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## Letters to the editor

Response regarding school closures

As a 19-year-old college student who's returned to Lamorinda due to the COVID-19 pandemic, I feel compelled to respond to Dave Cummins' recent letter to the editor and to note that his views don't express those of young people like myself.

First off: children are not "bulletproof." The very usage of the word "bulletproof" in the context of schools strikes me as alarmingly tone-deaf. Mr. Cummins ignores the fact that many children and members of their family are, in fact, vulnerable to experiencing complications from COVID-19. Children can contract the virus just like anyone else, and can still transit coronavirus asymptotically.

Keeping schools open doesn't just affect children, it also puts faculty members and staff at risk. When I was asked to leave my college campus, I did so willingly because I knew that I was protecting my older professors from a disease that, yes, was more likely to be lethal to them than to me.

My life wasn't ruined by finishing the school year at home, and it's an exaggeration to say that shelter-in-place is costing teenagers their "future." We're experiencing many real disappointments and losses, but sending us back to school is not an acceptable solution. If we had stayed in school, COVID-19 would have spread far more rapidly - and it would have disproportionately impacted low-income communities and vulnerable members of our population. We cannot prioritize our individual interests and leave other Americans behind.

I won't feel fully safe returning to school until the response to COVID-19 includes rigorous testing and contact-tracing processes that effectively track the spread of the virus and isolate anyone who may have been infected. During a time when we should be coming together, it's disappointing to see residents show disregard for others. I believe that every human life has value and is worth protecting - no matter what - and that while economic downturns are not permanent, the loss of a life is just about the most permanent thing there is. I plan on continuing to "follow the science and save lives," and I'll stay wary of armchair epidemiologists who show little concern for public health. I hope that the rest of the Lamorinda community does the same.

Lauren Rodriguez  
Moraga

Orinda is Wasting Money on a Downtown Precise Plan

Orinda does not need a Downtown Precise Plan ("DPP"), which would amend the General Plan and existing zoning regarding downtown.

As a preliminary matter, it is important to understand that the unstated purpose is to increase density and increase height limits downtown. It is not about preserving Orinda's downtown's village character.

A DPP is not needed for building new housing in Orinda. The ULI study explained how 240 new housing units could be built within the current General Plan and zoning rules. Moreover, under the state's Density Bonus Law, the effect of any increase in density or height limits will be multiplied as a matter of law.

A DPP will not facilitate retail development. Street retail has become something of a dinosaur. To the extent it survives, it will not be in an environment like Orinda, which lacks the kind of trade area retail needs.

Orinda does not have the traffic or parking capacity to serve retail in any meaningful way.

Redevelopment pursuant to a DPP would involve evicting our locally owned businesses. People would lose their work and their livelihood - people who have served our community for years. Most recently, pursuant to a GoFundMe campaign, they have provided meals at cost to local hospitals. It is no secret that OrindaVision has its eyes on parts of downtown where these existing businesses are located. We should protect those people, not redevelop them out of existence.

Finally, a DPP is an extravagance Orinda cannot afford. The City has budgeted \$740,000, but also is making use full time of one senior planning department employee, and is using part of the time of another full time employee, plus an intern. Their work includes preparation of a three-dimensional model of downtown. The total actual cost is over \$1 million. Orinda is facing a budget shortfall of \$1 million. Even though the City Manager has made this shortfall public, Orinda's Downtown Development Subcommittee, comprised of council members Inga Miller and Nick Kosla, told the planning department to proceed "full speed ahead." Orinda's limited funds are better spent on other priorities, including fire prevention and fuel reduction, roads, storm drains, and other infrastructure.

For these reasons, Orinda should not be proceeding with a DPP, and certainly not at this time. The DPP is a Trojan Horse.

Nick Waranoff  
Orinda

MOFD meeting coverage

I was stunned to read the story "covering" the recent MOFD meeting and see no mention of the fact that it had the biggest citizen participation in what may be a generation! There is a huge grassroots move afoot in Orinda to address our high risk of wildfires-there are 18 groups that either already are Firewise certified or

working on it. We have raised the alarm about the prior indifference of the Orinda City Council (which now is definitely paying attention) and the MOFD firefighter-driven tendency to ignore prevention in favor of hiring more (you guessed it!) firefighters who are only of use when the fire breaks out. We actually made the difference in the decision not to hire more firefighters this time around. (And, we'll be back, as we're pretty sure the firefighter union won't give up.)

I have no idea why the reporter didn't report on this aspect, but I want your readers to know that we're in this for the long haul, and that everyone in the community will benefit from the energy and initiatives from this growing Firewise movement. Perhaps you should write about that?

Hatti Hamlin  
Orinda

#### Orinda's Priorities

In a recent survey on a new sales tax two facts came out:

- 1) 55% of those surveyed said their top priority for spending tax dollars was for Wildfire Prevention.
- 2) 2/3 of those who did not flat-out reject a new tax (as 25% historically do, regardless of need) believed that private roads should be brought into the public road network and storm drains transporting water from public roads across private property should be maintained by the City.

At the recent MOFD Board meeting the call for spending money on more firefighters was rejected by the Board. This followed a (historic?) show of participation by citizens both writing letters and attending the meeting. These included both Mayor Gee and Council Member Fay whose attendance at the meeting was a first for two Orinda officials to attend an MOFD meeting.

Unfortunately, only half the task was completed. While money was not allocated to more firefighters there was no discussion of allocating any more funds for fire prevention.

The MOFD draft budget projects a \$2.3 million deficit for next year. However, this budget includes \$2 million in employee retirement benefit contributions in excess of what the pension plan is owed and reflects a parcel tax which is \$2 million less than what the voters agreed to.

And the City of Orinda continues to be focused on downtown development. While a pleasant downtown would be nice, the City needs to reprioritize on the basics first: Wildfire prevention and the provision of basic infrastructure to all of its residents including paved access to their homes and the orderly transport of storm water from public property.

Most of Orinda has been deemed as an extreme fire risk area. The problem is a combination of geography, weather and excess vegetation. We cannot do much about the first two but we can start removing some of the massive fuel load we have allowed to build up over the years.

MOFD and the City of Orinda need to get together to provide funding and other assistance to property owners to reduce this fuel load as quickly as possible. They cannot just fiddle as Orinda burns.

Steve Cohn  
Orinda

#### Disappointed

I was disappointed to read the article by Nick Marnell about the recent MOFD meeting. After sitting in front of my computer for more than 4 hours watching and listening to at least 10 of my neighbors eloquently speak about the importance of fire mitigation in Orinda and Moraga, there was not a word about it in his article. I'm not sure how he could have missed those comments and the more than 20 letters written by citizens fearful of wildfire in Lamorinda that were read into the record. Either the author took an hour-long dinner break and missed the unprecedented turnout and citizen participation or he and you decided the interests of the citizens were not important.

We depend on the Lamorinda Weekly for accurate reporting on local news and events. I suggest you find someone else to do a feature on the grassroots Firewise Neighborhood movement that is occurring here as a way to make up for the insult.

Dan Detzner  
Orinda

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