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Transportation executive Darlene Gee steps up as vice mayor

By Sora O'Doherty



Vice Mayor Darlene Gee Photo Sora O'Doherty

Not surprisingly, Darlene Gee's most passionate issue on the Orinda City Council continues to be the roads program. "With good luck and timing, we managed to do an awful lot of repair in Orinda," she says, adding, "But while the condition of residential streets is much better, we still have to find real solutions for longer-term maintenance, as well as addressing the larger roads classified as collectors and arterials, and storm drains. We really need to understand all the financial considerations."

As her second top priority, Gee believes that Orinda has to step up and be proactive about potential redevelopment around the Orinda BART station. She cites multiple actions at state level to take away local control of BART land. "There will continue to be a struggle regarding the balance of power between state control and local control. We need to stop putting our heads under the covers and pretending that the issue will go away. Especially we need to concentrate on the BART area. If we don't do something, the chances are that the state will step in."

Gee was in a minority on the city council this past year on the subject of private roads. "I don't have a preconceived answer and I'm not sure that there will be one, but it is an issue that affects 20 percent of our residents, one fifth of the community.

"I think that a task force was warranted, and I still support that," Gee maintains. "I believe that the topic will come back," she adds, because the private road residents want a better method of communication than what was available, which was written communication to the city council, and public conversations at Citizens' Infrastructure Oversight Committee. But in Gee's opinion this was not robust enough to fully air the issue.

She remains empathetic to what people living on private roads are facing, and says that she is sensitive to their perception of inequities. They are charged for things that they don't benefit from, like the extra fee on garbage collection. "I understand their frustration," she says. "We all know that life is not fair. You can't make a perfectly fair system." She will continue advocating for their desire to have the task force and a more robust conversation, she says, although she fully comprehends that it is a very complicated issue that doesn't have an easy solution. Still, she supports better public conversation.

Gee's company represents major transportation agencies, including Caltrans and BART, and she is always very mindful of that, she says, adding that it came up during the election. She emphasizes that the transportation consulting business she works for does not do business with Orinda and stresses that if she feels that there is anything that would be a conflict of interest, she would recuse herself. But she believes that her level of expertise is helpful to the community and she tries to contribute the benefit of her experience in dealing with challenges of roads and infrastructure that is subject to hilly terrain, and poor soil. She is also very aware of concerns about fire safety and evacuation capability.

Gee has lived in Orinda since 1989. Because her husband works for PG&E, she recuses herself on energy issues. Gee grew up in Illinois, and moved to the Bay Area in 1980. She has two grown sons, ages 23 and 26. The 26-year-old is an attorney in Union city, and her younger son is in Davis law school.

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