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Letters to the editor

We need to clear hazardous wildfire fuels from our properties

I know that we all love the green, wooded look of so much of Orinda's residential areas. Unfortunately, many Orinda properties are heavy with wildfire fuels. If a wildfire burns near our town, which is more likely than we want to think about, embers blown from that wildfire will land in our properties, and any heavy fuels will literally explode into an inferno. That inferno would likely engulf the vast majority of our beautiful town. All that would be left is burned out cars, chimneys, and a few large metal appliances - just like after the Oakland Hills fire 21 years ago. Even if all of us could escape the flames, there may be nothing left to come back to.

All of us property owners MUST do our part, by removing hazardous wildfire fuels from our properties. Vegetation near the edge of the road should be removed, to ease evacuations and fire vehicle access in the event of a fire. Annual grasses and similar dry, leafy growth are extremely flammable, and should be trimmed to less than 3 inches above the ground by the end of May each year. Tree branches should be removed if they are less than 6 feet above the ground or 6 feet above any shrubs below the tree, so that a ground fire does not ignite the trees. Shrubs should be trimmed to assure a significant space between adjacent shrubs, so that one burning shrub will not ignite adjacent shrubs. The MOFD Fire Code and web site (www.mofd.org) give clear guidance on how this work should be done.

PLEASE do your civic duty and support your neighbors by clearing hazardous wildfire fuels from your property SOON, and again each spring.

Jud Hammon
Orinda

Wildfire Efforts Blunted, or No Good Deed Goes Unpunished?

My family takes fire prevention seriously. We've removed an entire forest, installed attic screens, built rain catchments, all exceeding \$50,000. We are on a first name basis with our tree-trimmers. I volunteer to pull French broom (ladder fuel on steroids) and practice rotational grazing on a nearby horse pasture to keep vegetation levels down. Our new reality of extended dry periods and higher fire risk requires this. I consider myself a good citizen: The Fire Marshal doesn't.

In appreciation for my efforts, I have received two pre-citations. Real fines arrive next week. The first contact addressed a lonely rose branch extending towards the street. The unmentioned backdrop for the offending branch was the 25 dying and dangerously flammable Douglas fir trees I voluntarily removed. The second citation was for the now horizontal and less flammable logs from my new shaded fuel break. Similarly, the East Bay Municipal Utility District and East Bay Regional Park District, who have collectively invested untold career decades and millions of dollars into fuel reduction and land management on their uniquely beautiful lands, are branded "non-compliant" land managers. Even our elected leaders are publicly condemned.

I question these unprovoked attacks and wonder why MOFD is throwing everyone under the fire truck. Some humility is in order; The "Fire Community" helped put us in this dire situation. By singularly emphasizing fire suppression (and pensions), while ignoring fuel management for decades, "Fire Experts" helped bring us to this flashpoint. I applaud MOFD for their recent efforts, but blame, fines and public attacks aren't productive.

Our community has made incredible progress in the last few years, learning valuable lessons along the way, but a problem 100 years in the making won't be solved in one. We are all in this together, so let's strive to reach consensus on a strategy embraced by the entire community. Acknowledging good faith efforts to cooperate and working on new approaches together would be a great way to start.

Michael Bowen
Orinda

MOFD wildfire ordinance is evidence-free

Personally, I would have titled your article "Evidence-free wildfire mitigation efforts blunted by concerned, highly-educated residents and public landowners" instead of your front-page heading on the July 20th issue. I am not one of the residents that was inspected. However, I am one of the many residents that suspects that MOFD's actions will put us in a worse situation when a fire comes our way. The 20 page brochure that we received doesn't have a single reference. We need a fire department that understands their audience. We will do the right thing. MOFD needs to prove that the ordinance is not based on unfounded assumptions.

Many residents are painfully aware that Paradise had (still does) an aggressive fire department before the fire. They proposed even more controversial wildfire 'mitigation' efforts and conducted many evacuation drills. Publications on the effectiveness of some of those actions are nowhere to be found. It would be easy to show success or failure from satellite imaging from before and after the fire. Pictures have surfaced that directly question MOFD's defensible space recommendation, for example the Safeway (in the middle of town) and a church both burned to the ground even though they were surrounded by large parking lots.

Houses burned while the trees, feet away, are still thriving today. The speed of the fire in the town could be a direct result of the modified landscape that allowed easier airflow. MOFD has said 'where the wind goes, the fire goes'. Well, making it easier for the wind to go between the houses does not seem reasonable. If they had any evidence that this in any way helped, compliance will be automatic, no citations needed. We believe in science as evidenced by the high vaccination rate of our residents. Lamorinda Weekly might consider doing an investigation to see if you can find ANY science that supports the ordinances (or even the authors of the ordinances).

Juana Rudati, PhD
Orinda

Censorship in Lamorinda

Censorship by the left is rampant in Lamorinda. The social media platform Nextdoor allows an anonymous person to report a post to which he or she objects. The report is made to an anonymous "neighborhood lead," who can then remove the post and suspend the poster. This allows anonymous censorship. Experience has shown that most of the objections come from the left; that comments by moderates or conservatives are removed; and that the neighbors posting such comments are suspended. Ironically, Nextdoor claims that posts should not make people feel "unwelcome or excluded," yet in fact it is Nextdoor that makes people with moderate or conservative viewpoints "unwelcome [and] excluded."

Some of our local school districts are worse censors. The Lafayette (K-8) and Acalanes (high school) districts have adopted BIRS - a bias incident reporting system. Reminiscent of the Salem Witch Trials, this "system" also allows anonymous complaints. <https://www.acalanes.k12.ca.us/Page/3334> Only persons with "membership in [an] historically marginalized group" can complain of "microaggressions." <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1z1hJzOtAknyPmoXCJj3hCx9iTPO0bavUpn9DbhCBekw/edit>

The schools officially permit a raised Black fist as a symbol of Black power but an off-campus student's statement of "white power" is not allowed. I am not a fan of "white power" and what it represents, but I do believe in viewpoint diversity and in the full First Amendment rights of students off campus. The Lafayette district spends over \$100,000 for programs from Race-Works LLC, at which the existence of institutional racism cannot be questioned, even though Asians, Nigerians and others outperform whites. It is not surprising that the incessant drumbeat of racial identity in the schools provoked a reaction from some students.

The old adage, "sticks and stones may break my bones but names will never harm me," is no longer taught. Nor is its message of resiliency; instead, words are now "violence." "Diversity," does not include viewpoint diversity. "Equity" is used to justify reverse racism, which is primarily directed against high-achieving Asians. Equity substitutes proportional representation by race, sex, and "gender identity," for merit. "Inclusion" does not extend to moderates and conservatives.

Nick Waranoff
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