



...Can Education Stay Excellent?

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ect may contain enough land for a school to accommodate additional pupils.

Many Orinda residents choose to live in the city (population 19,500) because the reputation of the schools is so high.

Good schools increase the demand for housing in Orinda, and a decent house in the city can cost anywhere from \$1.2 to \$2.0 million (or more).

Destroy the reputation of Orinda's schools, and guess what will happen to property values?

Meanwhile, Kaune head of the OUSD board of trustees, said during the interview that, currently, "The jewel of Orinda is the schools." ■

ANNOUNCEMENT:

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Orinda's Public Schools Face Challenges; Can Education Stay Excellent?

By Richard Colman

Orinda's public schools continue to maintain a tradition of excellence, but serious challenges exist to keeping quality high.

Inadequate financial support from the State of California is hampering progress, Orinda school officials said recently.

According to Dr. Carolyn Seaton, superintendent of the Orinda Union School District (OUSD) and Mr. Jason Kaune, president of OUSD's Board of Trustees, 87 percent of the district's pupils met or exceeded 2016 state test scores in the area of English/language arts. In mathematics, the figure was 85 percent.

State test-score standards refer to all public school districts in California that have more than 1,000 pupils.

According to Seaton and Kaune, Orinda's public schools, in 2016, were in the top one percent in California in the areas of English/language arts and mathematics.

Seaton and Kaune presented their findings to the Rotary Club of Orinda on May 3, 2017. The Icon interviewed both individuals together on May 24, 2017.

OUSD has five schools. Four schools are elementary schools; the fifth school is a middle school. The elementary schools cover kindergarten to fifth grade. The middle school covers grades six to eight. After completing eighth grade, pupils move on to high school.

The four elementary schools are: Del Rey; Glorietta; Sleepy Hollow; and Wagner Ranch. The middle school is known as the Orinda Intermediate School.

According to the interview with Seaton and Kaune, the "key challenge" is maintaining adequate funds to support OUSD.

"Funding is not adequate," Seaton said.

In their Rotary presentation, Seaton and Kaune showed slides stating that OUSD received \$30.5 million in revenue for the 2016-2017 school year. Sixty-six percent of the revenue came from the State of California, 15 percent from the Educational Foundation of Orinda and from parents' clubs, and 13 percent from local parcel taxes. Four percent of the revenue came from "other local revenue" and two percent from the federal government.

In their interview, Seaton and Kaune said that the number of OUSD pupils has, in recent years, tended to remain fairly constant. Enrollment for the 2016-2017 school year was 2,552 pupils, nine more pupils than in the 2015-2016 school year.

During the interview, Seaton said that OUSD receives limited dollars from the state government. She noted that pupils in Oakland, California, receive extra money because of a "students of need" program. Extra money, she said, also goes to the Mount Diablo Unified School District, which includes such California cities as Concord, Pleasant Hill, and Clayton.

To supplement funds for Orinda's schools, the Education Foundation of Orinda (EFO) was established 37 years ago.

According to EFO's 2015-2016 annual report, "Orinda remains one of the lowest publicly funded districts in the state with per-student funding of \$6,857." The report states that other states provide much more money. The report lists Vermont as

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More Sugar, Please

By Dr. Laura Pawlak

Love sugar? This innate desire for sweets can be traced to an ancient part of the brain -- the reward circuit. The sweet, sensory experience is recorded as a rewarding one as endorphin molecules (natural opioids) bathe the brain. A long-lasting memory of the tasty experience is stored deep inside the brain. There is purpose to the "feel good" experience resulting from sweetness. You will search for, and continue to consume, the ideal fuel for your mind -- the simple carbohydrates in sugar.

Nature offers fruits, vegetables, and other plant foods to satiate the need for carbohydrate -- along with fiber and a wide variety of nutrients in these foods. But nature is no competition for the added sugar in today's super-sweet desserts, snacks, packaged foods, and beverages. Manufacturers add some form of sugar to 74 percent of their products.



Liquid sugar, such as found in sodas, energy drinks, and sport beverages, is the leading single source of added sugar in the American diet. The rapidly absorbed sweetened beverage is linked to sugar addiction, obesity, Type 2 diabetes (often called adult-onset diabetes), and other diseases. Worldwide education regarding the disease risks linked to the consumption of sugary drinks has resulted in the decline of soda sales. As summer approaches, man-

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The Icon is a periodic publication that covers news about Orinda as well as health-related matters.

Is Suburbia Under Attack? Living Near Transit Stations May Not Be Safe

Whether it's Trump Tower on Fifth Avenue or a tenement on the Lower East Side of Manhattan, there are several things city residents -- compared with residents of single, detached suburban homes -- generally do not have: lawns, gardens, more space, and possibly swimming pools.

