



## Can We Talk?

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meeting] with the Mayor and she thinks this is worth pursuing. I will put an item on August 15 for discussion."

However, the August 15 city-council agenda contained no mention of a town-hall meeting.

Orinda's residents want and need to know what the future of their city will be like. Will Orinda have overcrowded schools, open space, a semi-rural environment, and high-rise, high-density housing?

Apparently, the city council is not willing to have a dialogue with the city's residents. This bodes ill for the future of Orinda.

Perhaps the city council -- or at least a majority of the council -- believes that the city's taxpayers work for the council. In a democracy, elected officials work for the citizens.

Is the city council, when communicating with residents, acting more like some version of Vladimir Putin's Russia or Donald Trump's Washington, D.C.?

— Richard Colman ■

### ANNOUNCEMENT:

The Icon is a periodic publication designed to inform Orinda residents about important issues in their community.

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## Orindans Powerless to Stop Water-Rate Hikes

By Richard Colman

Water rates for Orinda residents and businesses are going up massively.

On July 11, 2017, the directors of the East Bay Municipal Utility District (EBMUD) voted 6 to 1 to raise water rates. A 9.25 percent increase will take place from July 2017 to June 2018. Between July 2018 and June 2019, there will be another rate increase of 9.0 percent.

Thus, in a two-year period, water rates will be going up by 19 percent.

How can this happen?

Water rates are set by EBMUD's board of directors. The board is free to raise rates to any level. If the board wants to raise rates 50 percent, 80 percent, or 300 percent, it has the power to do so.

EBMUD supplies water to much of Alameda and Contra Costa Counties.

The board has seven directors. Representing Orinda, Piedmont, and a portion of Oakland, is Marguerite Young. She was elected to the board in 2014. Her terms expires on Dec. 31, 2018. Young's district is called Ward 3. Young voted for the 19 percent rate hike.

The board's one dissenting vote came from John Coleman, whose district includes Lafayette, Alamo, Walnut Creek, Danville, Blackhawk, and portions of Pleasant Hill and San Ramon. Coleman's district is called Ward 2. Coleman was elected to the board in 1990. His current term expires on Dec. 31, 2018.

In a telephone interview, Coleman said that the 19 percent rate hike was too high. He complained that the rate hike puts an enormous burden on individuals living on fixed incomes. Coleman said that instead of raising rates, the EBMUD board should have put a bond measure on the ballot. With a

bond measure, voters can decide whether to approve or reject a rate hike.

A bond measure, if passed, would mean that local property taxes would go up. However, individuals who itemize their federal tax returns can now deduct state and local taxes from their gross income. The Trump administration wants to eliminate this deduction, but Congress may not agree to support the administration.

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The Icon's online presence will allow more frequent news updates. Printed editions of The Icon are expected to continue.

Coleman noted that the 19 percent rate increase is far above the rate of inflation. Between July 2016 and July 2017, the inflation rate, according to the federal government's Bureau of Labor Statistics, was 1.7 percent.

Coleman conceded that EBMUD's infrastructure needs improvement, adding that he was "very frustrated" by the size of the rate hike. EBMUD, he said, needs to save money. EBMUD employees, he said, are paid very well.

According to Young, there is no check on the ability of EBMUD's board of directors to raise rates. A proposed rate increase, she said by telephone, does not have to go to another body for approval.

The only way to stop a rate increase is to vote out of office any EBMUD director who supported an increase.

Eighty percent of California's water is used by agriculture. Much of this water is subsidized by payments from the federal government. The Environmental Defense Fund has argued that eliminating this subsidy will leave California with plenty of water and eliminate the need to build more water-storage facilities. Presidents Jimmy Carter and Ronald Reagan tried to eliminate the subsidy. They were unsuccessful. ■

## Nourish Your Friendly Bacteria

By Dr. Laura Pawlak

In a society of anti-bacterial warfare, who would imagine scientists touting the benefits of consuming foods fermented by living microorganisms?

The organisms are called probiotics, which means "for life." Identified on the skin and within the body, these beneficial microbes are part of a community of healthful and harmful micro-organisms called the microbiota. Most probiotics are located in your gut, particularly the large intestine (colon). Probiotics aid the digestion and absorption of food, improve immune function, overpower harmful gut microbes, and rebalance the microbiota following antibiotic therapy.

Research continues to demonstrate the versatility of these friendly critters. Potential benefits of probiotics have been seen in the treatment of gut discomfort and diseases of the gastrointestinal system. Other benefits are treatments of vaginal and urinary tract infections.

