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Miramonte students return to city council to urge ban on Styrofoam

By Sora O'Doherty

After clarifying that the Contra Costa County ban on Styrofoam takeout food containers only applies to the unincorporated areas of the county, a group of students intent on banning such containers in Orinda returned to ask the city council again to consider such a ban. In addition to the county ban, 10 cities in the county have also instituted such bans.

Mayor Amy Worth asked to meet with members of the student group via Zoom, and frequent contributor to the public forum, Nick Waranoff, a retired attorney, volunteered to help the students draft a proposed ordinance for the council.

The group of students from Miramonte High School addressed the city council on various aspects of the problem. Devon Bradley talked about the county ordinance, and the other 10 cities in the county that have already banned polystyrene food containers, commonly called by the trade name, Styrofoam.

The Miramonte Environmental Club has been running a community-funded project launched last July to promote environmental sustainability and help restaurants during the pandemic. Since restaurants have been conducting their business solely through takeout, they are having to purchase more takeout supplies and most of these materials are made from plastic. The group has been donating compostable takeout supplies to restaurants since July, and has raised over \$1,100 dollars so far.

Sheng Shu, who read from the CCC Ordinance, suggested that the county legislation can be used as inspiration for Orinda and said that the students were working hard on draft legislation that should be ready by the next city council meeting.

Leo Cardozo informed the council of the results of an informal survey conducted by the students on Feb. 6 when they were delivering environmentally friendly food packaging to 21 restaurants in Orinda. Of the 21 restaurants surveyed, only four reported that they are still using Styrofoam. Those four restaurants are Europa, Baja Cali, Serika, and Sushi Island. Cardozo said that there might be a couple more, but the actual number of restaurants affected by the ban would be small because most have already stopped using Styrofoam takeout material.

Joseph Manio talked about how to implement the ban and incentivize compliance. He told the council that the project can supply local restaurants with compostable containers through the rest of the pandemic, having recently obtained support from Sustainable Lafayette.

Miramonte sophomore Alexis DeBusschere, the granddaughter of Dan DeBusschere, a frequent attendee at city council meetings, informed the council that Styrofoam is not recyclable anywhere around the world, and talked about the deleterious effects of the material, which winds up being ingested by fish and humans. Worth explained that the council could hear comments but could not legally discuss the issue until it is placed on a city council agenda, but she invited the students to arrange to meet with her in a Zoom meeting.

Waranoff asked the students to be sure to include food trucks operating in Orinda in the draft proposed ordinance because, he said, the city has already given them a very large advantage over brick and mortar restaurants.

More information on the student project, is available at heartorinda.org.

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