



Orinda's High-Quality Schools Imperiled

By Richard Colman

Imperious and remote forces are placing the quality of Orinda's schools in jeopardy.

While the Orinda Union School District (OUSD) is in the top one percent of public school districts in California, the State of California is planning to bring demographic changes to Orinda. These changes, if carried out, could lower educational quality.

The one percent figure that rates the quality of Orinda's school comes from the 2017-2018 annual report of the Educational Foundation of Orinda. The foundation helps provide extra funds for Orinda's public schools.

According to the foundation, Orinda receives about \$7,000 per pupil annually from government sources. Foundation support brings that total up to \$10,700. The foundation claims the per-pupil funds in New York State and Massachusetts are \$22,000 and \$17,500 respectively.

In a January 2019 interview, Jason Kaune, a member of the OUSD board of trustees, claimed that injecting more pupils into Orinda's schools could bring about new challenges to the school district. "The pressure is huge," he said. Dr. Carolyn Seaton, who is the superintendent of OSUD schools and who was also present at the January 2019 interview, said matters are "getting very challeng-

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ing." She added that the "financial future is cloudy."

Currently, OUSD has one teacher for pupils who need to learn English. That teacher is used in all five of OUSD's schools. If Orinda's demographics change, Dr. Seaton and Mr. Kaune said, more teachers could be needed for English-language learners.

In recent years, the State of California has enacted legislation that will bring more housing to Orinda (and other communities). A portion of this housing is to be set aside for people of various income levels.

Building housing for people of different income levels is not new in Orinda. Several years ago what is called the Housing Element, a mandate from the State of California, was adopted in the city. For the period covering 2009 to 2014, Cycle 4 (version 4) of the Housing Element required Orinda to construct 218 new residences, of which 118 were to be set aside for "very low-income" and "low-income" people.

In 2015, Cycle 5 (version 5) of the Housing Element was adopted. Under Cycle 5, which covers the years 2015 to 2023, 227 housing units are to be built. Of these 227 units, 131 are to be reserved for "very low-income" and "low-income" in-

See High Quality Schools on page 3

Wine & Weight

By Dr. Laura Pawlak

The new year means new goals, and they include a fresh focus on body weight. People trying to lose weight, or not gain weight, are frequently advised to "lay off the booze."

The math is simple: The alcohol molecule releases 40 percent more energy than an equal weight of sugar and is devoid of nutritional value. The biochemistry is clear: The alcohol molecule activates the production of appetite stimulants in the brain, promoting poor food choices and excess food ingestion. But do scientific studies support the logic that alcohol consumption can be a significant factor in weight gain?

The type of alcohol may be a factor. A 20-year review of alcohol consumption and body weight reveals that light-to-moderate intake of wine is more protective against weight gain than the identical alcohol content in beer or liquor.

Gender plays a role. Alcohol con-



Moderate intake of wine -- made from grapes like those shown above -- is more protective against weight gain than an identical alcohol content coming from beer or liquor.

sumption is about three times higher in men than in women. Men are more likely to drink beer and binge drink. Consistent with this observation is research showing positive associations between beer consumption and measures of abdominal fat (also known as the "beer belly") in men,

See Wine & Weight on page 3

Orinda's High-Quality Schools Imperiled

Continued from page 3

up extra housing.

In the January 2019 interview, Mr. Kaune of the OUSD board of trustees, said that he believes the main reason people choose to live in Orinda is the high quality of the city's schools. According to Superintendent Dr. Seaton, 90 percent of Orinda's pupils plan to attend a college or university. State of California housing plans, she said, could, without extra money, harm Orinda's schools. She added that Orinda is at a "tipping point." ■

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California: A Failed State?

By Richard Colman

The famous architect, Frank Lloyd Wright, once said, "America was tilted, and everything loose was sliding into Southern California."

If Mr. Wright were alive today, he presumably would be taking about all of California.

What Mr. Wright might also be saying is that California is on the verge of becoming -- or has become -- a failed state.

To stop the rot in California, groups like Livable California have come into existence.

Livable California (www.livablecalifornia.org), which began operations in early 2018, has grown in stature and membership. This group wants local control over land use, not authoritarian control by the State of California.

According to Livable California's website, "We support local strategies for communities to meet all housing needs. We oppose State overreach and big money influence."