Probiotics also release vaporous chemicals into the blood system. Scientists are investigating the healthful effects of these metabolic products throughout the body and brain -- from fetal life through the elder years.

You can improve the number and diversity of probiotics in your gut. Eating probiotic-rich foods is the first way to shape the makeup of your intestinal microbiota. Fermented dairy products, such as yogurt, kefir (a fermented milk drink), and some cheeses are major sources of probiotics.

Consuming a variety of fermented foods enhances microbial diversity and potency. Include sauerkraut, cider, miso, tempeh (a soy product that originated in

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# California's Phony Water Shortage

By Richard Colman

California does not have a water shortage. The federal government, through subsidies, mismanages the water that is available in California.

The impact financially is enormous. Orinda residents, who obtain their water from the East Bay Municipal Utility District (EBMUD), pay about \$7 per 1,000 gallons of water. Growers who receive federally subsidized water in such areas as Fresno, can pay 42 cents for the same amount of water.

Thus, an Orinda resident is paying 17 times more for water than a subsidized grower.

Municipal water can cost more than farm water because municipal water requires purification facilities, a maze of pipes, and maintenance.

On July 11, 2017, EB-MUD raised water rates 19 percent.

Bad water policies in the form of subsidies coming from Washington D.C. are creating a phony shortage.

There really is no need to construct more facilities to store water in California.

In a typical year, 45 million acre-feet of water are available for consumption in California. This amount is based on how much water, from precipitation, is left over after evaporation and water flow into the Pacific Ocean.

An acre-foot is 326,000 gallons. A family of five will use an acre-foot in one year.

An acre is about the size of a football field. An acre filled 12 inches high with water constitutes an acre-foot.

The 45 million acre-feet of water available would be enough for 225 million California residents. Currently, California has 39.5 million people.

So why is there a water shortage? Much -- about 40 percent (16 million acre-feet) -- of the that water is given away free by the federal government. A local irrigation district may charge a pumping fee, so a grower does have to pay something for water.

This policy of free water for agriculture began in 1902, when the federal government, in order to settle Western states, approved the donation of free water to

individuals wanting to farm small plots of land.

In California, 80 percent of all water goes for agricultural purposes. (Some of the 80 percent goes for environmental purposes.) The remaining 20 percent goes for municipal and industrial use. In numerical terms, 39 million acre-feet goes for farming, leaving 9 million acre-feet for municipal and industrial use. These nine million acre-feet are enough for 45 million people.

Thus, agriculture is the water hog. Powerful agricultural interests argue that farming creates food for people and that water for farms must be protected.

However, much of California agriculture is used for specialty crops like almonds, pistachio nuts, and avocados. A small amount of farm water goes for cotton and rice.

Enjoyable as almonds, pistachio nuts, and avocados may be, these foods are not essential for human nutrition.

California agriculture is assumed to be a large industry. California is a state that has an annual total economic output (gross domestic product) of \$2.4 trillion per year. (For the entire United States, total economic output is \$19 trillion per year.)

Agriculture, according to the California Department of Food and Agriculture, is \$54 billion a year. The figure of \$54 billion per year equals 2.2% of California's total economy.

The 39 million acre-feet of California water going to agriculture needs to be examined.

If the federal government got out of the water business, farmers would have to pay market rates for water, instead of receiving free water. Thus, a farmer, instead of flooding his field with water, might, if charged a higher price, could use water-efficient sprinklers, saving water.

As long as the federal government gives water away for free, there will be overuse of water and frequent water shortages and phony droughts in California.

Presidents Jimmy Carter and Ronald

Reagan tried to stop water subsidies to California growers. These presidents got nowhere.

As stated earlier, if California had no farms at all, there would be enough water for 225 million people. ■

## Nourish Your Friendly Bacteria

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Indonesia), buttermilk -- or yogurt and kefir made from nondairy sources. Grapes and grains, which are popular probiotics, can be fermented into wine and beer!

Another way to impact your gut microbiota positively is to eat foods that "feed" the probiotics in your gut. Called prebiotics, foods with a high-fiber content have a positive impact on the growth of probiotics, but not on the harmful bacteria. All plant foods contain fiber, but the fiber in whole grains improves the diversity of the probiotics -- especially whole wheat and whole barley.

There is some evidence that good quality oils and certain nutrients in plants may also help probiotics to thrive. The typical Western diet -- low in fiber and high in sugar, saturated fats, and processed foods -- feeds harmful microbes. Probiotics are not associated with such negative consequences.

