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Inga Miller returns as mayor of Orinda

By Sora O'Doherty



Inga Miller says it "feels wonderful" starting her second term as mayor of Orinda with Darlene Gee serving as vice mayor. "We lost three of our council members, and that is challenging and also sad but full of new opportunities." While she is disappointed to not have the previous council members, she is excited to have new members.

New council members Latika Malkani, Brandyn Iverson and Janet Riley were sworn in and began work as city council members on Dec. 13 when Miller and Gee were elected to the top spots following Orinda custom. This is the first time since incorporation that three incumbents have left the city council, with the majority of the council being newly elected members.

Inga Miller Photo Kersti Peter

Miller said, in a recent interview with the Lamorinda Weekly, that it is not the mayor's job to train newly elected city council members. Rather, she and Gee will accompany the new members to attend the New Mayors and Council Members Academy offered by the League of California Cities in Sacramento from Wednesday, Jan. 18 to Friday, Jan. 20 in person. They may also get to know the new mayors and council members of neighboring Lafayette and Moraga if they also attend the event, Miller added.

At the training, attendees can learn about the Brown Act, and learn about ways of working together. Malkani and Iverson already have experience with the Brown Act from their work on the Supplemental Sales Tax Oversight Commission and the Planning Commission, respectively.

Miller noted that, because of the Brown Act, "we can't even answer questions from constituents on the street."

January will also hold the challenge of submitting the Housing Element to the state by the end of the month, and in February the city council will hold a public strategic planning workshop.

Miller says that she doesn't feel like she is stepping into the shoes of departing five-time mayor Amy Worth. "I don't feel like I'm assuming any position of the outgoing council members," she said. "We lose things when council members leave, often irreplaceable things." But, she added, "Each new council member will bring new skill sets. We are losing the past, but ushering in the future."

The new mayor is grateful that Orinda has "always been very civil for the most part, certainly when I have been mayor, much more civil than government at the county, state, or federal level, where there is so much divisiveness. We need to celebrate our rising above that," Miller states, "and do what we can to make it more the norm in our Contra Costa community."

Miller says that she has no aspirations to higher office, "but we interface with the state and federal governments, particularly in the Housing Element," she pointed out. "The state has really put in a lot of rhetoric about cities not wanting to build housing, and as cities we can respond by meeting demands but we can also work to educate our legislatures by going to Sacramento." Miller believes that all politics are local.

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