After World War II, millions of Americans decided to abandon such places as Manhattan, Chicago, and San Francisco for suburbia.

Suburbia generally offered better schools and lower crime rates. One could own a car and have a garage. Parking was easy. So was shopping. There was the virtue of owning a home, rather than renting an apartment.

Government even offered an incentive to buy a home. The interest paid on a home mortgage would be deductible from the personal income tax.

For 50 years, from 1945 to 1995, suburbia just kept growing. Many Americans seemed happy to live somewhere other than in big cities.

Then, in 1992, thinking started to change. A group of nations -- in conjunction with the United Nations -- gathered in Rio De Janeiro to promulgate Agenda 21. The "21" in Agenda 21 refers to the twenty-first century.

Agenda 21's goal is to promote "sustainable" communities, in which thousands, perhaps millions, of people would live and work together. The advocates of sustainable communities argue that such communities will relieve traffic congestion, reduce air pollution, and promote "harmony" among different ethnic groups.

Agenda 21 was supposed to be voluntary. But in California, what was supposed to be voluntary is becoming mandatory.

In California, there is a movement to create what are called Transit Villages.

In Pleasant Hill, California, a suburban community about 30 miles east of San Francisco, there is a Transit Village that has 2,700 residents, 6,000 employees, and 84 companies.

The Transit Village in Pleasant Hill is near a BART (Bay Area Rapid Transit) train station. BART transports people to different

parts of the Bay Area. BART serves such places as Oakland, San Francisco, Berkeley, Concord, Oakland Airport, and San Francisco International Airport.

How well are Transit Villages working out?

Usually, there are three complaints. One, there is a lack of ample parking at BART parking lots after 7:00 A.M. on workdays. Two, BART trains are so full that a passenger cannot find a seat. Three, BART has experienced a 45 percent rise in crime over last year.

The East Bay Business News reported on May 1, 2017, that robberies on BART trains and at BART stations are up 45 percent between January 1, 2017, and March 31, 2017, compared with all of 2016.

At 9:20 P.M. on April 22, 2017, 40 to 60 youths at BART's Coliseum station in Oakland boarded a train and robbed and beat passengers. The assailants left before police arrived.



Part of a Transit Village in Pleasant Hill, California.

Undaunted, governmental agencies in California are going ahead with plans to create more Transit Villages. The California Department of Housing and Community Development is telling local communities, including communities that have no space for additional housing, to build hundreds of new residences. Many, perhaps most, of these residences are to be high-rise, high-density dwellings.

In addition, in July 2013, two regional Bay Area governmental agencies, MTC (Metropolitan Transportation Commission) and ABAG (Association of Bay Area Governments) voted to adopt Plan Bay Area, a scheme to encourage the construction of high-rise, high-density housing in the Bay Area's 101 cities. The directors of MTC and ABAG are not directly elected by voters. Thus, these directors are not accountable to voters on election day.

Citizens of the United States are free people. However, Transit Villages are being created without the consent of the governed.

In 1776, The United States declared itself independent of Great Britain. In 2017, Californians may have to decide if they

need to declare themselves independent of the forces creating Transit Villages -- villages being established by unelected, unaccountable bureaucrats.

If Californians do not take command of out-of-control government, suburban residents may find that they will living in what could be called Manhattan 2.0.

—Richard Colman ■

More Sugar, Please

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ufacturers offer new products to quench your thirst -- products called plant waters.

These beverages are made from extracts of fruits, vegetables, grains, grasses, and other plant parts, with fewer calories than sugary beverages or no calories at all. Manufacturers of plant waters promote their products with a variety of unsubstantiated health claims.

For example: Artichoke Water, a sugar-free, zero-calorie beverage, is claimed to be healthy because artichokes have antioxidant and anti-inflammatory properties. Where's the artichoke in this water?

Made with concentrated bamboo-leaf extract, Bamboo Water is stated to contain the powerful benefits of bamboo. Is bamboo really a food source for humans?

Other beverages produced from plant sources, such as the olive, banana, cactus, barley, and maple sap are also available -- all with dubious health claims and varying amounts of sugar.

Here's a sound approach to quenching your thirst this summer. Drink these plant waters if you like them and if you don't mind their cost. They lack the nutrients and fiber obtained by eating whole-plant foods, and they won't prevent disease. The best choice is nature's offering: A healthy, refreshing glass of water and some juicy, fresh fruit. Enjoy the summer!

Dr. Laura Pawlak (Ph.D., R.D. emerita) is a world-renown biochemist and dietitian emerita. She is the author of many scientific publications and has written such best-selling books as "The Hungry Brain," "Life Without Diets," and "Stop Gaining Weight." On the subjects of nutrition and brain science, she gives talks internationally. ■

Lafayette Residents Are Concerned About Traffic Congestion

In a strong showing of civic involvement, more than 150 residents of Lafayette, California, attended a special symposium in May to learn about plans to reduce the city's traffic congestion.

