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New Administrative Services Director in Orinda knows he's got a hard act to follow

By Sora O'Doherty



Douglas Alessio Photo Sora O'Doherty

fire safety.

New Administrative Services Director Douglas Alessio knows that he has a challenge to face, stepping into the shoes vacated by outgoing Director Paul Rankin, whom Alessio recognizes as having been well liked and well respected. But the veteran government employee enjoys a challenge, and is excited about his new job in Orinda.

Alessio most recently was assistant city manager in Livermore, a city of some 91,000 residents. Unlike Orinda, which contracts for police services and is part of the Moraga-Orinda Fire District, Livermore is a full-service city handling the full complement of services, including water distribution, wastewater collection, police and fire services. Alessio was with Livermore for 12 years, starting as finance manager and serving as administrative services director before being promoted to assistant city manager. He dealt with issues similar to those Orinda faces, from storm drains to using goats for

Born in New York, Alessio's family moved to Walnut Creek when he was 4 years old. He attended college at Cal State Hayward (as it was then). After graduating during a recession, he took a job with the Franchise Tax Board auditing people's tax returns. It didn't take him long to realize that this wasn't his ideal job.

After a year, he saw an ad in a newspaper for a job with a firm in Walnut Creek, where he grew up. He stopped by, intending to just submit his resume, but was immediately brought in and interviewed for three hours. The firm told him that their clientele was mostly local governments. "I warned them that I had had only one lecture in school about local government," Alessio said, but they told him they would teach him. "I fell in love with the field. There is so much going on in local government about which the average person has no idea," Alessio noted, adding that he fell into this career and finds it to be the most interesting career someone can choose. He particularly likes local government because he finds it to be closer to the people and therefore more accountable about how it uses its resources.

Looking at Orinda, Alessio is impressed with the willingness of Orinda's residents to tax themselves for services that they want. "In Livermore," according to Alessio, residents refused to pay for services and amenities. But he thinks it is super cool that Orinda's residents are willing, and he believes that when residents are paying for services from the government it makes them more interested in government finances. "I love that," he said, "I think that is a healthy relationship when the residents want to make sure that the resources they are providing are being used as intended."

In Livermore Alessio was concerned that emergency preparedness and operations were not where they should be. "Four years ago, we brought in an emergency manager, who focused on training staff and developing a public safety plan." Alessio observed that the city got to see the immediate benefits, as right after developing its safety plan the city had a cyber attack, PSPSs, a wildfire that almost made it into Livermore, and then COVID.

Alessio is excited that one of the things he is being tasked with in Orinda is the development of an IT master plan. "Any time you can leverage IT," he says, "you are leveraging your human resources to keep up with increasing service demands." He says that his passion is to help improve systems so that an organization can function efficiently.

Alessio knew Rankin, and knew that Orinda is a pretty well put together organization. He views his new job as an opportunity to do something different, to help out a community with slightly less resources than in his previous job.

Another similarity that Alessio sees between Orinda and Livermore is the high level of education among residents. While Orinda is near UC Berkeley and has a lot of tech executives, Livermore has Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory. The joke in Livermore local government, Alessio says, is "you don't have to be a rocket scientist to get on the city council, unless of course it's Livermore."

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