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## Attempt made to shorten Orinda City Council Meetings

By Sora O'Doherty

Newly elected member Janet Riley raised the issue of meeting length at the March 21 Orinda City Council meeting. When it came time for the annual review of the city's practice and procedure manual, Riley expressed her desire to start and end meetings earlier. Her proposal prompted a wide-ranging council discussion about meetings, and, in the end, the council agreed to try to shorten the meetings by requiring a majority vote of the council to continue a meeting past 10 p.m. and a unanimous vote to continue past 11 p.m. In addition, a unanimous vote and a specified end time would be required to continue a meeting past 11:30 p.m. Currently, meeting extensions begin at 11 p.m. However, the council declined to begin meetings earlier than the current 7 p.m.

Council Member Latika Malkani expressed concerns about parents and working people being able to attend meetings starting earlier than 7 p.m. While Mayor Inga Miller asked about the possibility of moving closed sessions to the end of city council meetings, it was agreed that this would not be a good idea for a variety of reasons.

Riley also suggested that start times be added to the agenda for each agenda item, but the council rejected this suggestion as impractical. Miller noted that if something was published as beginning at 7:15 p.m., for example, but the council started the item at 6:50 p.m. they would get in trouble. Vice Mayor Darlene Gee said that she has been on the city council for almost eight years, and recalls times before the pandemic when the auditorium was full. She added that many closed sessions are challenging and complicated and cannot be completed in one hour.

Malkani was also concerned about consistency, as Orinda residents are accustomed to having city council meeting start at 7 p.m., and she believed that some of the suggested changes might discourage community discourse. On the other hand, Council Member Brandyn Iverson felt that when meetings go beyond 11 p.m. it effectively disenfranchises some community members, and suggested that the council attempt to offer a hybrid meeting forum. City Clerk Sheri Smith informed the council that at that meeting they had been testing a Zoom format as well as streaming on YouTube, but unfortunately had lost the internet connection. The practice and procedures manual was adopted unanimously with no changes other than that affecting the extension of meetings.

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