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Letters to the editor

The unfairness persists

Measure R says that road and storm drain maintenance are "essential City services". And yet 30 miles of Orinda's roads, and their associated storm drains, are denied this essential public service. Thirty miles of publicly used but privately maintained roads are identical to the thirty miles of publicly repaired and maintained cul-de-sacs. With the passage of Measure R, privately maintained road residents are again being forced to subsidize public road residents and are not allowed to benefit equivalently.

We all depend on all our roads for evacuations. We all depend on all our drains to prevent landslides and flooding. We all will pay the same measure R taxes. We all have paid past taxes and bonds to repair roads. Why has Orinda forsaken over 20% of its residents? It is time to stop finding creative ways of blaming the victims to justify this. The status quo is clearly unjust. We are all equally vulnerable members of one community. With our new measure R funds the City Council and Measure R commission can address this inequity. An economically viable process to allow openly publicly used privately maintained roads to become publicly maintained must be found.

Charles Porges

Orinda

5G needs more discussion

At the March 10 Meeting, the Moraga Town Council discussed a Master Licensing Agreement with Verizon that will streamline the application process for the installation of dozens of Fifth Generation (5G) small cell wireless facilities (cell towers) in Moraga. Currently our municipal ordinance is not sufficient to ensure a responsible implementation of this technology as it does not prioritize the best interests of residents.

An example of this potential outcome: After such an agreement was signed in Oakland, two different site developers submitted plans for 70+ cell towers EACH, in a 1 1/2 square mile area! Do we want this kind of proliferation of cell towers in Moraga?

The current Moraga Municipal Code (Chapter 8.144) which governs the deployment of these towers is extraordinarily weak compared to other cities, including Orinda and Lafayette. There is absolutely no public notification or transparency in our code. There are no restrictions on tower placement or hard data required to justify tower sites, no minimum setback from homes or schools, no liability insurance requirements, and no oversight to ensure that radiation emissions are within FCC guidelines.

We need to revise our ordinance immediately to reflect a proactive, well-informed planning strategy to ensure responsible placement of this technology. We should contract with an attorney who specializes in this field to advise on this matter and include provisions that Lafayette, Orinda, and many other California cities have adopted. The Council should not sign this, or any, MLA until we have done this.

Visit www.cal4safetech.org/

moraga or contact us at Safer5gMoraga@gmail.com for more information.

Amanda (Malmquist) Conrad

Moraga

De-stress activities not for everyone

I'd just like to comment on Vera Kochan's March 3 article on "SMC Students De-Stressing." As a parent of an SMC student, I can tell you that the 650 students allowed to de-stress on campus live on campus. The few thousand students who live off campus do not have accessibility to those services. The college has not allowed students, living off campus, to even set foot on campus, since the start of this pandemic (or thereabouts). They have made exception for D1 athletes (who also enjoy the luxury of weekly Covid testing, like the on-campus students do) and my only guess for that is that those sports potentially draw in future enrollment. Had the college required on-campus students to stay on campus, I could imagine agreeing with their decision. Unfortunately, that is not the case. Again, if I had to make assumptions, I would believe the extra room and board expenses that fund the college provide these students these perks. I can tell you that the off-campus students are suffering the same stress over this horrific pandemic. I expected more from a small, private school.

Darren Chilimidos

An SMC Dad

Housing concerns in Lafayette

There have been an abundance of building projects within walking distance to Lafayette's downtown and BART station either recently completed or currently in-progress. It strikes me as disingenuous to read City Manager Niroop Srivasta's claim last week that the city needs the Terraces of Lafayette project to fulfill its affordable housing requirements. With all of the housing units that have recently gone up or are in progress at Woodbury, the former Celia's site, behind Pet Food Express and elsewhere within a half mile of the BART station, how has Lafayette ended up with a 255 unit deficit in its affordable housing quota?

