



Letters to the Editor

Share your thoughts with our community! Opinions in Letters to the Editor are the express views of the writer and not necessarily those of the Lamorinda Weekly. All published letters will include the writer's name and city/town of residence -- we will only accept letters from those who live in, or own a business in, the communities comprising Lamorinda (please give us your phone number for verification purposes only). Letters should be 350 words or less; letters of up to 500 words will be accepted on a space-available basis. **email: letters@lamorindaweekly.com**; Regular mail: Lamorinda Weekly, P.O.Box 6133, Moraga, CA 94570

Editor:

The supporters of a revitalized downtown overlook the many side effects and collateral damage that would be involved in demolishing and rebuilding Orinda Village, and also overlook the drawbacks of a "revitalized" Village. How would Orinda obtain a revitalized downtown? Property would have to be acquired over time from the many owners. While that is happening, existing businesses would close and new businesses would not open. Our local, friendly, family-owned businesses would be forced to close. There would be years of construction noise, dust, and interference with traffic flow to the remaining businesses. What would the end result be? Instead of family-owned businesses paying affordable rents and charging affordable prices, we would end up with more expensive chain stores. We would have more traffic on the only street through the village, and parking problems, which already exist in the downtown around the Orinda theater. Parking meters would be in our future. Look at "revitalized" Lafayette. The costs of the new construction, including underground parking, will be enormous. The developer will have to charge high rents to make a profit. Only chain or specialty high end stores charging us high prices will be able to afford those rents. It is ironic for the pro-development forces to point to the empty Phairs building, when it was their efforts that helped scuttle the proposed Montessori school, which the community desired. And before we add more housing, let's first wait and see the effect of all of the recently-constructed housing on our quality of life -- on parking, traffic, schools and shopping. I prefer the current village, which serves the community and which will evolve slowly. There is easy access to our community park. I can conveniently park my car when I need to pick up a prescription at Rite Aid, eat lunch at Geppetto's, or obtain take out from the Szechwan Chinese Restaurant. We can always drive the short distance to Lafayette or Walnut Creek for an expensive meal or a high end retail product. Let's not destroy Orinda's village character in the guise of revitalizing it.

Nick Waranoff
Orinda

Editor:

In his letter of 1-14-15, Tom Trowbridge said: "Housing has been well established as an appropriate use of real estate in villages for centuries." Tom overlooks or ignores that this "establishment" was formed in medieval times. We now have the wonderful freedom of auto-

mobiles. Orinda does not need or want low income or high density housing. Housing prices should be set by supply and demand, left to the individual discretion of the individual owners of that land. All proposed or finished high density housing in Orinda does not have adequate parking for the residents to park their cars. This is not an accident. Central "planners" want people out of their cars so they are dependent on public transportation. Mr. Towbridge is resistant to change as well as progress. The freedom of the automobile is the future and is imperative of a free people. If you fly over the U.S. you will see this country is empty. We do not need to huddle together like medieval peasants. Democrats are seeking to impose this on us simply so they can control us.

Henry R. Pinney
Orinda

Editor:

As a long-time resident of Orinda, I totally understand why the City of Lafayette supports the plan to replace Orinda's Honey Hill Fire Station with a new station on El Nido Ranch Road at Lorinda Lane in Lafayette. The county closed their station in NW Lafayette nearly three years ago. Since then, the residents of that area have depended on our Honey Hill Fire Station to provide emergency services. If the new (very expensive) station is built, response times to NW Lafayette will be reduced by several minutes -- at no cost to Lafayette residents. It's a great deal -- for Lafayette!

However, the real "costs" will be borne by the taxpayers of the MOFD (especially parts of North Orinda) who will have their already sub-standard response times increased by two minutes. The MOFD Board hopes to save money on operations with this plan, but what is the real cost? What is the value of a life lost while waiting for help to arrive or the value of a house that burns down because MOFD couldn't get there within its own 6-minute response time goal?

I understand why Lafayette would support this move. What I don't understand is why any resident of the MOFD would do the same. I, personally, have no desire to fund a station that will be located in Lafayette and will primarily benefit Lafayette at the expense of the residents of Orinda and Moraga. For more information visit the following web site: www.savehoneyhillfirestation.com

John Robertson
Orinda

Orinda Motion to Bring Housing Element Special Election to Voters Fails

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"I have been here several times suggesting that, as I participated in the fourth cycle, we came up with a good document. Everybody agreed with it," said Dan DeBusschere, who added that the fifth cycle should have been "a slam dunk" after the amount of work already done. "I urge you to move on from this issue," said Valerie Sloven. "You've bent over backwards to gather input." Exchanges between council and Orinda Watch members, working line by line to edit drafts, are audible on public meeting recordings.