Although the fermentation of food and beverages is an ancient custom, the scientific analysis of the many probiotic species and strains is just now unfolding. In the future, healthful longevity will certainly include adding more friends (probiotics) to your gut and feeding them well (prebiotics.)

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# EDITORIAL

## Why Live in Orinda?

Why do people move to Orinda? What did they expect to find in such a warm, friendly place?

Orinda has many assets: excellent schools; a semi-rural environment; friendly people; a low crime rate; a salubrious climate; and beautiful homes.

Rarely, if ever, does life get better than it does in Orinda.

But are Orindans' expectations being met today?

The Orinda of 1960, 1970, or 1980 is being challenged. The population has grown. The schools are on the verge of overcrowding, the traffic is unbearable, and downtown parking is practically nonexistent.

Can a person who bought a single, detached family home be sure that his or her home and lifestyle are not threatened?

The accompanying chart shows the population growth of Orinda over the last several decades. Note that the population between 1960 and 2017 has quadrupled.

Orinda's Population (1960 – Present)	
Year	Population
1960	4,712
1970	6,790
1980	16,825
1990	16,642
2000	17,599
2010	17,643
2017 (est.)	19,500

*Source: United States Census*

And now, Orinda which is really full, has plans to make the city even bigger.

The assaults on Orinda come from two sources: the Orinda City Council and the State of California.

What happened to Orinda? Around 2004 (and perhaps before), the Orinda City Council started to become enamored with development. Before 2004, there was really no need to attend city-council meetings. Everything was going fine. Why sit through boring council meetings when life

was good?

But around 2004 advocates of development took control of the council. Suddenly, Orinda did not seem to be the original Orinda. And who benefits from development? Answer: real-estate interests; construction workers; banks; insurance companies; and architects.

Orinda residents should ask which city-council members are aligned with development interests.

The three major blows to Orinda's environment can be seen in several projects. Readers of The Icon have seen many articles about these projects:

- the 67-unit Monteverde/Eden Housing project at 2 Irwin Way. The project has room for 30 cars. Monteverde is across the street from an Orinda fire house and violates Orinda's 35-foot height limit.

- the Orinda Grove/Pulte project on Altarinda Road. The project has 73 homes squeezed into 8.2 acres (one house per 0.1 acre). Try to find a parking space in Orinda Grove.

- Plan Bay Area, a scheme to add to Orinda and other Bay Area cities high-rise, high-density housing. Plan Bay Area was approved by regional governmental agencies on July 18-19, 2013.

Now another project is under discussion. The project involves the construction of high-rise residential units, where the Orinda post office and the Orinda Rite Aid drug store are.

Orinda is now on the verge of looking like New York City or Tokyo than the Orinda of yore.

What can be said about the State of California?

The state does not have the same type of government it used to have. In the era from 1946 to 1990, the state built freeways, educational institutions, and water projects. In 1965, gasoline cost 32 cents a gallon. Tuition at any campus of the University of California was \$180 a year then. Today, tuition is \$12,000 annually.

As California began to change, the State Legislature became less supportive of education, freeways, and other big projects. Housing prices began to rise sharply. Then, Silicon Valley emerged as a sort of world power.

The nation's heretofore big companies were no longer just General Electric, Proctor and Gamble, and General Motors.

New names appeared like Apple, Google, Intel, Netflix, Facebook, and Uber. These new firms now dominate the financial world. And the headquarters of all these firms are located in the San Francisco Bay Area.

According to The New York Times (Aug. 13, 2017), here are the rankings of some Bay Area firms in terms of stock value: Apple (first), Facebook (third), and Google (eighth).

The 20th century was dominated by petroleum. The 21st century is dominated by data.

In recent years, the State of California began to take control away from local communities. California, not local communities, would have control

over building heights, zoning, and housing density (houses per acre).

In effect, local communities, like Orinda, are now colonies of the State of California. This phenomenon raises the question: Why even have a local government?

With the pressure from some members of the Orinda City Council and the State of California, Orinda is on the brink of tremendous change.

This change, if it occurs, will be irreversible.

Is the kind of change planned for Orinda what Orinda's current residents expected -- or wanted-- when they first moved here? ■

## Can We Talk?

When is the last time the government of Orinda had an open exchange with the city's residents?

In the last 10 years, no one from the Orinda City Council has held a town-hall meeting or a press conference.

In June 2017, The Icon asked the city council to put an item -- an item about holding a town-hall meeting -- on a council agenda.

Interim City Manager Steve Salomon wrote The Icon on Aug. 1, 2017. He said: "I have discussed this [idea of a town-hall

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Lafayette Reservoir



Parking situation in downtown Orinda.