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A lone flag flies on a hillside home in the Bluffs.

Photos Vera Kochan

William and Roberta Klaproth decorate their Moraga yard with American flags for the Fourth of July (far right).

Fly flags to show patriotism on Fourth, not fireworks

By Vera Kochan

Another year of drought brings warnings from local authorities about being fire-wise. Conditions are bad enough without adding Fourth of July fireworks into the mix.

With the scaling-down of sanctioned fireworks displays due to social-distancing, some celebrators are looking for ways to add a “bang” to their festivities by using what has traditionally been touted as “safe and sane” fireworks.

According to FireworksLand.com, “The term ‘Safe and Sane’ was popularized in the late 1950s and 1960s to refer to a new generation of consumer

fireworks. These new fireworks were thought to be safer than the ones sold in previous decades, which did include very large firecrackers and a wide variety of other devices such as rockets and aerial shells.” The newly classified fireworks are not supposed to fly or explode and are sold by legal vendors, however the Contra Costa County Fire Protection District reminds residents that all fireworks, even those marked “Safe and Sane” are illegal in the county.

“The only safe and sane approach to fireworks in Contra Costa County is to simply not use them,” noted ConFire Chief Lewis T. Broschard III in a June 10 statement. “They are uncontrollable and dangerous, illegal, and their use – especially in our current

drought conditions – is irresponsible posing the very real possibility of causing wildland fires that could easily destroy homes and threaten lives in this time of critically high fire risk.

To that end, the Contra Costa County Board of Supervisors adopted a new fireworks ordinance (Chapter 44-2 of the County Ordinance Code) on June 8 strengthening regulations regarding the possession, manufacture, sale, use, and discharge of fireworks in the unincorporated areas of the county.

The new ordinance declares that property and vessel owners are responsible for ensuring that the use of illegal fireworks does not occur on their property.

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Could a miracle save Orinda from PG&E transmission towers?

By Sora O'Doherty

Orinda's Downtown Subcommittee heard a tale of overwhelming obstacles to moving or undergrounding the unsightly Pacific Gas and Electric Company transmission towers that run right through downtown Orinda on June 10. But, buried in the doom and gloom was a tiny spark of hope, fanned by someone with experience of removing towers from Orinda. The meeting was attended, on Zoom, by Mark van Gorder and Vic Baker, who are stepping into the very large shoes vacated by the death of longtime community relations executive Tom Guarino, who died at the end of last year from complications of COVID-19.

Baker and van Gorder came prepared to discuss the issue of whether anything could be done to relieve Orinda of the burden caused by the transmission towers, which have the greatest impact on the Village side of the city.

The downtown subcommittee consists of city council members Inga Miller

and Nick Kosla. Kosla took the lead at the meeting, as the two rotate running the meetings. The benefits and challenges of either placing the wires underground or moving them to a different location were reviewed. Undergrounding would eliminate the visual impact of the towers, and potentially could reduce the risk of fire. But the cost of undergrounding is huge, and even if the lines were undergrounded, structures could still not be built over the lines or the setbacks. Moving the lines could result in more open space for greater development potential, and might reduce the visual impact of the towers in downtown, although they would still have an impact where they were moved to. While the cost would be less, it would still be very large. Other concerns include increased fire risks and concerns from residents, in addition to the fact that topography grading might be required for the towers, which might also touch lands owned by the East Bay Municipal Utility District or in the unincorporated part of Contra Costa

County where it borders Orinda.

The restrictions are that only landscaping and parking is allowed under the towers. No elevation is permitted, not even for a parking structure, nor a golf course. The same restrictions would apply even if the lines were undergrounded.

The costs of undergrounding the lines or moving the towers would be borne by the city. When a number of towers were moved from the valley that is now Wilder, the developer OGLLC paid to have the towers moved to the adjacent hill. Asked after the meeting, Bruce Yamamoto of OGLLC said that he recalled that the project cost over \$10 million.

The PG&E representatives were reluctant to give an estimate of costs without having all the parameters, but said that generally the cost of undergrounding transmission lines, which are distinct from distribution lines, runs to about \$100,000 to \$250,000 per linear foot, and might be even higher depending on the circumstances.



Photo Sora O'Doherty

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