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## Inga Miller relies upon experience to be an effective vice mayor

By Sora O'Doherty

As she goes into her second term as vice mayor of Orinda, Inga Miller has three big priorities. First, she wants to keep working on responding to the climate emergency, improving the city's fire safety, evacuation routes, and storm drains. She sees a connection between those things, and believes that they define emergency preparedness in Orinda. She is interested in vegetation management to protect the community, and also urges people living in high fire danger areas not to wait for evacuation orders, but to leave as soon as possible if a fire is threatening their community.

Second, she wants to move forward with downtown planning. She feels that everyone has a real sense that the project is moving forward. The city council has been tasked with completing the housing element to find space for many more homes in Orinda, and has combined that task with the project to revitalize the downtown. Miller mentions that the housing element poses a huge challenge, and this time the number of houses the city has to plan for is far greater than in the past. "It's no small task," she says.

High fire areas need to be protected, such as El Toyonal, and the fire chief has some discretion. Downtown planning includes restoration of the creek in downtown Orinda, which Miller says the community supports. Miller will continue her assignment on the downtown subcommittee along with Council Member Nick Kosla, whom she says is a tremendous asset.

The new vice mayor's third priority is continuing the work of integrating new staff. Orinda, like other places, lost a lot of staff members and department heads during the pandemic. Miller said that the new Orinda police chief, Ryan Sullivan, is a great fit and has been doing a lot of good work behind the scenes. Miller says that with a lot of new people has come a wonderful new energy. The city also has a relatively new city manager, David Biggs. New administrative services director Douglas Alessio has begun work less than a month ago.

Miller discussed the job of performing a balancing act in government. For fire safety, one might think it would be good to reduce vegetation to a minimum, but to do so would lose the ecological benefits we gain from trees. She is happy to see dead trees being removed while live trees are kept, and also happy to see that things have gone as well as they have in the Grizzly Peak area. She is also interested in other ecological developments, such as bioswales, landscape features that collect polluted stormwater runoff, soak it into the ground, and filter out pollution.

Drainage issues loom large for the city now. Miller sees wildfires and storm drains as two sides of the same coin. After a fire, the lack of vegetation can cause flooding. Drains erode over time, and many of the drains in Orinda were installed 50 or 60 years ago. Fortunately, most of Orinda is above the flood plain, but it is time to repair the infrastructure, Miller says. After learning the ropes of local government during her first term, Miller sees the upcoming year as one where her time as vice mayor can be effective, taking advantage of her experience to help achieve the goals of the community.

From time to time, Miller says, subcommittee assignments can change, but many believe that council members are more effective if they stay on. Solid waste is one area that benefits from not changing because there is a lot to learn. Miller sits on the JPA along with Council Member Amy Worth.

Although it is hard to feel the vibrancy of downtown now because of the pandemic, Miller says there are signs of life, and she is encouraged that planning is going on behind the scenes. She mentioned that the minipark at the intersection of Camino Pablo and Brookwood is coming together now.

Miller's biggest goal is keeping Orinda as a wonderful and coveted place to live.

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