



See public meetings schedule on these pages and check online for agendas, meeting notes and announcements
City of Orinda:
 www.cityoforinda.org
 Phone (925) 253-4200
Chamber of Commerce:
 www.orindachamber.org
The Orinda Association:
 www.orindaassociation.org

City Council Regular Meeting:
 Monday, July 2, 7 p.m.
 Orinda Library Auditorium
Planning Commission
 Tuesday, July 9, 7 p.m.
 Orinda Library Auditorium
Supplemental Sales Tax Oversight Commission
 Wednesday, July 10, 6:30 p.m.
 Sarge Littlehale Community Room, 22 Orinda Way



KAPLAN ARCHITECTS

City of Orinda steps in to stop the clock on \$1.5 million for Nature Area

By Sora O'Doherty



Photo Sora O'Doherty

The Wagner Ranch Nature Area in happier times. Students and teachers enjoy a Thanksgiving Dinner in 2019 before the closure of the area in 2023 caused by severe winter storm damage.

While the Orinda Union School District continues to feel unsure about accepting a \$1.5 million appropriation from the State of California for the Nature Area at Wagner Ranch Elementary School, the City of Orinda has stepped up, offering to act as a steward for the money, thereby assuring that it will not revert to the state's general fund. This development, however, does not move the district closer to accepting the appropriation, secured by Assembly member Rebecca Bauer-Kahan at the request of the OUSD board.

The school district, which would have lost the funding in June, says that it will "continue to negotiate terms in hopes of securing the funding for the reopening and conserving of the Nature Area while allowing for the District to provide ongoing maintenance and address liability and risk."

The Nature Area, which has been closed since winter storms last

year created unsafe conditions owing to fallen or unstable trees and erosion of the creek, has been a beloved feature of Orinda for about 50 years, and hundreds of people have signed petitions calling for its renewal and reopening. Many people have shown up at OUSD board meetings to urge the district to accept the state money and move forward towards renovating and reopening the Nature Area.

At the board's June 10 meeting, Superintendent Aida Glimme presented an update. A contract with McNeal Arboriculture Consultants will be funded by Fund 40, and the district will seek reimbursement if available from other potential funds. The contract provides for the identification of trees that are dangerous and need to be removed from the Nature Area. A draft Request for Proposals package for the actual work has been prepared. The district plans to examine reopening the Nature Area in

phases.

Rebecca Dahlberg and Kathy Barrett, Co-Presidents of the Friends of the Wagner Ranch Nature Area, again addressed the Board on June 10. Dahlberg pointed out that Fund 40, the Special Reserve Fund for Capital Outlay Projects, can only address hazards in a small portion of the nature area, not the entire 18-acre property. The balance of Fund 40 stands at under \$3 million currently, according to the board's audit report.

Dahlberg noted that Fund 40 would not be able to fund restrooms, training for a new naturalist, or ongoing maintenance for the nature area, while the money from the state could fund all of those items. She added that the Friends of the Nature Area can continue to help with the maintenance of the nature area.

Dahlberg suggested that the board obtain a second legal opinion concerning accepting the

\$1.5 million in state funds. Other public speakers spoke of their personal memories about the Nature Area, all urging the board to take the money from the state.

Back in 2022, the OUSD board of trustees voted to ask Assembly member Rebecca Bauer-Kahan to seek funding from the governor's office to be allocated from the state's 2022-23 budget for the express purpose of preserving and protecting the Wagner Ranch Nature Area. The matter was brought to the board by OUSD Superintendent Aida Glimme, who suggested that the ask would be for \$5 million or more.

The request was made after District staff were informed of the opportunity to submit a request for funding and protection of the nature area. The funds that were available could only be used for such projects, and not to improve school facilities, to secure services for students, (such as mental health support), or for staff salaries. The grant to Orinda was one of dozens related to natural resources and environmental protection in California.

Although there are no specifics in the budget act about the grant, the Assembly member has asked the school district to memorialize its intention to preserve the Nature Area as open land in perpetuity or for 99 years. The district has expressed concerns that to do so would in some way limit the ability of the district to raise funds for the Nature Area in the future.

The stewardship proposal was on the agenda of the city council on June 18, after this issue of The Lamorinda Weekly went to press.

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Host home sought for visiting student from Czech Republic

By Sora O'Doherty

The next Czech student to attend Miramonte High School in the fall will be Jan, a 17 year-old from Orinda's Sister City, Tabor, in the Czech Republic. He has been chosen after careful selection process to be this coming year's Miramonte visiting student. The Orinda-Tabor Sister City Foundation is currently seeking someone to host Jan in their home for about five months

from this August to Jan. 1, 2025.

In the past, families with students at Miramonte have served as hosts to the visiting students, but it is not a requirement that the host family have students at Miramonte or even children living at home. Those who have hosted past Czech visiting students have reported that they really enjoyed the experience.

Jan loves to play tennis and has been playing the cello for 10 years. He also dabbles in piano and guitar. Since he has been studying English since kindergarten, he is amazingly conversational in English. He enjoys flying his drone and also makes videos for local businesses. Jan lives at home with his mother, father and three brothers. His dream is coming to Orinda, making new friends, improve his English skills, and perhaps even learning to surf!

Bobbie Landers, who hosted the last Czech student, says, "If you

host a Czech student, your lives will be changed forever. Step out as a Citizen Diplomat as President Eisenhower planned it."

The Eisenhower administration established the Citizen Ambassador Program in 1956 to promote exchanges between private citizens of different cultures, allowing them to gain a better understanding of each other through the sharing of ideas and experiences.

To learn more please contact bobbielanders@yahoo.com; or by telephone at 925-254-8260.

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