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Inga Miller returns as mayor of Orinda



Inga Miller

Photo Kersti Peter

By Sora O'Doherty

Inga Miller says it "feels wonderful" starting her second term as mayor of Orinda with Darlene Gee serving as vice mayor. "We lost three of our council members, and that is challenging and also sad but full of new opportunities." While she is disappointed to not have the previous council members, she is excited to have new members.

New council members Latika Malkani, Brandyn Iverson and Janet Riley were sworn in and began work as city council members on Dec.

13 when Miller and Gee were elected to the top spots following Orinda custom. This is the first time since incorporation that three incumbents have left the city council, with the majority of the council being newly elected members.

Miller said, in a recent interview with the Lamorinda Weekly, that it is not the mayor's job to train newly elected city council members. Rather, she and Gee will accompany the new members to attend the New Mayors and Council Members Academy offered by the League of

California Cities in Sacramento from Wednesday, Jan. 18 to Friday, Jan. 20 in person. They may also get to know the new mayors and council members of neighboring Lafayette and Moraga if they also attend the event, Miller added.

At the training, attendees can learn about the Brown Act, and learn about ways of working together. Malkani and Iverson already have experience with the Brown Act from their work on the Supplemental Sales Tax Oversight Commission and the Planning Commission, respectively.

Miller noted that, because of the Brown Act, "we can't even answer questions from constituents on the street."

January will also hold the challenge of submitting the Housing Element to the state by the end of the month, and in February the city council will hold a public strategic planning workshop.

Miller says that she doesn't feel like she is stepping into the shoes of departing five-time mayor Amy Worth. "I don't feel like I'm assuming any position of the outgoing council members,"

she said. "We lose things when council members leave, often irreplaceable things." But, she added, "Each new council member will bring new skill sets. We are losing the past, but ushering in the future."

The new mayor is grateful that Orinda has "always been very civil for the most part, certainly when I have been mayor, much more civil than government at the county, state, or federal level, where there is so much divisiveness. We need to celebrate our rising above that," Miller states, "and do what we can to make it more the norm in our Contra Costa community."

Miller says that she has no aspirations to higher office, "but we interface with the state and federal governments, particularly in the Housing Element," she pointed out. "The state has really put in a lot of rhetoric about cities not wanting to build housing, and as cities we can respond by meeting demands but we can also work to educate our legislatures by going to Sacramento." Miller believes that all politics are local.

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Orinda School Board welcomes new members, reflects on pandemic

By Sora O'Doherty

It was an emotional afternoon on Dec. 12 when the Orinda Union School Board bid farewell to outgoing board members Carol Brown, Jason Kaune and Liz Daoust and welcomed new board members Edda Coleman, Eve Phillips and Katie Shogan,



Photo provided

Contra Costa County Supervisor Candace Andersen (second right) with Katie Shutte Shogan, Eve Phillips, and Edda Collins Coleman

who were sworn in by Contra Costa County Supervisor Candace Andersen. The board was then reorganized, with Hilary Weiner once again becoming the board president and Cara Hoxie vice president.

Outgoing board president Carol Brown opened the meeting with her last official act, seeking approval of the agenda, which was unanimously approved. This was followed by accolades to the outgoing board members. Brown and Kaune each served eight years and Daoust four years.

Superintendent Aida Glimme thanked them for volunteering their time to do an incredibly difficult but hopefully rewarding job. "Many members of the public do not know that this is not a paid position, yet at times it is a full-time job," Glimme noted. "You exemplify what a great board member is: you've put in countless hours and you have provided vision and guidance through some of the most challenging times any district has ever gone through. You had to go through the pandemic, when no decision was welcome, but you were able to keep our core values as your guide."

Former Superintendent Caroline Seaton joined the meeting remotely from Colorado. She also referred to the pandemic, a time when, she said, "even experts disagreed on what was the best thing to do during a pandemic." She added, "People just don't understand how difficult it is to be a board member." She praised the

board for putting students first, as well as developing the Diversity Equity and Inclusion program, "Everyone Belongs Here," which she noted was also adopted by the city of Orinda. Turning her focus to the incoming board, she stated, "I know that Edda, Eve and Katie are going to do an outstanding job."

Other speakers included Charles Shanahan of the Orinda Educational Association, who said that although he was not feeling well, he wanted to express his gratitude to the outgoing board members. Patsy Templeton, principal of Sleepy Hollow Elementary School, and Emily Allen, executive director of the Orinda Network for Education (ONE) also offered encomiums. Allen, an OUSD parent for 12 years, praised the outgoing board as being "unwavering in your dedication" and acting "with professionalism and grace." She concluded, "In a world when differing viewpoints can cause such strife, you have been a model of cooperation and respect."

Weiner told the outgoing board members, "It has truly been a privilege to know and work with you. We have accomplished so much," adding,

"It has been such an honor to work together. It's been a real blessing to make friends out of colleagues," her voice thick with emotion. She spoke about working through the pandemic, explaining, "It was not easy working with Brown Act restrictions, having to discuss really difficult issues for the first time in public."

Liz Daoust, who was board president in 2021, thanked everyone, saying she was truly humbled and touched. She said that she had actually gone back and looked at the statements she made at the beginning of board meetings at the height of the pandemic. She summarized the experience by saying, "I was really struck by what a unique, complicated and desperate time in which we were situated. Serving our community these past four years was one of the most challenging and stressful things I've ever done, but it was also the most rewarding. I've learned a tremendous amount. We all suffered and we all grew in different ways," Daoust concluded. "I'm so tremendously proud of our team; we kept students at the forefront of our work."

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City Council
Regular Meeting:

Tuesday, Jan. 10, 7:00 p.m.
Tuesday, Jan. 17, 7:00 p.m.

Planning Commission

Wednesday, Jan. 18, 7:00 p.m.

Supplemental Sales Tax Oversight Commission

Wednesday, Jan. 11, 6:30 p.m.