



**Independent, locally owned and operated!**

www.lamorindaweekly.com 925-377-0977

Published September 1st, 2010

## Orinda's Council Candidates-On the Issues

By Andrea A. Firth

The five candidates running for three seats on Orinda's City Council each bring a unique skill set and experience, and they are all motivated to work to maintain and enhance their home port nestled on the east side of the Oakland hills. The candidates agree that City's deteriorating road and storm drain system is one of the major issues facing the City. While they pledge to keep looking for revenue sources, a clear solution to the infrastructure challenge remains elusive. On the issue of downtown development, their positions on how to proceed start to diverge. The Lamorinda Weekly asked each candidate why they are running and what they bring to the post and to share their thoughts on the City's infrastructure challenges, downtown development, and we even asked about leaf blowers. Here's what they had to say...

Tom McCormick

Nearing the end of his four-year term on the City Council and currently serving as mayor, Tom McCormick says he's running again to finish what he started-to bring new ideas to city government and to ensure that Orinda is fiscally sound and intelligently planned. He feels his legal and business backgrounds provide him with the skill set to budget, prioritize problem, and lead.

Raising taxes is not the solution to Orinda's crumbling roads according to McCormick. He supports better fiscal management and revitalizing Orinda's downtown to increase local tax revenue. "Simple economics are that if more money is spent in Orinda, then it will generate more sales tax dollars," he says noting that residents shop outside of the City because retail and service options are limited.

McCormick believes the City's Planning Process Review Task Force, which he chaired, has generated some very good recommendations to streamline and promote development. He feels that the task force had a diverse membership, so that the ideas generated represent most of Orinda's citizen's views. "With the additional meetings to follow, more input will be obtained and a better plan will be developed to stimulate downtown Orinda," says McCormick. He feels businesses should benefit from improvements to the planning process already in place. "The process has started, and [we] should continue to look for ways to revitalize downtown," adds McCormick.

Dean Orr

"I believe my professional background in architecture and my experience as the Chair of the Planning Commission will give me a unique perspective as a Council member," says Dean Orr, who, as the father of two young daughters, also looks forward to representing the voice of a family with young children in the public schools.

In the short-term, Orr advocates continuing to prioritize road repairs and to seek alternative funding sources to address the City's infrastructure needs. Longer term, he feels the Council must listen to the community to understand their willingness to support a bond or other revenue measure as a fix. "When the economy permits, I will work tirelessly to educate our community on the need, the repair plan, and to gain support to succeed in securing funds to repair our roads," says Orr.

"The most important part of our [development] process, and I embrace it, is to preserve the wonderful outdoor spaces and small town feel of Orinda while at the same time providing opportunities to bring more services, and restaurants, to serve our residents," says Orr. He would like the City to encourage infill construction projects and support and highlight sustainable building practices and alternative energy installations. Orr supports public debate on the downtown development issues, and he feels it important for the community to consider some residential use in downtown.

Sue Severson

"My approach in public service is to maintain a respectful attitude toward all participants in the process, foster open and responsive communication, and focus intently on fiscal responsibility," says Sue Severson, a first-term Council member. She serves on along list of City committees and wants to continue contributing in these areas to the betterment of Orinda.

"Road and drain repairs must receive the highest priority from city government," says Severson. Noting that the City has investigated several revenue options to fund the significant infrastructure needs, Severson supports vetting these options through public workshops. "We as a community must come together and decide what option to pursue understanding there are pros and cons to all; certainly [there is] no one perfect solution that all will agree upon," she adds.

"We can and should examine ways to reduce restrictive regulations on downtown businesses, which would both enhance our quality of life and augment the City's tax revenues," says Severson. "Establishing greater flexibility and unleashing creativity in making these improvements in our community by allowing selective building heights above 35 feet is one of 63 recommendations by the Planning Process Review Task Force after an extensive two year investigation," she states adding, if adopted, these options are subject to additional planning review. "This is a reasonable approach to ensure downtown viability while providing desired community services and maintaining the charm of Orinda."

Amy Worth

Running for her fourth term on the City Council, Worth feels she has the ability to bring people together to solve problems, a strong knowledge and experience in prudent fiscal management, regional experience and relationships to protect Orinda's interests, and a strong belief and experience in public participation in decision making.

Worth advocates a multi-pronged approach to the City's infrastructure challenges. "I am working with the fire district to identify other revenue sources to address safety aspects of our infrastructure program," says Worth, and she cites the City's pothole program and new process for neighborhood self-help paving of residential streets as other examples. She does not feel the economic climate is right for a tax increase, but she feels the City needs to explore future revenue options.

"We need to improve our business district in a manner that preserves the essence of Orinda, and we need a tailor-made downtown that's vibrant and serves our community needs," says Worth. She feels that providing additional flexibility, which promotes the reconstruction of downtown buildings, will provide the opportunity to do that. She supports further community input to develop a downtown plan and a vision that fits Orinda's character and the community's desires. "The plan that the city adopts will be one that is the result of extensive community discussion, input, and consensus," adds Worth.

Scott Zeller

"I have found that many Orinda residents feel they do not have a voice in the way our city is governed," says Scott Zeller, M.D. He promises that this will change if he is elected, and he believes that his record of effective leadership in both the public and private sector can be brought to good use for the citizens of Orinda.

"Clearly the citizens of Orinda do not want additional taxes," says Zeller who feels the City must approach the failing infrastructure issue creatively. He advocates exploring a variety of revenue options such as creating neighborhood assessment districts, re-evaluating the fire district to recapture revenue, and pursuing state and federal grant monies.

Zeller feels any major changes in Orinda should be in response to what the residents support. He identifies the proposed recommendations for downtown development as the reason that he chose to run for the Council. "I believe we can revitalize our downtown without raising height limits," says Zeller adding that following the current General Plan will maintain the "village character" of the City.

"Let's embrace what makes Orinda special, a semi-rural small town in the midst of the bustling Bay Area, rather than becoming another cookie-cutter suburb with unchecked development," says Zeller and he adds, "I believe all 18,000 Orinda residents should have an equal voice in the future of our wonderful city."

What do the candidates think about the banning or limiting the use of leaf blowers in Orinda?

"Orinda has a noise ordinance that should take care of the problem if properly applied. I hope people call to make sure it is properly applied." -Tom McCormick

"I do not support an outright ban on the use of leaf blowers in Orinda. It is not clear that the majority of Orinda residents support such a measure at this time. I will continue to listen to the public and try to further understand the is-sues at hand." - Dean Orr

"I empathize with those citizens who are still dealing with [noise] problems. I support enforcement of existing codes and encourage respectful neighborhood dialogue to work together toward satisfactory solutions." - Sue Severson

"[Orinda's noise] ordinance was adopted after numerous meetings and public input and discussion, and it balances the desire for noise reduction along with the desire of property owners to be able to manage their property as they chose. Further decisions regarding a ban or limiting use of garden tools such leaf blowers and other power equipment should provide that same balance." - Amy Worth

"As Tip O'Neill said, "all politics is local." While it might seem minor, the leaf blower controversy is a major issue to many of our constituents and is also being considered in several other Bay Area communities. I pledge to bring the leaf blower issue to a full debate in the City Council." - Scott Zeller, M.D.

Reach the reporter at: [andrea@lamorindaweekly.com](mailto:andrea@lamorindaweekly.com)

Copyright © Lamorinda Weekly, Moraga CA