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## Brookwood Road will be mitigated, not necessarily how residents prefer



Image City of Orinda

By Sora O'Doherty

The Orinda City Council decided on Dec. 6 to focus on improved landscaping for Brookwood Road, but not to install any fencing, which may have been the outcome preferred by residents. Back in May of 2021, a large amount of vegetation was removed from the area between Brookwood residences and the side of Highway 24. The vegetation, which included bushes as well as trees, was cleared in the interest of promoting fire safety. However, the new look of the area left residents feeling exposed to and perhaps in dan-

ger from cars traveling on the highway.

Residents appealed to the Orinda City Council to do something to make them feel more comfortable again. The council responded sympathetically, and the 2021 Capital Improvement Program budget allocated \$110,000 for Measure R sales tax for mitigation. The matter came back to the council in mid-November, and staff was requested to present renderings of the three options being considered and bring it back to the council. All three options included a fence, either a six-foot or a 12-foot redwood fence, with or

without landscaping.

Residents had expressed a preference for the 12-foot fence option, seeking greater safety as well as possible noise reduction along the busy highway. The staff report was presented by Chief City Engineer Sivakumar Natarajan. Written comments had been received from some Brookwood Road residents, who also spoke at the meeting.

As the city council discussed the options, several points arose. First of all, since the trimming of the vegetation that had resulted in Highway 24 becoming very visible along Brookwood Road, some vegetation had regrown, which softened the view of the highway but also raised questions about repeated clearances in the future. Second, the council considered the two fence proposals in terms of cost, effectiveness, maintenance and coordination with existing and possible future vegetation.

In terms of future vegetation, the city will undertake the management of the landscaping, which should reduce the potential for a repeat of the extreme clearing that occurred last year. Although the city council members started the conversation favoring the six-foot fence option, consid-

ering the 12-foot fence to be excessively costly and unusual, gradually it became apparent that the council members actually preferred to rely on landscaping alone, with neither the shorter nor the taller fence.

Council Member Amy Worth suggested that native plants such as Scrub Oaks, Sugar Bush, and Coffeeberry really prosper in the location. She suggested selective planting and maintenance to keep the trees clear of undergrowth. Council Member Nick Kosla expressed surprise at how quickly vegetation had grown back, and suggested that larger specimens could be planted for quicker coverage. Council Member Darlene Gee agreed with Worth and Kosla,

suggesting that the primary focus should be on landscaping to improve the situation.

Vice Mayor Inga Miller suggested that she heard consensus among the council on doing as much as possible through landscaping, and Mayor Dennis Fay said he had been astounded to see how quickly nature was recovering in the area. At the conclusion of the discussion, Natarajan said that he understood that the council wishes to look at a solution using landscaping alone in a strategic manner to fill in gaps, looking for larger plants to start with. "We can get an arborist involved," he said, "and we'll bring it back with a cost estimate and a specific plan."

## Orinda City Council glides through reorganization

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The ranking is significant because, according to Orinda custom, it determines the order in which the rotating mayor and vice mayor serve.

Also at the meeting outgoing mayor Dennis Fay bestowed his Awards of Excellence to Jud Hammon for his work as chair of the Supplemental Sales Tax Oversight Commission; to Derek Zemrak and Michael Williams for putting on Live at the Orinda Theatre, a program that brings live performances to Orinda; and to Maggie Boscoe for her work on Artify Orinda, a project that brings art to public spaces and utility boxes.

Praises and proclamations were also heaped upon the outgoing council members, Fay, Amy Worth and Nick Kosla. Katie Keeshen, speaking on behalf of Assemblymember Rebecca Bauer-Kahan, quoted the assembly member as saying, "I feel incredibly lucky to live in and represent Orinda. Orinda is special because of the people who serve," she added, concluding, "You are giants in this community and will continue to have Orinda in your hearts." Supervisor Candace Andersen presented proclamations from the Contra Costa County Board

of Supervisors to Fay and Kosla, saying that Kosla's "experience in development let the council see things from the other side." Andersen had already presented a county proclamation to Worth at a reception honoring her earlier in the month.

Worth, with 24 years of experience on the Orinda City Council, including a record-breaking five terms as mayor, had words of the highest praise for outgoing mayor Dennis Fay. She expressed her delight working with him on the city council, noting that he has so much knowledge of local government, following a career for the city of Oakland. Worth said that she had recruited him to work on the original Citizens Infrastructure Oversight Committee (CIOC). She credited him with helping Orinda go from a city with the worst roads in the Bay Area to the best. Miller said that Fay had accomplished his goals on the city council, including the development of a downtown plan and increased wildfire safety and environmental consciousness measures that, she added, will be his legacy. Gee, who worked with Fay on the CIOC, said that he had done a great job as mayor, despite some trepidation before taking the

office.

Following the Zoom meeting, the city council members, new and old, were honored at an in-person reception at the Orinda Community Center.

## Reception honors Amy Worth



Photo Sora O'Doherty

"Bittersweet" was the theme of a very well-attended reception held on Dec. 4 to honor outgoing city council member and former five-time mayor of Orinda, Amy Worth. From local representatives to city, county, regional, state and beyond, there was a river of praise for Worth's long and dedicated service and everyone who spoke of her called her "friend." To honor her, the Library Rotunda has been renamed the Amy Worth Rotunda, and, high on the wall across from those words is the simple but true phrase, "Amy's Place." – S. O'Doherty



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