One Lafayette resident said attendance at the event would have been higher if there had not been, at the same time, an open-house at a local intermediate school.

Leading the symposium was Mike Iswalt of ARUP, a San Francisco-based firm that does consulting work in the areas of transportation planning and land use.

The event was held at the Lafayette Veterans Memorial Building on Mt. Diablo Blvd.

Mr. Iswalt presented 15 strategies for reducing traffic congestion in Lafayette. The strategies covered such topics as coordinating traffic signals, expanding bicycle pathways, and enhancing school-bus service.

Other strategies included making some streets one-way, adding pick-up and drop-off zones for schools, building a bridge to connect BART's two parking lots in Lafayette, and staggering school times.

If all 15 strategies were adopted, the costs could range from \$33 million to \$49 million.

Mr. Iswalt said that Lafayette could adopt only some of the 15 strategies, thereby saving the city money.

Mr. Iswalt said that Lafayette could, over the next few years, experience population growth of 8 percent to 20 percent. He did not rule out the possibility of growth exceeding 20 percent.

Among audience members, there was skepticism over having any growth at all, Lafayette, like its neighboring city, Orinda, is basically full and has no room for additional construction unless high-rise, high-density residences are added.

Questions from audience members reflected concern over plans to increase the city's population.

When one audience member said that growth could be imperiled by California's high taxes, expensive housing, and a future economic downturn, enthusiastic applause

erupted. Mr. Iswalt said he was confident that Lafayette would grow.



Lafayette residents examine plans to reroute city traffic.

Lafayette's vice mayor and city council member, Don Tatzin, who was present at the May symposium, told the audience that a city's plans to limit population growth can be unsuccessful.

According to an October 18, 2012, article in the Mercury News, "Urban Habitat, an Oakland-based urban justice group, filed a suit against the city [of Pleasanton] in 2006, claiming its voter-approved limit of 29,000 housing units prevented Pleasanton from building its

share of affordable housing units, as set by the state."

Urban Habitat won the lawsuit. In 2012, the Pleasanton City Council changed its general plan. The city's cap on new housing was removed.

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\$27,962, New York State at \$22,106, and Massachusetts at \$17,510.

In the future, will OUSD will able to continue its pattern of success?

From the state of California and from regional governmental agencies, there are mandates for Orinda, a city which is basically full, to add more housing. Additional housing may mean more pupils for OUSD.

The State of California is requiring cities to adhere to what are called Housing Elements. If a given city fails to follow a Housing Element, the city may be sued and face cut-offs in funds for such matters as road repair.

To date, Orinda has gone through five cycles (versions) of the Housing Element. The Fourth Cycle, which covered the years 2007 to 2014, required, according to the East Bay Times (formerly the Contra

Costa Times), Orinda " . . . to show how it can provide land for -- but not build -- 218 housing units . . ." The Times' article appeared on September 19, 2013.

The Fifth Cycle, which covers the years 2015 to 2023, is, according to the Times (March 7, 2014), able to provide space for 227 units for Orinda.

More Housing Element cycles are expected to appear in the future.

In 2008, Orinda approved the Orinda Grove development, which has 73 homes on Altarinda Road. The homes, built by the PulteGroup of Georgia, is sold out, according to a Pulte website dated April 12, 2017.

On July 18-19, 2013, the boards of directors of two regional governmental agencies MTC (Metropolitan Transportation Commission) and ABAG (Association of Bay Area Governments) met jointly in Oakland to approve Plan Bay Area, a scheme to encourage Bay Area cities to provide high-rise, high-density housing for Orinda and other cities.

The directors of MTC and ABAG are not directly elected by voters. The directors come from a pool of locally elected officials.

In the western part of Orinda near the Caldecott Tunnel, there is the Wilder Project, which, when complete, will have 245 new homes. To date, about 30 Wilder homes are occupied.

In April and May of 2017, after the Orinda City Council approved a \$15,000 contract for the Urban Land Institute (ULI). ULI has recommended rezoning downtown Orinda for 240 units (or more) of new housing. The city council has not decided to approve or reject ULI's recommendation. Mr. David Cropper, who works for ULI, told The Icon on April 11, 2017, that if ULI's proposal for Orinda is approved, money from Orinda's taxpayers will be needed.

Chris Kniel, a 40-year resident of Orinda and the former chairman of Orinda Watch, a group dedicated to preserving Orinda's semi-rural environment, said on May 26, 2017, that, "Orinda is building too many housing units. This construction will lead to school overcrowding [and] lower the quality of education."

How will all this new housing affect OUSD? No one is quite sure. OUSD superintendent Seaton said the Wilder Proj-

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