozens of new shops and apartment buildings have popped up gradually over the years, creating vibrant downtowns. On the topic of housing in particular, all we know is we have not been building enough! In the past 10 years, you can't get away from headlines about the new extremes of California's housing supply shortage.

With a new study showing 52% of 18- to 29-year-olds are now living with their parents, it couldn't be a better time to update Orinda's zoning plans to allow for more diverse housing options along with commercial development. We need housing for these younger folks and for empty nesters looking to downsize. We should have those options in our downtown close to the BART station and shops. We should also be asking ourselves whether the justifications for not allowing new housing construction downtown are actually based on a legacy of racism that pushes new infill housing development into more disadvantaged communities, causing displacement.

Ultimately, downtown Orinda will not stay sleepy forever. With proposed state legislation such as this year's SB50, it's only a matter of time before BART station neighborhoods are automatically "up-zoned." Developers won't have to wait to hear what locals think. If Orinda residents want to take control of how their town will look, they should take the time now to implement thoughtful guidelines for how that denser infill should look and incorporate strategies to meet local needs while also creating a more beautiful, inclusive, and walkable place with new homes and businesses.

Thomas Gonzales
Orinda

A vote for David Stromberg

I support David Stromberg for Moraga Town Council. I have worked with David on the Planning Commission for three years and know he has the necessary governing experience, objectivity, and analytical skills to be an effective Councilmember.

David has impressive experience in public service in Moraga. He served on the Design Review Board; is a Moraga Community Foundation Boardmember; and has been the Planning Commission Chairperson for two years. He provided careful analysis on the Citizens Advisory Committee to finalize the MCSP.

As a business mediator and attorney with expertise in dispute resolution, David approaches contentious issues by carefully listening to and identifying the merits of competing perspectives and then working collaboratively to achieve a consensus. His unique skill will be an invaluable contribution to the Council as he tackles the complicated issues and projects in Moraga.

As a Councilmember, David will devote himself to promoting the core values that we all support: maintaining our beautiful open space; ensuring managed growth; pursuing sound fiscal management policies; and protecting our safety.

I urge all Moragans to visit David's

website to learn and appreciate the difference he will make as our Councilmember.

www.stromberg2020.com
Brenda Luster
Planning Commission Vice Chair and Moraga resident

Measure R is NOT a Road Tax

Measure R is a general tax, and by law cannot be specified. The Orinda city council plan and the campaign literature, which by law CAN state the intentions, is to front-load fire prevention for the first five years, with roads/storm drains maintained. As road work needs increase and needs for heavy duty fire prevention decrease, priorities would be rebalanced. Written assurances from Mayor Gee and Councilmember Fay state this. A citizen oversight committee will insure the revenue is spent as intended. Saferorinda.org outlines the plan.

We see, breathe and read every day that wildfires are increasing. As a result the homeowners insurance market is collapsing. Insurance companies now look at whole neighborhoods and towns. AND they are looking at infrastructure to determine the potential for wildfire survival. Measure R is actually an integrated fire prevention plan that will give us some ability to fight back against the insurance companies.

There are two opponents to Measure R: the No-tax people and the private roads people. I don't know any of the no-tax folks. I have spoken with the private road people extensively. Their 5-year parcel tax would raise just over \$1 million per year, result in less work in the early years than the sales tax can accomplish and provides no ongoing revenue to maintain the initial fuel reduction. A special election would be required at an extra cost to the city. Because property taxes are collected and distributed periodically, that money won't show up until December 2021 at the earliest. Why go to all this extra trouble when this general tax would be more comprehensive, raise more money and make it available faster?

The private road people have been at all the city council meetings when the general tax was discussed. They know very well it cannot be specified but insist on calling it a road tax. They refuse to acknowledge a citizen oversight committee is part of the tax and say they cannot trust the council despite the current 0.5% general tax having been spent exactly as the city council promised.

Melanie Light
Orinda

Why I'm voting for Measure R

As a member of the Board of Directors of the Contra Costa Taxpayer's Association I pay a lot of attention when a sales tax increase is on the ballot. So when I heard that Orinda wants to increase the City sales tax from half cent to one cent, I did research. I learned that Richmond and Antioch already have a one-cent sales tax. So does Moraga, where many Orinda residents go to shop at TJ Maxx, and to the nursery and the hardware stores. The Cities that have kept a one half-cent sales tax are the cities with lots of retail shopping centers, unlike Orinda. I learned that Orinda receives the sales tax income when an Orinda resident buys a car even though the car dealership is located outside of Orinda. It only makes sense to keep that sales tax inside Orinda, where it can be put to use improving our storm drains, enhancing fire safety, and keeping our local roads repaired. I think Orindans know best when it comes to tax issues impacting Orinda, and I am voting yes on Measure R for a safer Orinda.

