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## City enters into controversial food truck agreement

By Nick Marnell



Photo Sora O'Doherty

The Orinda City Council May 21 approved a three-year contract with Martinez-based Taste of the World Market to provide vendors for the city's Thursday Night Food Truck Feast for a \$200 monthly concession fee, but the contract award was not well received by members of the Orinda restaurant community.

Thomas D'Amato, president of the Orinda Chamber of Commerce, said that the Orinda agreement with TOW gives the company a competitive advantage over local restaurants. "Orinda restaurants support the city of Orinda and our local community by paying taxes and rent and many hire locally, support Orinda schools and other nonprofit organizations," D'Amato wrote in an email to the council.

The co-owner of Shelby's in Theatre Square agreed that the event harms his restaurant. "It's a significant hit to my business," Gregory Haynes said. "I may have to close my restaurant the nights of the food trucks."

"My occupancy costs at 2 Theatre Square in Orinda exceed \$200 daily," wrote Peter Eberle of Piccolo Napoli, unhappy with what he called an "absurdly low fee" being charged to TOW.

"There was never any intention to cause a negative impact to restaurants," said Vice Mayor Darlene Gee, and City Manager Steve Salomon explained that the city met three times with Orinda restaurants to try to bring greater variety to the Thursday events, and to create positive programs with restaurants. "It didn't go anywhere," Salomon said.

As for restaurant participation, Haynes said that he could not afford to send his staff to the food truck events and also keep his restaurant open.

The council maintained that the focus of the Thursday events was not simply eating out but a community gathering, with Mayor Inga Miller insisting that the events were more about the Orinda community than they were about food.

Contract terms designate that TOW provide food trucks each Thursday from February through October and also for the Orinda Summer Concert Series each Tuesday from mid-June through mid-August. The events are held in the Orinda Community Park at 28 Orinda Way.

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