

Letters to the editor

Orinda's future

My wife and I feel very fortunate to have lived in Orinda for nearly 30 years now. I used to feel Orinda needed to transform itself into something closer to Lafayette or Walnut Creek, but I've come to agree with the sentiments expressed by Mr. Porges and Mr. Waranoff in their recent letters to the editor. While it would be nice to have a bigger, more commercial tax base to increase revenue, I'm very content to see Orinda make much more incremental improvements and remain a primarily residential community. I also strongly feel that state mandated housing should be multi-family and confined to the downtown area and not scattered throughout outlying neighborhoods in the form of ADUs in backyards as has happened in my own neighborhood much to its detriment.

Gary Johnson
Orinda

Monarch Garden at Rancho Laguna Park

It is cause for huge celebration

that the gorgeous 6+ foot metal monarch butterfly and the charming mosaic caterpillar have been installed at the Monarch Habitat and Demonstration Garden at Rancho Laguna Park at 2101 Camino Pablo, Moraga (see story on page A1). What a way to cap off 2021!! This year-long project of the Moraga Garden Club has been a true community effort, with the Town of Moraga, the Moraga Park Foundation, the Moraga Rotary and Kiwanis and Lions, the Lafayette Garden Club, Orinda Garden Club, Montelindo Garden Club, Orinda Junior Garden Club, Boy and Girl Scouts, Campolindo Leos, Andy Boggeri and AB Construction, Diamond K, Moraga Garden Center, Orchard Nursery, Orchard Supply Hardware, Mc-Donnell Nursery, Scott Carr and a host of private individuals assisting the Moraga Garden Club in bringing this project to the finish line. A few final tasks remain, including installing 5 more benches surrounding the garden and a bit more decomposed granite and flagstone surrounding the spectacular WINGS sculpture. This gift of a generous local donor is already

being used as intended...children interacting with it, learning about monarchs, and having their picture taken with the beautiful butterfly. Special thanks go to the patient and always helpful Town Park and Recreation Department: Breyana Brandt, Director Park and Recreation, Kyle Salvin, Public Works/Parks Maintenance Manager, Public Works Staff: Ruben Ochoa, Jose Limon, Raul Serano; they have been there for the project from the very start and without them we could not have finished the project. We had many butterfly, bird and bee visitors in 2021, including a few monarchs. Soon the early spring flowering plants will be blooming and hopefully even more monarchs will find this slice of heaven. Come enjoy the art, the bubbling fountain and the hardy winter pollinators. If you would like to help with the on-going maintenance of the garden, want to arrange a group docent tour, or want more information: MoragaGardenClub.com/moraga-for-monarchs
Bobbie Preston, Chair Moraga Garden Club Moraga for Monarchs Project
Moraga

Correction: In the Dec. 22 issue of *Lamorinda Weekly*, the final portion of the Letter to the Editor that was submitted in the text of an email by former Moraga mayor Mike McCluer was hidden in the body of the text and so was inadvertently cut off in the published version; we apologize for this error.

The missing text is as follows: "Renata was President of the Moraga Community Foundation while the Fritzky embezzlement was occurring with poor oversight.

I voted for Steve based on his 20 years of experience on the Planning Commission, Design Review Board, Hacienda Foundation Board. A Kiwanis leader and Past President, three years of excellent Town Council service. Steve routinely reaches out to Moraga residents and is a champion for them getting results.

2022 is the last year of Steve's current term. Is this some type of personal, vin-

dictive agenda to deny Steve the Mayorship which he has earned? I certainly hope not.

It's ironic that after taking this action Sos insisted all "take the high road". How completely hypocritical to say that after blindsiding Steve and defying tradition.

This action by Sos and Onoda creates and increases the distrust, divisiveness and dysfunctionality in our Town Government.

200+ negative reactions by residents speaks volumes.

No leader should ever put their individual interests above the residents.

I am calling for Renata Sos to do the right thing and step down as Mayor."

While it is never our intent to leave off portions of submitted material, we must reiterate our standing that Letters to the Editor must not include personal attacks or implied claims of impropriety without documentation to support such claims.

Opinions in Letters to the Editor are the express views of the writer and not necessarily those of the *Lamorinda Weekly*. All published letters will include the writer's name and city/town of residence - we will only accept letters from those who live in, or own a business in, the communities comprising *Lamorinda* (please give us your phone number for verification purposes only). Letters must be factually accurate and be 350 words or less; letters of up to 500 words will be accepted on a space-available basis. Visit www.lamorindaweekly.com for submission guidelines. Email: letters@lamorindaweekly.com; Regular mail: *Lamorinda Weekly*, P.O.Box 6133, Moraga, CA 94570

What Park Theater renovation means for downtown Lafayette

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"CinemaSF demonstrated strengths in each of these areas and the Board found them to be responsive and keen to work in collaboration with the board to establish our vision for the Park Theater."

Board member Tracey Farrell suggests CinemaSF, in addition to having a solid reputation for establishing and managing viable and sustainable practices to run financially successful independent theaters, is "well-aligned" with the Lafayette community's values. "Not only are their films fun, they know that first-run films are a necessity, that 40% of a theater's intake comes from concessions, not ticket sales, and they were completely in tune with the community's best interests in that regard."

She sites, among other programming priorities, films for families with young children, movies with appeal to the senior community, provocative films that deal with diversity and equity or economic and social injustice or the natural environment and will be tied to community conversations, and special programs geared for audiences with particular needs such as people in the autism spectrum or those people who have Alzheimer's for whom movies provide unique, appreciable, science-backed benefits.