"I think that the development and submittal of a Housing Element is a

clear example of the purpose of representative government," observed Judd Hammond. "By virtue of the election process, our city council members have been delegated the responsibility of and the authority to act on behalf of the citizens of Orinda in precisely this sort of activity. Developing a complex plan such as the Housing Element update requires gathering and assessing large amounts of information, including input and feedback from citizens of the city, identifying and evaluating various alternatives and plans of action and, finally, deciding on a plan

that's expected to best meet the needs of the city as a whole while also meeting external constraints, such as state and county mandates and regulations. This type of back and forth activity, often with several iterations, cannot realistically be accomplished through an election."

Too long to reprint here, the deliberation can be heard online at www.cityoforinda.org. Smith and Orr spoke of opportunities lost as the city has repeatedly back burned key issues to address the Housing Element. Phillips' motion died without a second.

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Moraga

Moraga Citizens Network

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To see a staff report about an issue, residents had to make an appointment with staff to take a look in person, and only summaries of the meeting minutes were available on the town's website, months after the meetings.

Schwartz called a meeting with a few friends, including Beans, and they started discussing what they thought was needed in town. Moraga Citizens Network (MCN) was born, with the simple objective of "promoting participatory democracy in Moraga."

Schwartz presented the project to the town council and received a cold reception from then mayor Mike Majchrzak, but this didn't stop the group. They began attending all the meetings and spreading information through their email newsletter. "In 2007, during his State of the Town address, Mike (Majchrzak) said in front of everybody that he wanted to apologize to Edy Schwartz, that he did not believe me and thought the group had an agenda, and that he was wrong and hoped everyone would support them," says Schwartz.

"Our first big information campaign came with the 2006 election," remembers Beans.

"We printed and sent our first mailing to all voters with a Q&A answered by all the candidates." The mailing was funded privately by MCN members. MCN also organized its first candidates' night in partnership with the League of Women Voters. Schwartz, Beans and a few friends advertized the forum by going door-to-door to every retailer in both shopping centers and asking to put flyers in their windows.

MCN members continued to participate in meetings, listen and sometimes comment, especially when issues dealt with freedom of speech or information for the public. In 2007 the website Moragacitizensnetwork.org was up and running and by 2008, MCN had 500 members. "We always had a table at the Pear Festival, at the Fourth of July, and spread the word that way about our activities," says Beans.

Then in 2008 there was a heated battle in Moraga, not only between council member candidates, but also about ballot measures that would affect land use. Knowing that the stakes were high, some people in town started questioning the neutrality of MCN. Beans welcomed

them to participate in the draft of the questions that were going to be asked at the Open Space Initiative forum that MCN organized at Saint Mary's College with proponents of each measure. It was also the year the Moraga Center Specific Plan's report was produced. The group videotaped the report and made DVD copies that were available in the library and other public places. *Lamorinda Weekly* began taping the candidates' nights and making them available online.

Now whenever the public needs to be informed about an upcoming meeting, initiative or workshop, staff sends the information to Beans for publication in the newsletter, MCN Link. In recent years, information about Saint Mary's College and service group activities were added to the newsletter. "MCN provides such a critical service to the community since citizens can rely on it for providing unbiased and transparent information," says Town Manager Jill Keimach. "Ellen (Beans) is one of the first people we call when we need to get the word out about something quickly." She adds that MCN's candidate forum provides all residents the opportunity to get to know and hear from candidates, again in a manner that is "non-political and unbiased."

The group's objective for the next decade? Reach the next generation of Moragans.

Beans and Schwartz acknowledge that a lot of progress has been made to provide information in town. Agendas, staff reports and minutes (including audio and, soon, video) are available online and the town publishes "About Town," which succinctly explains what happened from a civic perspective. "But it is hard to get information to the people on complex issues," says Schwartz, whose current objective is to get younger generations informed and involved in the land use questions the town will debate this year.

The Moraga Town Council will honor MCN tonight with a proclamation thanking the group for all it has done to expand participatory democracy in Moraga. The current MCN board includes Ellen Beans, Larry Beans, Mike Bernhardt, Tory Courtney, Denise Duff, Janet Forman, John Haffner and Tom Marnane. To sign up for the MCN newsletter, go to moragacitizensnetwork.org.

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