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## Orinda ushers in new mayor and vice mayor; planning director to retire

By Sora O'Doherty



Orinda City Council honors Mayor Inga Miller as she steps down from her year as mayor. Darlene Gee (second from left) will serve her second term as mayor and Latika Malkani, far right, will serve as vice mayor. Photo Sora O'Doherty

Acting in accordance with the city's tradition, the Orinda City Council reorganized on Dec. 19. Outgoing Mayor Inga Miller will return to the council as a member, while Vice Mayor Darlene Gee steps up to be mayor for a second term. Top vote-getter Latika Malkani was chosen as the new vice mayor, serving her first term as such.

Miller was honored by the council with a proclamation, and a gift of flowers and a gavel. The proclamation was read out loud by the rest of the city council.

Miller chose to grant her Mayoral Award of Excellence to outgoing Planning Director Drummond Buckley, who joined the Orinda staff in 1996, and his staff for their work on the Plan Orinda Project. She noted that Plan Orinda marks a positive point in the history and trajectory of Orinda, and that the award was earned by a team of members, led by Buckley, that included a number of people over the past seven years, some of whom no longer work for the city.

Specifically, Buckley called to the podium to be recognized former Senior Planner Mayank Patel and current Assistant Planners Winnie Mui and Darin Hughes. Buckley also announced his own retirement, effective Jan. 17.

Miller said of Buckley, "He's done a lot of work and been under, I would say, a lot of duress." She explained that the mayor's award of excellence is an award that's given out each year by the outgoing mayor for an achievement that the mayor sees as remarkable in the community. "This is a team of people that continue to work extraordinarily hard to see the dream that so many of us share in Orinda, to see our downtown revitalized, and return to what we remember from a long time ago, and to grow and to be a new place.

"They have also spent a lot of late nights and a lot of commuting from really distant parts of the East Bay to listen to all of our residents, and to hear about how to make our downtown, how to make all parts of our community fit within our housing here in Orinda and because of their hard work over the last seven years planning our downtown, they were able to then use that as a keystone in our larger state required housing element for planning, for housing all over our city," Miller said.

Buckley, accepting the award, said that he first wanted to thank the Orinda community, the city council, the planning commission, the downtown housing subcommittee of the city council, and all the community groups that participated along the way. He added that he also thanked the city managers, noting that during his career at the city he worked for three city managers, and particularly the current one.

He also acknowledged the substantial contributions of the team of consultants, Placeworks, Opticos Design, Rincon Consultants, who provided support and guidance throughout the process, and the city attorney's office, which, together with the consultant team, helped the planning department navigate through a highly complex legal landscape.

At one point or another, Buckley said, every staff member pitched in to help, but the core team was present to accept the award, including special guest, Mayank Patel, who served as senior planner until early 2020, and Assistant Planner Darin Hughes, "who started as an intern in the pre-Plan Orinda days when we were beginning to explore options for downtown planning, and later took on the completion of the downtown precise plan."

Buckley also praised associate Planner, Winnie Mui, who took on overall management of all components of Plan Orinda after Patel departed. "Mayank, Darin and Winnie are all very, very different people, but they have one important quality in common: to a person, they all deeply enjoy their craft and as a result they really like their work. They like to learn new skills and they are extremely dependable and competent. It's a cliché for managers to say that they are only as good as their staff. But in my case, it's also the truth," he said.

Upon the conclusion of Buckley's remarks, the council gave a presentation, honoring him upon his retirement. Mayor Miller acknowledged that he had agreed to stay on to complete the relevant projects. "I know that you put off a lot of plans and have people waiting on other continents for you so very patiently,

and that you have stayed with us long beyond what you intended to do. So we are so grateful to you, Drummond," she added.

Accepting the proclamation in his honor, Buckley said, "This is a little bit much," but he noted that it was also his father's 90th birthday, and it was a great gift for him. Former Mayor Amy Worth, who served on the city council for over 20 years, praised Buckley and noted that one of the main reasons why the city of Orinda chose to incorporate was to deal with land issues.

Planning Commissioner Robert Hubner was among those in the audience at the meeting in honor of Buckley.



Planning Director Drummond Buckley was honored by outgoing Mayor Inga Miller with her Mayoral Award of Excellence, from left, front: Janet Riley, Winnie Mai, Drummond Buckley and Latika Malkani; middle row: Mayor Inga Miller, Darlene Gee, and Brandyn Iverson; back row: Assistant Planner Darin Hughes and former member of the planning department, Myank Patel. Photo Sora O'Doherty

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