Lifson says CinemaSF was well suited to operate the Park Theater and rose to the top during the interviews because they were the most transparent in sharing their financials, had a proven record of working with the communities in which they currently have theaters and "even though their theaters are all in SF, they understand the vast difference in demographics and really focus the movie selections for each location."

Included in the Park's redesign is a commercial kitchen, which Farrell says is a vital feature the Park Theater will offer to nonprofits renting the facility for galas and other fundraising purposes. "An important part of what we wanted was to align with people, not compete with them. For example, Dennis Markam, the artistic director at Town Hall Theatre has been a part of TPTT from the beginning. We want to fit in with other businesses, which means we'll do great books stuff with *Lamorinda* bookstores and libraries that can be presented also at Town Hall. Local schools offer another direction: The Park used to show films in sync with students' studies during California History week. With diversity issues and other things today, films are a great way to open up and offer content that leads to discussions."

The Park Theater needs extensive renovations - \$5 million

in repairs and upgrades to meet current building codes and offer the aesthetics to make it commercially viable. "You look at the building and it looks pretty dilapidated," says Farrell. "This is community funded, so we have to be realistic. The best news is that we found in a structural assessment we obtained that it's structurally sound. It's built of solid redwood; built like a tank."

Farrell says TPTT's crown achievement was the enormous community partnership with the city, which shared all prior surveys and studies and the history of preceding groups who had attempted to preserve the theater. "We also had hard work and perseverance from the task force and a community who were extremely supportive and volunteered where they were able. We needed to establish a drum beat so developers knew if they were coming to the city hoping to get the property, they had to look at us."

Parking emerged in surveys and direct feedback as residents' primary concern. Fortunately, that had been anticipated by the board. "I've been on other boards and professional organizations and from the first meetings we were staying online with the community's best interest," says Farrell.

Lifson says, "When the theater was opened 80 years ago there was no parking ordinance. When it closed 16 years

ago it could have reopened within 120 days and it would have been grandfathered in to be used as a theater without increasing the number of parking spaces. That ship left long ago. Then the city initiated a historic overlay district that planned to change the current parking for each of the properties on Plaza Way. This included having each property pay into a fund along with the city to increase the parking allowing all the businesses to share parking. With the purchase of the theater property, which includes a four-plex housing building, they can get closer to achieving that goal."

On the TPTT website under FAQs, the most current information reads: "The City has recently developed a new surface parking lot with 23 spaces within a 5-minute walk of the Park Theater. In addition, TPTT has reached an agreement with the City to re-develop the rear of the property to create additional parking of (approximately) 33 spaces. There are also about 500 spaces - we counted! - within (a quarter)

mile of the Park, which does not include possible street parking, private lot opportunities, nor the LLLC garage. The Park Theater will, of course, continue to be highly accessible by foot traffic, ride share, BART, and County Connection bus service as in the past."

CinemaSF's Adam Bergeron anticipates when the remodeled theater opens in 2023, programs "will start with the most classic/popular movies in each specialty category, then move on to 'deeper cuts' as we see that there is interest."

Having seen with his own eyes during time spent in Lafayette that the city is "tight-knit and welcoming," Bergeron expects to hire completely from within Lafayette and the surrounding areas. "We hope to be a hub of discourse and debate as well as entertainment. We look forward to engaging with the community on a variety of levels."

To learn more about how to donate, visit www.parktheatertrust.org. For information about CinemaSF, visit <https://www.cinemasf.com/>

Lafayette mayor

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The council will continue to work with the Chamber, Lafayette businesses, schools, nonprofits and faith communities to address ongoing concerns related to COVID. "The distribution of ARPA funds is on track thanks to our subcommittee and staff," Gerringer explained. "We will continue to look for other grant opportunities with the help of Townsend Associates. When it's safe to gather, I look forward to working with the Chamber and the Lafayette Community Foundation to introduce a Lafayette Together Community Volunteer Day

that brings us all together to connect while doing good in the community." More details including the date will follow.

Gerringer also commented on the General Plan Advisory Council (GPAC), which is made up of volunteers from throughout the community who have committed to updating the Lafayette General Plan over a 5-year period. "They are one year in and have begun to update the Housing Element, reviewed and drafted an updated mission and vision statement, and worked on the Regional Housing Needs Assessment (RHNA) requirements." The GPAC will present

an update on the Housing Element timeline and the Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing (AFFH) law at a joint meeting of the City Council and Planning Commission at 6 p.m. Jan. 10, Gerringer said.

In summarizing her particular focus, Gerringer says, "My legislative priorities will be to work with my colleagues on the council and across the state to advocate to increase the supply and funding for affordable housing, and to strengthen city-school partnerships. Ongoing efforts include safety around our schools, and matters relating to Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging."

Project Earth recognized

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Chugh says the group has aspirations of pushing beyond no idling practices at schools and toward the passage of a no idling ordinance in the city of Lafayette. "Before this I had never done public speaking. I had no idea about the city council or how any of that works," Chugh says confidently while describing how much she's learned.

Sejal Choksi-Chugh is Raini's mom and serves as

Project Earth's advisor and as the liaison to Sustainable Lafayette. Choksi-Chugh says she's really proud of the kids not only for earning the recognition of an environmental excellence award, which was awarded at the Dec. 13 Lafayette City Council meeting, but for their tenacity, persistence and dedication.

"Climate change is such a huge problem and yet these kids feel enthusiastic and inspired and they want to tackle the problem at a local level,"

Choksi-Chugh says. "It's exciting to work with this group of kids. They're taking their ideas and learning life skills while they work on the problem of climate change. They've learned how to run meetings, make presentations, plan projects and make goals achievable. I think they'll be able to take this experience with them into any future career that they want to have. For their voices to be heard and recognized by the city council has been really rewarding."

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