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Orinda recognizes Black History Month

By Sora O'Doherty

At its Feb. 7 City Council meeting, Orinda adopted a proclamation recognizing February as Black History Month. Read into the record by Mayor Inga Miller, the proclamation acknowledges Black History Month, also known as African American History Month, as an annual celebration and recognition of the tremendous achievements by Black Americans in all aspects of American life and a time for acknowledging their important role in U.S. history.

The proclamation states that the Orinda City Council feels it is important to communicate its support for inclusivity and respect in the city, and that the council en-

courages all members of the community to remember and celebrate the contributions that African Americans have made to the nation as well as the importance of diversity and inclusion in our community, concluding that racial equality must always be a cornerstone of democracy.

In 1926, Carter Goodwin Wilson, a Black historian, established a week to recognize the accomplishments of Black American citizens, which has become one of the cultural landmarks of contemporary America. The second week of February was chosen for the event because it coincided with the birthday of Abraham Lincoln on Feb. 12 and of Frederick Douglass on Feb. 14.

The proclamation noted

that the Orinda Library is proud to celebrate Black History Month with all the Contra Costa libraries, and has partnered with local authors, artists, historians, activists, and regular folks doing extraordinary things to bring some important programs to the community, with live and virtual events that include art exhibits, conversations with poets, and workshops where Black History is taught and shared by those who are experiencing it.

Library Manager Michael Beller, who attended the Zoom meeting, agreed that the Library collection offers several resources describing Black experiences, and if residents seek further information regarding what to read, view, or

listen to, as they recognize Black History Month, the Orinda library staff is happy to provide many reading and listening options. Beller added that he is always happy to answer any questions from the public.

The proclamation spoke to the joint resolution adopted by the city and the school district to adopt a resolution supporting Inclusion, Diversity and Equity in the community. As part of those efforts, the Orinda Union School District has developed a curriculum to celebrate Black History Month highlighting the myriad ways Black Americans have contributed to the fabric of our country, with a focus on different themes and activities for each grade level.

In-person meetings to return next month

By Sora O'Doherty

Following an announcement by California Gov. Gavin Newsom that the COVID-19 state of emergency will end on Feb. 28, the Orinda City Council has concluded that it needs to return to in-person meetings beginning in March. At its meeting on Jan. 17, the city council discussed the possibility of continuing to allow members of the community to attend the meetings via the Zoom conference application. City Attorney Osa Wolff explained the prior rules before COVID and the new rules that might be in effect for future meetings. City Clerk Sheri Smith explained some of the difficulties about hosting hybrid meetings that would have the city council meet in person but allow the public to participate via Zoom.

The state-wide state of emergency that allowed public meetings to be held on Zoom was put in place on Oct. 5, 2021. Since that time, as required by state law, the City Council has determined that they desire to continue remote public meetings and make the necessary findings at least every 30 days.

The staff report noted that, while there are some constraints and obstacles to overcome regarding hybrid meetings, recent changes to the Brown Act have made it easier to utilize a teleconferencing option on an ongoing

basis if certain conditions are met. Many residents and other attendees at City Council meetings may wish to be able to continue to participate remotely as well. Some cities, such as Foster City, have adopted a hybrid meeting policy where council meetings are held in person but participants can attend via Zoom.

Vice Mayor Darlene Gee expressed interest in exploring a hybrid scenario. She also asked, in the event that the council went back to in-person meetings, if streaming on the YouTube platform would be less "clunky" than the previous method of streaming used by the city. Smith said that would be possible, and agreed that it would be a simpler streaming method. She added that two-way participation via Zoom is definitively possible, but may be more difficult and expensive.

The city clerk and the council discussed various possible venues for hybrid meetings. The difficulty, the clerk explained, was the staff time and effort required to set up and take down equipment for a Zoom meeting where the library auditorium is used for many events. The Sarge Littlehale Community Room would be easier, but it is smaller. Mayor Inga Miller suggested that there might be benefits to using the community center at Wilder, but noted that there have been problems with acoustics in the

past, and that the location might present an obstacle to staff going back and forth to the City Hall. Smith noted, "Anything is possible with the right resources and people."

In a discussion of the rules that would govern remote attendance for council members via Zoom, Gee noted that, although she travels for business, during COVID she missed only one meeting because it was possible for her to attend via Zoom. Wolff explained that the new rules would allow remote participation in certain circumstances, such as illness of the council member or a family member, but exclude business travel. In all circumstances, a majority of the council members will have to be present in person, meaning that at most two members could appear remotely, according to City Manager David Biggs.

While city staff considers that logistical considerations of returning to in-person meetings on any basis other than the prior traditional format, might prevent the city from offering a hybrid option, they agreed to explore offering a teleconference option in addition to the in-person meetings given council interest in that possibility. The matter will return to the city council at a later meeting, when staff will present options, including associated costs, including both one-time technology needs and any ongoing costs.

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