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Ivy Drive crime spree continues; council to consider course of action

By Sora O'Doherty

The Orinda City Council on Jan. 18 took the unusual step of making a matter brought to it in the public forum a matter initiated for its Feb. 1 agenda, going further and saying that it wanted nothing else on that agenda to distract from the issue raised by Ivy Drive resident Adam Reiner. When a resident brings a matter to the attention of the council, but it is not on the agenda, the council is prohibited from acting on it because it has not been publicly noticed. They may make it a matter initiated and instruct staff to place it on the agenda for the very next meeting.

Reiner both submitted written comments and appeared before the council at its Zoom meeting. He reported that "during the week of Jan. 10, the Ivy Drive neighborhood experienced three brazen home burglaries, some of which involved groups of three men breaking into homes. My next-door neighbor was one of the victims last week, even though they had locked their doors, kept lights on, etc. Two blocks away on Beaconsfield, we had a home invasion with three men entering the home. Video indicates that the alarm was triggered, and yet these three individuals seemed unfazed, while they stole family valuables from the home."

Reiner explained that last March several residents of the Ivy Drive neighborhood brought similar concerns to the city council and spoke with then Orinda police chief David Cook, who has since retired. "Coming out of these engagements, our understanding was that the police would be launching a neighborhood watch program." In addition, he said, the police chief committed to providing information on automatic license plate readers that could be deployed to assist the police after a crime. Such cameras are deployed in Wilder. However, "all this fizzled out, and we have no idea why such basic ideas all failed to gain traction."

According to Reiner, "the Ivy Drive area of Orinda has become a crime target like never before, and it's up to the city council to acknowledge the issue and then quickly develop an effective plan to address it." He also asked the city to consider setting up a crime prevention commission, as Lafayette has.

Another resident of the area spoke in support of Reiner. "We are living in fear," she said, "and it's just not okay. We just can't have it like this. Children are at home, parents have to go to the grocery store." She expressed shock that the matter is still under discussion after a year and nothing has been done to address residents' concerns.

Council Member Amy Worth noted that Orinda does have a public safety committee, consisting of herself and Vice Mayor Inga Miller. City manager David Biggs said that the city is currently working on an update, looking back over 2021 and looking forward, focusing on crime statistics and use of force by police officers. That meeting should occur in February or March. He noted that the Orinda police department, like others, has been struggling to fill vacancies, but recently filled two, leaving only one vacancy for a vacation floater. He added that the police department is on top of the Ivy Drive area cases. "It is more than likely looking like an organized ring," Biggs said, but added that he couldn't say more because it is an active investigation. However, additional targeted patrols have been added.

Mayor Dennis Fay said, "This strikes home with all of us. All five council members live in Orinda, and we all feel concerned about this." Council Member Nick Kosla agreed that it should be a matter initiated, and that everything else can take second place so this matter can be addressed.

Unfortunately, the Feb. 1 meeting happened as this issue was going to press. It will be reported in the next issue of the Lamorinda Weekly.

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