ORINDA

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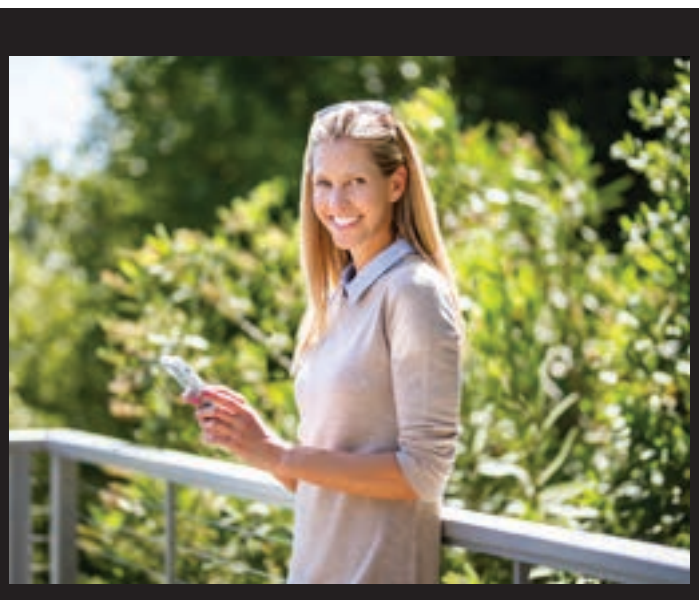

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Outgoing committee members recognized, new ones appointed

By Sora O'Doherty

The Orinda City Council on March 21 thanked outgoing committee and commission members and recognized their contribution to the city. Bobbie Landers was recognized for her service on the Historic Landmarks Committee, Bergen Kenny Woodbury for his service on the Parks and Recreation Commission, Travis Blascheck-Miller for service on the Traffic Safety Advisory Committee and Jeffrey Lyon for serving on the Finance Advisory Committee.

Later in the meeting, the council decided to appoint three applicants on the basis of their applications, without interview. Longtime resident Natalie Fay was appointed to the Planning Commission, leaving one remaining vacancy to be filled. Fay is currently a board member of the Orinda Community Foundation and worked as a senior planner for the cities of Walnut Creek, Oakland and Berkeley.

The council also filled the two remaining vacancies on the Finance Advisory Committee by appointing Joan Kiekaefer and Wendy Wee. Kiekaefer, who holds a degree in economics from Stanford University and an MBA from UCLA, had a 35-year career in banking and volunteers in various education-related positions in Orinda. She has lived in Orinda for 29 years.

Wee is the newest resident of Orinda at only a year and a quarter, but brings to the city close to 50 years of accounting and finance experience. She worked as the chief financial officer for Kindred Biosciences, Inc., but is retiring and wishes to volunteer and serve the community.

Council Member Brandyn Iverson commented that she was blown away by the candidates, whom she regards as fabulous. All three candidates were appointed by a unanimous decision of the council.

Anyone who wishes to serve on the Planning Commission should contact Orinda City Clerk Sheri Smith.

Photo Sora O'Doherty

From left: outgoing committee member Bobbie Landers, Mayor Inga Miller, and outgoing committee members Travis Blascheck-Miller and Jeffrey Lyon

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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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In-person mixers return to Orinda

Orinda Chamber of Commerce members greeted each other in person March 16 at Mechanic's Bank, Orinda, after a long hiatus.

Photo Sora O'Doherty