



Orinda Civic News

Public Meetings

City Council

Tuesday, Jan. 14, 7 p.m.
Auditorium, Orinda Library,
26 Orinda Way

Planning Commission

Tuesday, Jan. 14, 7 p.m.
Founders Auditorium
Orinda Community Center
28 Orinda Way

Historical Landmark Committee

Tuesday, Jan. 28, 3 p.m.
Gallery Room, Orinda Library,
26 Orinda Way

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

School Board Meeting

Orinda Union School District

Monday, Jan. 13, 6 p.m.
OUSD Office, Vintage Building
25 Orinda Way, Suite 200
www.orindaschools.org
See also AUHSD meeting page A2



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Navigating Challenging Financial Seas while Looking Toward a Brighter Horizon

Orinda mayor Sue Severson sets city's course for 2014

By Laurie Snyder



Sue Severson Photo Ohlen Alexander

"I had the great privilege of meeting Sue Severson while serving as President of Orinda Arts Council (2002-03) and was struck immediately by her depth of character, sincerity, poise, and willingness to hear every voice and concern," wrote Orindan Elena Pang in a letter to the Lamorinda Weekly Oct. 13, 2010. "Sue balances her volunteerism between civic duties, work in the schools, support for the arts, and family life. Her generosity of spirit and humanity are insurmountable. Our community has been the lucky recipient of her positive presence, practical solutions, and experience. She understands and believes fiscal responsibility as priority and supports ongoing respectful communication between our community members and leaders."

Severson, who served for nine years as a board member of the Orinda Union School District,

was first elected to the Orinda City Council in 2006. Since then, she helped to launch the Orinda Community Foundation (www.orindafoundation.org/), which relieved the city of much of its financial burden during the national economic decline for Orinda's Fourth of July Parade and other events deemed by Orindans to be vital to the health of the community.

Severson sat down with Lamorinda Weekly at her home just after she took over the reins of the city as mayor for the second time. Still catching her breath after a year that many longtime community members say was one of the busiest ever for the Orinda City Council, she has been mulling over priorities for 2014-15, and plans to present her State of the City Address sometime in March. Traditionally delivered at a joint Orinda Rotary Club and Chamber of Commerce meeting, this year's address may be held twice to accommodate Orindans' increasingly diverse scheduling needs.

According to the National League of Cities, "fragile fiscal health" is high on 2014's list of "10 Critical Imperatives Facing Cities," along with the worsening of America's transportation infrastructure. In response, Severson observed, "It's always an ongoing challenge - with increasing costs and decreasing revenues - to maximize your resources

while maintaining the high level of services expected by the community." Fortunately, Orinda "is very fiscally conservative as a city and has always had a balanced budget," she added. "We need to look ahead to make sure that continues to happen - to keep the cuts away from services as much as possible."

Having a balanced budget is no small feat in today's world, she said, and is even more challenging in Orinda because when the city incorporated, it inherited a decrepit drainage system from the county. At more than 50 years old, "All of it is beyond its lifespan." And with only about \$10 million each year to repair those problems plus support all of the standard services the city must deliver each year - housing development oversight by the planning department, maintenance and repair of roads and drains, parks and recreation services, public safety services provided by the police - money is tight.

That's why reserves are so critical. Drainage failures - like those on Glorietta and Tarabook that required million dollar-plus fixes each - can be tipping points for cities, along with earthquakes, mudslides, and Yosemite-type wildfires. "A city is basically like a household in terms of budgeting," explained Severson. "If you have an unexpected illness, accident, loss of job - if you haven't planned ahead and set aside a reserve, you could easily, as a fam-

ily, be wiped out." Vallejo. Stockton. San Bernardino. So many city governments have seen no other way out but to file for bankruptcy.

But not Orinda. "We're really running a tight ship financially to accomplish a lot of good and provide excellent service - despite our limited resources."

One of the other things Severson takes pride in is the role she played in helping to establish the Finance Advisory Committee, a body of Orinda residents with financial management experience which provides guidance to the city council in very much the same way as the Citizens' Infrastructure Oversight Committee. Its members were, in fact, the ones who advised the City Council to gradually set aside a \$5 million reserve to help get life moving again for residents should disaster strike.

Ultimately, said Severson, "I hope that we will come together in a more united, collaborative way - in a kinder way - to be supportive of each other, to work together to better our community." One way to do that is to answer your phone this month when the city conducts its annual telephone poll regarding city services and the next steps Orinda should take when funding future road and drain upgrades. Another is to show your civic pride by volunteering for a city commission or helping with Orinda Action Day.

Solid Waste Authority to Raise Rates

Moraga more likely to be down in the dumps over garbage rates than Orinda

By Laurie Snyder

"These are pretty exciting times in the world of garbage," said Paul Morrison as he began his talk on behalf of the Contra Costa Solid Waste Authority before the Orinda City Council Dec. 17. A new decade-long franchise agreement could be worth as much as a half billion dollars to haulers. Morrison, the executive director of the CCCSWA which represents Orinda,

Lafayette, Moraga, Danville, Walnut Creek, and unincorporated Central Contra Costa County, was on hand to discuss both the new agreement and a likely rate hike coming at the end of the present 20-year contract.

Nine proposals for collecting, transferring, landfilling, and/or processing of recyclables and green (yard) waste are under consideration. The challenge ahead

will be to meet a new state mandate requiring the increased diversion of waste from 50 to 75 percent of what is being collected.

"You currently have two franchise haulers - Allied Waste that provides your solid waste service and Waste Management that provides your recycling and green waste services," said Rick Simonson, a representative of the firm

which performed CCCSWA's rate-setting analyses. The allowable expenses are calculated each year as required by the respective franchise agreements, and then allocated to each member agency. In this final year, Orinda's service costs will increase 2.1 percent. "That's primarily based on labor-related cost increases and increases for disposal fees at the landfill. And that is offset, partially by some decreases in depreciation and interest related to the collection vehicles."

Simonson, who met in November with the two council members serving on the subcommittee charged with oversight of Orinda's solid waste situation - Steve Glazer and Victoria Smith - explained that revenues for year nine were actually higher than expenses. So, CCCSWA only needs to increase collection rates for 2014 by 1.5 percent instead. Commercial service levels will rise by a uniform 1.5 percent with all proposed rate increases effective starting March 1.

In comparison, Moraga is looking at a whopping 9 percent hike.

Customers wanting to cut costs should use smaller collection bins. "Our recommended rate increases range from 51 cents per month for a 20-gallon container up to 94 cents more per month for the larger, 96-gallon containers." Planners anticipate that the new 10-year franchise agreement will start March 1, 2015.

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Tuesday & Wednesdays	Pitcher of House Margaritas \$20 <small>Reg. \$32 Must present coupon and can not combine with other offers. Exp. 1-27-14</small>

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