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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.

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 man-

ager, 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.

City honors garden club for holiday wreaths, Boy Scout volunteers help

By Sora O'Doherty

Boy Scouts from Troop 237 on Jan. 9 assisted the Orinda Garden Club by taking down the 60 wreaths that had brightened downtown Orinda over the holidays, and on Jan. 11, the city council honored the club with a certificate of recognition for the holiday wreath program. In introducing the matter, Mayor Dennis Fay commented that his family had guests in town over the holidays and they were very impressed by the wreaths.

Present on the Zoom meeting to accept the honor were Orinda Garden Club copresidents Linda Thompson and Laura Swaczuk and co-chairs of the wreath program,



Photo Sora O'Doherty

Scout Troop 237, back row, from left: Michael Robinson, Ben Hollerbach, Grayson Bloes, Hayden MacKenzie; front: Louie Windhurst

Shelly Gilligan and Margaret Stahle. Thompson explained that the theme this year is environmental kindness, with an emphasis on recycling and reusing. To that end, she gave a shout out to Scout Troop 237, whose members took down the wreaths and carefully took them apart.

Council Member Amy Worth commented, "I don't think that any museum takes the care that the garden club does in hanging the wreaths." Vice Mayor Inga Miller, who helped the Scouts prepare the wreaths for recycling or reuse at St. Mark's Church on Jan. 9 shared "how special it is to have this beautification that we wouldn't have without the generous support of

the garden club as well as the hours of effort." Miller added, "as one of the members of the recycle smart board, thank you for the extra effort that went into the recycling of the wreaths." The greenery was placed in bins for composting and the wreath frames went to Holly's Homegrown in Lafayette for reuse. Bows were carefully removed for use next year. The only thing that went into the trash were very small zip ties.

The Scouts from Troop 237 who participated were Michael Robinson, Ben Hollerbach, Grayson Bloes, Hayden MacKenzie, and Louie Windhurst, with assistance and driving from their parents.

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City Council Regular Meeting: Tuesday, Feb. 1, 7 p.m. By Teleconference Only Downtown Planning & Housing Element Council Subcommittee Special Meeting Thursday, Jan. 20, 4:30 p.m. By Teleconference Only Planning Commission TBA

Supplemental Sales Tax Oversight Commission Wednesday, Feb. 9, 6:30 p.m. By Teleconference Only