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Sustained effort by Miramonte students results in polystyrene ban in Orinda

By Sora O'Doherty



An idea first brought to the Orinda City Council in January of 2020 has resulted in the adoption of an ordinance regulating the use of polystyrene food containers in the city, effective Aug. 20 of this year. The students, including Devon Bradley, Sheng Shu, Leo Cardoza, Joseph Manio, and Alexis DeBusschere, are members of the Miramonte Environmental Club that has been running a community-funded project launched in July of 2019 to promote environmental sustainability and help restaurants.

Mayor Amy Worth thanked senior planner Adam Foster for working closely with the students to bring the ordinance to fruition, and proclaimed that the students are now ready to go to Congress and advocate for important environmental issues.

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City manager David Biggs and Foster presented the ordinance to the council and explained how it has been crafted to address Orinda-special issues and to incorporate feedback from the council at earlier stages in the process. The law is based on similar laws adopted by Contra Costa County and some 13 out of 20 county jurisdictions. However, Orinda does not, for example, have a prison or hospitals within its limits.

Foster explained that the new law will substantially reduce the use of polystyrene food packaging in Orinda, but does contain exemptions necessary for pre-packaged food, ice chests, and raw meat trays. Although the law does apply to city facilities, it does not apply to clubs, including swim clubs, or congregations. The city's parks and recreation department will amend facility lease agreements to incorporate the new law. Although restaurants will have until Feb. 1, 2022 to comply with the new law, it will become effective on Aug. 20, 2021, at which time city facilities will require compliance. Parks and Recreation Director Todd Trimble assured the council that the city will be ready to comply by the August date.

The ordinance contains regulations governing polystyrene food service use. Polystyrene is often sold as the brand name Styrofoam. The regulations apply to restaurants, food trucks, and farmers' markets, but exempts clubs, schools, and residential care facilities. The regulation also requires that polystyrene utensils only be provided upon the request of a person receiving food and would therefore not be the default procedure.

The first reading of the ordinance was on July 6, with discussion by the council. The second reading and final adoption of the ordinance was on the council's July 20 consent calendar.

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