Joe Fitzpatrick
Orinda

Measure R & MOFD Election!

I have personally seen the destruction of wildfires in California. The melted pools of metal all that remain of a car, bottles of wine exploded and shattered on a leveled suburban plot in Coffey Park, the remnants of a wedding celebration interrupted by wild fire, the coroner's van parked at a pile of ashes that was once a home and workers sifting through the ashes tragically looking for bone fragments, the remains of a resident who could not flee the advancing wild fires.

I had an awakening as a journalist as I photographed the devastation and it came home to me that these disasters could happen to me and my family. I quickly became active in our neighborhood firewise organization, attended City Council meetings, and became immersed in the world of MOFD when I heard our Fire Chief articulate the issues of wildfire in Orinda. What a rude awakening.

We Orindans' need to choose wisely in this upcoming election, we need to be seriously informed. I am supporting YES on Measure R, and the MOFD incumbents Craig Jorgen and John Jex for the board. John and Craig have fought for the interests of homeowners and residents. They both supported the summer chipper program, while three of the other MOFD board members voted NO, quashing this important program to eradicate dangerous fuel load. These other board members also voted NO to increasing the fire prevention budget despite a surplus of money. We love our first responders, and we need community members and supporters of wildfire prevention like Craig and John who also have experience reading sophisticated MOFD balance sheets to make sure more

funds go to fire prevention NOW! I believe that a Yes vote on Measure R will make funds flow quickly for fuel mitigation in Orinda. A half cent more on a purchase is worth knowing that my family is safer today than I was last week.

This is a critical election for Orinda & Moraga Wildfire safety. Let's keep our community safe and vote as if our lives depend on it.
Ken Light
Orinda

Re-Elect John JEX and Craig JORGENS to the Fire District Board

We are fortunate to have great people representing us on the Moraga-Orinda Fire District Board (MOFD) who stand up for our best community interests, not controlled by special interests. John Jex and Craig Jorgens are both strong supporters of wildfire prevention, fiscal prudence, protecting affordable insurance rates and maintaining the safety of our small towns. John and Craig both deserve your vote this November. Join me in supporting Jex and Jorgens for the MOFD Board. For more info and to express your support, go to VoteJex.com and VoteJorgens.com.
Sue Severson
Orinda

Yes on Measure R

I am writing to say that my husband and myself are in favor of Measure R. It is a modest sales tax (1%) that will do so much for Orinda. It renews the expiring sales tax used to repair the roads and adds another 1/2 cent. This sales tax will do many things for Orinda. It will help to maintain the roads now that they are repaired, improve wildfire safety for the first few years by controlling brush and vegetation growth, and also is slated to repair aging storm drains to prevent flooding and sinkholes. The sales tax does not occur on groceries and medicine so it reduces the burden on residents on fixed incomes.

Please join us in supporting Measure R. It will be used for making Orinda safer which is something all of us can get behind.
Bob and Cheri Etheredge
Orinda

No on Measure R

Measure R, which, if passed by Orinda's voters on Nov. 3, 2020, is seriously flawed. The measure will, if enacted, raise the Orinda sales tax from 8.75% to 9.25%. Here are the main objections:

- No Guarantee: There is no guarantee that the \$2.4 million expected to be raised annually (\$48 million over 20 years) will be spent on wildfire control. A future city council may decide to spend the funds on salaries and pensions. On Sept. 16, 2020, the Lamorinda Weekly reported that Orinda management employees will "receive a 3% cost-of-living salary adjustment ..." Measure R should have been drafted so that all funds collected go to wildfire control.

- Tax Avoidance: One can avoid the sales-tax increase associated with Measure R by shopping in neighboring Lafayette, where the sales tax is 8.25%. One can also shop online, where sales taxes may be lower. Some online retailers do not charge -- or say they do not charge -- a sales tax. There are an estimated 10,000 sales-tax jurisdictions in the United States. Not every retailer has the ability to keep track of so many sales-tax jurisdictions. In California's Modoc County, the sales tax is 7.25%.
- Boycott and Job-Killing: Organized or not organized, certain shoppers will boycott Orinda merchants. If and when sales drop, merchants can and may lay off employees. Currently, unemployment rates are at levels not seen since the Great Depression of the 1930's. Measure R can and will lead to job-killing.

The Orinda City Council should never have voted to put Measure R on the November 2020 ballot.