Worsening sprawl should not be the price for affordable housing

Ms. Srivasta, like Mr. Falk before her and our Planning Commissioner Gregg Wolff seem to measure their success by population growth in Lafayette. Instead, their performance should be measured by how balanced are our local mobility (e.g. the last mile connecting BART to the outlying neighborhoods), school capacity and other aspects of growth. By that measure, I feel they have failed and continue to fail Lafayette. Much has been said in the Bay Area about the need to advance transit-friendly affordable housing and much of it I can accept. But in reality highly profitable luxury condominium projects have flourished close to BART while the Terraces project, which is at least a mile and half away from the BART station, is cited to fulfill the shortfall. The Terraces site is not a comfortable walking distance for BART commuters; it will be dumping hundreds of daily car trips on increasingly congested highway bypasses (Deer Hill Road and Pleasant Hill Road). I'm not opposed to affordable housing or bringing greater equity to Lafayette. But I am opposed to unhindered development that exacerbates the sprawl and imbalances that have encroached on Lafayette; Ms. Srivasta's kowtowing to developers at the broader community's expense and self-serving justifications for the City's failure to meet its quotas with other projects more proximate to the BART station is reprehensible.

Ian Kallen
Lafayette

How our Orinda works

On or before December 1st our city Councilmember Fay wanted an accelerated Orinda chipper program "to have an impact on the next fire season". The council agreed and budgeted funds. It was intended as a fire prevention activity that was to occur before the measure R commission had its first meeting. Today, the earliest we can expect a chipper is in June, when fire season starts.

What happened? I was told in a joint city-MOFD meeting that "it's complicated" by our city manager Salomon. In the subsequent city council meeting he clarified what he meant. He said that a) the city had to negotiate a contract with MOFD which involves lawyers. b) Ordering a chipper has a 3 month lead time. c) It has still not been decided whether to lease it or buy it. And d) The crew will need a six week training program after the equipment arrives.

Why is it so complicated? Because city staff clearly stated that they didn't have the required expertise! Had the city not involved MOFD it might have hired a tree service company that could have started in January (as is often done by MOFD). Or the city could have decided to buy the chipper outright and hired a trainable crew, possibly with one extra city staff person to manage the chipping program, with some MOFD advice. Really, how hard is it to order the equipment that MOFD tells you to, and train two guys to chip wood? Surely not more than five months, which would be an April start.

Instead of doing whatever was necessary to accelerate the program the city chose to spend the upfront money on lawyers and contracts because the city staff said they have to delegate the job to the "expertise" of MOFD. MOFD will still have to get the equipment, and then train the crew, after the lawyers, City Council and MOFD Board all agree.

That's politics and your government in (accelerated) action.

Let's hope we have our chipper before September.

Charles Porges
Orinda

Downtown development in Orinda

The City of Orinda has been patiently, carefully - a bit languorously - working on Downtown revitalization. Good on ya', City!

Since Covid, downtown is more important than ever. Livable, walk-able, relaxing outdoor spaces more precious. My older buddies and I meet for outdoor palaver and coffee right outside Caff♦ Teatro, next to Orinda Way. Today, Friday, the area sun-splashed, almost all tables filled. Skipping 3-year-olds, moms and dads, retired folks, delivery person, walkers, dogs.

Quiet vibrance.

But, I'm hard pressed to think of another such place in Orinda.

With coffee cup in hand, I'd respectfully remind the Council, the Planning Commission, the new City Manager, Directors, staff - that most Orindans will embrace more life - more zip - downtown. (Our past elections so demonstrate.)

We all want to leave the car, stroll, meet old, new friends, read a book, sip coffee, someday a wine spritzer .knosh, . shop.breathe fresh air, gaze the beautiful green hills.

Most of my cohort will not come to Council meetings, write letters. But, we are here, we support you, we wish for good things to happen.

So, humbly urged: step it up.

There are naysayers who will bend your ear. God love `em. Who profess to want progress, but at the same time toss roadblocks in the way. Perhaps here and there, some value added.

Keep ears open to all. But eye on the ball, and the wheels of change - good change - rolling forward. Toward a lively downtown.

David Anderson
Orinda

Reach the reporter at: info@lamorindaweekly.com

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