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## Orinda City Council returns in person, hears about drainage problems, farmers' market disruption

By Sora O'Doherty

The Orinda City Council's March 7 meeting took place in the Orinda Library Auditorium for the first time in about three years. Despite meetings having been held on the Zoom meeting platform, the return to in-person seemed surprisingly easy and familiar. For City Manager David Biggs, it was his first ever in-person Orinda council meeting, having been hired during the COVID pandemic. Council Member Brandyn Iverson had an excused absence, but the rest of the council was in attendance, along with the required staff. Masks were not worn in the sparsely populated auditorium. City Clerk Sheri Smith could be seen to be working on some technical difficulties, but nothing that interfered with the smooth flow of the meeting.

During the public forum, a number of neighbors showed up to complain about the lack of action on the storm drainage issue they say exists around the intersection of Sleepy Hollow and Ichabod Lanes in Orinda. Ian and Penny Baird provided the council with photographs and explained that they have been asking the city to deal with the issue since 2019 when Penny slipped on storm debris and broke her hip. The Bairds stated that some kind of storm drain solution has been needed since they bought their home in 1976, and they have asked the council before in 2012, but thus far, nothing has been done beyond adding it to the list of capital improvement projects.

They were supported in their claims by neighbors Gareth Noyes and George Counelis, who explained that the curbed wheels of parked vehicles send fountains of water into nearby front yards. "If you put out your bins when it is raining," he said, "they'd be washed away."

On another topic, the council heard from developer Bahadour (Ben) Zarrin, who expressed concern that the renewal of the agreement with the Farmers' Market would jeopardize the redevelopment of 31 Orinda Way, the old Bank of America building. When the market is taking place on Saturday mornings, the most direct entrance to the building is not accessible. While it is possible to navigate to the building by entering the Rite Aid parking lot and driving around to the work site, Zarrin expressed concerns that this would present considerable risks, especially when heavy construction vehicles require access. An additional concern he expressed was the willingness of restaurant tenants to commit to the building owing to the access situation. He suggested moving the street closure area somewhat to the south to allow the entrance to 31 Orinda Way to remain open during the Farmers' Market.

The council discussed the matter at some length, expressing support for the new development. Biggs pointed out that, although the agreement was proposed for three years, it could in fact be changed at any time. Council Member Janet Riley suggested that perhaps the number of vendors could be reduced or rearranged in order to keep the Village business-friendly. Mayor Inga Miller and Vice Mayor Darlene Gee thought that, at the time, there were more questions than answers. The council agreed to reduce the agreement period from three years to one, with the additional provision that the city manager could bring the matter back to the council if construction becomes an issue.

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