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Orinda Candidates Forum-2 Incumbents and the Alternative

By Andrea A. Firth



Candidates for Orinda City Council (L to R) Dr. Bob Larsen, Steven Glazer, and Victoria Smith Photo A. Firth

As the three candidates vying for the two open City Council seats in Orinda assembled to participate in the Candidates Forum on the evening of October 16th, there was no physically apparent difference among them. Yet a quick peak under the table gave a hint to the differences that might lie ahead. The current Mayor, Victoria Smith, wore blue pumps with a sensible heel. Incumbent and the former Mayor, Steve Glazer, was wearing a pair of black men's dress shoes. Dr. Bob Larsen sported pointy-toed, grey leather boots. One of these candidates was not like the other two—a point that Dr. Bob tried to emphasize throughout the evening.

To the question of Orinda's most pressing priority, Smith and Glazer identified repairing Orinda's roads as first on their lists. Both cited the \$100 million roadworks problem as the City's most urgent need, and both hoped to realize a comprehensive solution. Larsen took a different approach citing the need to improve City revenues through the promotion of small businesses to fill the empty storefronts in Theater Square.

When asked how they would improve the business climate in Orinda, Larsen stated, "We need professional help and a business plan." He went on to suggest that the City hire a consultant, possibly from UC Berkeley, to help make this happen. He mentioned the City's moniker of Borinda (not to confused with their neighbor Boraga) as evidence of the need for more entertainment outlets for teens and seniors, and he suggested a bowling alley as a possible improvement. Glazer described the ongoing sales tax leakage study as a good step toward identifying the commercial needs of the downtown district, and he highlighted the strong partnership already in place with the Chamber of Commerce and Council. Smith was also a fan of the sales tax leakage study, which she had pushed to make happen, and highlighted the commercial planning task force that was already at

work to help redefine Orinda's downtown.

When it came to schools, another clear distinction among the candidates arose. Both Glazer and Smith supported Measure E-the Acalanes Union High School District (AUHSD) Bond Measure on the November ballot-which has been endorsed by the current Council, citing the fact that AUHSD ranked first academically in the State because of the community's financial support of the schools.

Larsen questioned the appropriateness of the \$93 million bond measure. "Just because students do well on test scores is not a reason to borrow \$93 million," he stated.

Things got stickier when the discussion turned to the Moraga Orinda Fire District (MOFD) and campaign financing. Larsen noted that the MOFD receives three times more money from the Sate than the City of Orinda does. "We need to start talking turkey to these people, but it's hard to do when you get their endorsement," stated Larsen. "I think the Fire District does a great job, and I appreciate their efforts," stated Glazer. "[The City] gets seven cents on the dollar [from real estate taxes], and we are trying to do our best with that," he added. Smith also complemented MOFD's service and cited the importance of being able to work well with others as a key factor to success in city government.

Regarding campaign contributions, Larsen stated emphatically that he had and would not take money from special interest groups and that he differed distinctly from his two opponents in this respect. Glazer questioned Larsen's accusations regarding his current campaign contributions and the link to his previous campaign four years prior. Glazer stated that the majority of his campaign contributions had come from Orinda residents, and that smear campaigns reflected more negatively on the individual making the accusations. Smith admitted to having received a small contribution from PG and pointed out that this was just one of the many contributions that she had received including hundreds from Orinda residents.

Smith and Glazer closed their remarks noting their experience on the City Council, their successes in implementing positive programs for the City, and their desires to continue the work in progress. Larsen noted the difference between himself and his two opponents and encouraged voters seeking change to cast just one vote for him.

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