The council should think more carefully about supporting tax plans that may not work and also kill jobs. The council should support a measure that deals strictly with wildfire control and nothing else.
Richard Colman
Orinda

Measure R is insufficient

Many people who are endorsing Measure R, a sales tax that doubles our present sales tax and will last for 20 years, twice as long as our present sales tax, are very rightly concerned about Orinda's need for fire prevention. But only a small part (\$1.5-\$3 million over the next 3-4 years) of this 60-million-dollar tax will go toward this urgent problem. This amount is insignificant in light of the overwhelming fire season that we have just begun to experience, and these funds will not be available until the 2021 fire season.

Orinda needs a small, short-term parcel tax dedicated to fire prevention, not a general tax that the city can use for any purpose it deems necessary. The city tells us that the new revenues will have oversight, but the legal fact is that city cannot be held liable for changing its mind, and in these precarious times, and over the next 20 years, we are certain to have many new City Council members who will face an unknown range of problems requiring funds.

The city's recent poll indicated that a whopping 86% of respondents named fire

prevention as our city's greatest need. A small (\$150 annually) parcel tax for 5 years would provide the city with just over \$5 million dollars, significantly more than the city says it will spend out of this new massive tax.

Our present sales tax doesn't expire until 2023, so there is no need for the city to rush into a new tax for roads and drains. It makes more sense for the city to put a parcel tax on the ballot (in March with revenues also available for our 2021 fire season). Then we would have the security of knowing that the funds could go only toward fire prevention. We would also continue to have our present sales tax revenues maintain our roads until 2023, by which time we hope the pandemic will have subsided and the economy stabilized. We can then vote for a new sales tax in 2022.

Fire prevention is too important to rely on a general tax.
Kathleen Finch
Orinda

Vote for David Stromberg for Moraga Town Council

I have had the opportunity to observe David Stromberg in action in his capacity both as a member of the Moraga Design Review Board (and its Chair) and the Moraga Planning Commission (and as its Chair the past two years) and am impressed by his thorough and fair review of issues.

David is a strong proponent of maintaining open spaces and of working in a collaborative manner with Orinda and Lafayette to assure safe evacuation of our Town. His stance of fiscal responsibility and pro-business approach will serve the town well, as will his forward approach to future development.

David has demonstrated his responsiveness to the input of the community and will be an excellent addition to the Council. I ask you to join me in casting your vote for David Stromberg for Town Council.
Bobbie Preston
Moraga

Measure R will not make Orinda safe

Orinda's Measure R Sales Tax is being sold as a fire prevention tax. Consumer warning: IT IS NOT. If you are looking for a fire prevention tax, reject Measure R and demand a short term parcel tax dedicated to removing the wildfire fuel load from our hillsides.

Measure R is a twenty year tax which will generate \$60 million of revenue over its lifetime. The only part of this tax that the City has suggested will be spent on fire prevention is \$1.5-3 million over the first three to four years.

And will they even spend that? This tax would be a General Tax, meaning that after it is voted in the City Council has the power to spend it in any way it feels is appropriate. Right now, the existing sales tax is generating \$100,000 a month. How much of that is the City spending on fire prevention? None. How long has the City been aware that Orinda is a high fire risk area and part of that risk is excess vegetation? For decades. How much over that time period has it spent on fire prevention? Virtually nothing.

Now we are to believe that if we increase our sales tax from \$1.2 million per year to \$2.4 million, all of a sudden the City is going to start spending money on fire prevention. Not a lot, but some (about half of what the current tax is bringing in.)

We need to vote in a tax with teeth. A tax that the City HAS TO spend on fire prevention. Not one that they can spend on fire prevention if they feel like it and for as long as they feel like it. Again, it is important to note that General Tax money can be spent any way the City deems appropriate. Should some other financial crisis come up, this sales tax money can be diverted from fire prevention to whatever is the immediate need that the then current City Council members deem important.

Please join me and others in rejecting Measure R. If this 20-year tax passes, we may never see a dedicated sum of money that is specially set aside for fire prevention only. We citizens of Orinda do not need a promise. We need a guarantee that fire prevention will be taken seriously, with no chance that the money can be used for something else not as important.

Thank you,
Bob Daoro
Orinda

A Moraga Champion in David Stromberg

For four years, I have worked with David on the Moraga Design Review Board and Planning Commission. During this time, David has shown a genuine interest in the values of our community, in quality construction within our community, and the safety and happiness of our community members.

David has already served our town well in these two capacities: I strongly recommend that we allow him to continue serving our town well as a Council Member. His positions on Open Space, Public Safety, Downtown Success, and Fiscal Management are clear, compatible, and well aligned with the stated values and goals of our Town.
Karl Davis
Moraga

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