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Orinda city council candidates respond to questions



Darlene Gee

By Sora O'Doherty

The Lamorinda Weekly posed three questions to the three candidates vying for seats on the Orinda city council, incumbents Mayor Darlene Gee, council member Inga Miller, and challenger Latika Malkani. **Lamorinda Weekly on Diversity:** Orinda is a wealthy city with a limited amount of ethnic and racial diversity. And yet, Orinda residents are very concerned about being inclusive to all. Do you have ideas about how the City Council can



Inga Miller

promote increased diversity, or if it in fact should be concerned with that?

Candidates:

According to Malkani, "In the last few years, my competitors have either rejected or taken no action to implement many simple, practical, resident suggestions, including an Orinda 'City Day' focused on celebrating diversity, an official city proclamation that 'All Are Welcome Here' with resident-provided signs visibly posted on city windows, an implicit bias training for staff and councilmembers, and a resident review committee to oversee and review police practices that includes all



Latika Malkani

stakeholders (concerned residents, the Police Chief, the police unions, and others)," she said. Malkani suggested many innovative ways to foster an inclusive culture while also promoting other city values, such as educating our children, supporting local business and creating more vibrant downtown spaces. Post-COVID, she said that she would like to see the city partner with local businesses and restaurants – like our landmark Orinda Theatre – to host a speaker or art series showcasing presenters of color. "Orinda's residents are brilliant and generous volunteers, so why not create (as

other cities have done) a city committee to recommend and help implement social justice policies and events? The possibilities are exciting and endless, so let's act to value diversity and inclusion."

Gee, however, said that the council did adopt a proclamation in September 2019 on these important issues and that it should remain the guiding framework for actions that reflect this statement of values. She pointed out that, outside of direct employees of the city or appointees to committees and commissions, diversity happens through the process of growth, change and the mix of residents who choose to live in Orinda. In her term as mayor, Gee is proud that the city has taken important steps to create a more welcoming and equitable community, including initiated dialogue with the Orinda Union School District. The city has also, Gee said, taken multiple actions toward ensuring positive community policing, and she vowed to continue to build on this progress.

She added things that the city can and should be doing to foster respect and positive community experience include

ensuring that city staff and police have the training and knowledge to conduct their community interactions at the highest level of best practice and respect, reviewing performance at regular intervals; having adequate means of receiving direct community feedback about problem interactions, as well as having adequate city council and public oversight to ensure corrective actions are promptly implemented. She also espoused ensuring that public facilities reflect and honor diversity, including artwork, parks, buildings and streetscape.

Miller said that she has been saddened by the stories she has recently heard from her neighbors who have experienced racism and feel unwelcome in Orinda. In an effort to embrace Orindans who unbeknownst to so many of us have felt marginalized in our midst, Miller said, "we have opened a public dialogue about policing, which includes steps that the police department has taken and continues to take to avoid implicit bias in policing in Orinda and to improve transparency in police business."

... continued on Page A9

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