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Orinda appoints first Cal Shakes liaison

By Alison Burns

"It turns out that being the best kept secret in town is not necessarily fiscally sound or a blueprint for financial success," Clive Worsley, Executive Director of Cal Shakes, told the Orinda City Council, when he addressed them at their most recent meeting on Tuesday, Sept. 5.

Under the heading of Policy Matters, the council was meeting to consider appointing additional council liaisons, an arrangement where each council member has a close (but hands-off) involvement with organizations such as the Friends of Orinda Creeks, the Historic Landmarks Committee, and Art in Public Places.

To date, as City Manager David Biggs pointed out, council liaison assignments have traditionally involved nonprofits and other governmental agencies, but the discussion centered around whether Orinda's cultural landscape should also be considered, since COVID has left many of these organizations severely battered.

While making reference to Cal Shakes' current fiscal issues, Worsley was not at that

time requesting financial help (he'd unfortunately met Mayor Inga Miller and Council Member Janet Riley too late to be considered for a grant). Rather, Worsley wanted to explain to Orinda residents, and the council, why the theater company had been forced to take a different direction by transforming itself into a multi-disciplinary performing and cultural arts center. From now on, he said, the Cal Shakes season at the Bruns Amphitheater would involve just one or two classical plays, with the rest of the calendar devoted to activities such as dance, comedy, programming for families and youth audiences, "live music of all stripes," private, civic and corporate events, weddings and memorials.

Worsley, who started working for the California Shakespeare Theater in 2002, as an actor and teaching artist in public schools, was obviously a little weary of hearing people say "Cal Shakes? I drive by it all the time (located just off Highway 24) and I've never been inside." But he also admitted that "in recent years, in our company's desire to be nationally recognized, it may

have to some degree turned its back on its immediate neighbors and I am here to rectify that. We intend to be in good partnership with you all."

The discussion that followed was whether a council liaison should be concerned with only Cal Shakes, or whether to expand that responsibility to Orinda's other iconic cultural institutions.

Council Member Darlene Gee commented that the "excellent idea" of appointing a liaison from the city council "fits into the whole spectrum of our evaluation of our economic redevelopment" but she thought that it would be best to start something "simpler" with just one entity (in this case, Cal Shakes) and one person as liaison.

The motion was then carried to create a liaison to Cal Shakes, with the initial appointment going to Council Member Janet Riley, who later commented that "Cal Shakes adds such cultural value to our community, offering not only traditional theater, but also music, dance, and other live arts experiences. It is right at our fingertips for all to enjoy!"

Council discusses new MOFD ordinance

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One of the main areas that concerned Miller (which she had also mentioned back in February when the original ordinance was adopted) was the "landslide potential" in removing vegetation on the hillsides "because here in Orinda these plants are part of our protection against erosion," and now that Orinda is "four or five years into pretty hard work on vegetation removal" she was concerned that "we're seeing a lot of areas that are left bare, and those areas are either getting really dry, which may in part be because of the drought, or it may be because those soils are no longer retaining water."

Miller also mentioned seeing a "ton of invasives"

throughout Orinda, whether it was the broom sweeping through downtown, around Lake Cascade, or weeds on the hillsides. After taking a look at the state code that deals with exceptions for hillsides, she asked City Manager David Biggs to raise these points with MOFD Fire Chief Dave Winnacker.

Winnacker replied that he certainly had no problem proposing to the board that trees less than 15-feet could just be limbed up one third.

Although the discussion about the latest fire ordinance came to no conclusions, the obvious takeaway was that Orinda's residents would be welcomed in sharing their comments with the MOFD board because, as Biggs pointed out, "they're the only ones who can actually make changes to the ordi-

nance." He gave as an example, the time last January when the city objected to a certain element of a fire code update which would have barred any sort of traffic calming in very high fire severity zones. The city was ultimately successful in getting the MOFD board to take that provision out.

Miller also praised the level of interest shown by residents in local matters, saying that "Orinda's public have a great ability to come to meetings in order to comment" and despite the fact that very few people had been able to study the yet-to-be approved Fire Ordinance 23-08, four members of the public, in person and via Zoom, were ready with their opinions.



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