California had a golden era that went from about 1946 to 1966. During this interval, the governors of the state were Earl Warren, Goodwin Knight, and Edmund G. (Pat) Brown. Mr. Warren and Mr. Knight were Republicans. Mr. Brown was a Democrat.

Pat Brown, now deceased, was the father of Gov. Jerry Brown, also a Democrat. Jerry Brown was governor from 1975 to 1983 and again from 2011 to 2019. Jerry Brown, after 16 total years as governor, left office on Jan. 7, 2019.

During the 1946 to 1966 golden era, California's population grew rapidly. By the mid-1960's, California became, in terms of population, the largest state, surpassing New York State.

In that golden era, people from all over America (and other countries) poured into California. Any observant person would see vehicle license plates from every other state in the union as well as license plates from other countries.

During the golden interval, California was building a first-class system of higher education, new freeways, and big water projects. In that era, tuition at the University of California system reached a level of \$180 a year. Today, tuition is about \$13,000 a year.

California's coastal region does not have snow or cold, dreary winters. In mountainous regions (like Lake Tahoe and Lake Arrowhead), there is skiing. In milder parts of the state, there is year-round golf, tennis, and swimming.

Surfing in waters off the state's coast became a phenomenon as did the music of the Beach Boys and Jan and Dean. The image of surfing in California became indelibly etched in the minds of people all over the world.

From 1966 to 1999, California still continued to grow. In the San Francisco Bay Area, Silicon Valley emerged in and near San Jose. California firms like Apple, In-



Surfing is California's official state sport.

tel, Facebook, and Google became some of the largest companies in the world. These firms hired thousands of employees. In August 2018, Apple reached a market value of \$1 trillion, the first company in the world to attain that level.

Today, California may be on the brink of collapse. A decent home in coastal California can cost \$1.5 million to \$2 million (or more). There is a statewide shortage of affordable housing. Recent surveys show that many residents are considering leaving the Golden State.

In June 2018, the Bay Area Council, a business group, released a survey showing that 46 percent of Bay Area residents might leave the state. In November 2018, a weekly publication of the California Chamber of Commerce reported that more than three-quarters of the state's voters say that "earning enough income to enjoy a middle class lifestyle is becoming almost impossible . . ."

California's tax burden is enormous. The state has the nation's highest sales tax of any state, the highest top bracket for the state income tax (13.3 percent),

and the highest or second highest gasoline tax. In November 2018, the state's voters rejected a ballot measure that would have overturned a 12-cent-a-gallon gasoline-tax increase imposed in November 2017.

In recent years, the state government has demanded that local communities build more housing or face a cut-off in state funds for projects like road repair. In addition, the state has imposed a Regional Housing Needs Allocation (RHNA), requiring local communities to create housing for individuals having different income levels.

In 2017 and 2018, the state legislature began imposing more land-use controls on local communities. Assembly Bill 2923, which, in September 2018, was signed into law by Gov. Jerry Brown, has given BART (Bay Area Rapid Transit) authority to construct high-rise, high-density housing on BART-owned land.

Currently, Senate Bill 50 has been introduced in the state legislature. This bill, if enacted, would impose additional high-rise, high-density housing construction in areas within one-quarter mile of a frequently-used bus stop or one-half mile of a train station. The bill would require that a certain amount of new housing be set aside for people of different income levels.

State workers are eligible for generous pensions. Estimates show that much of the money needed to pay for these pensions is not available. No one knows how much extra money might be needed, but news media reports state that unfunded pension liabilities range from \$250 billion to \$1 trillion.

In a December 2018, interview with the Sacramento Bee, Gov. Brown warned that public agencies in California are headed for "fiscal oblivion" if they cannot adjust retirement benefits for their employees.

In California's big cities, there are thousands of homeless people. California businesses like Google are planning to expand operations in other states (like Texas).

California has been a land of opportunity. There is no guarantee that opportunity will exist in the future. Unless there are reforms, it's time to consider living elsewhere. ■

Orinda's High-Quality Schools Imperiled

Continued from page 1

dividuals.

In 2018, the state legislature passed and Governor Jerry Brown, a Democrat, signed Senate Bill 828. The bill requires cities to zone more land for residential construction. According to the May 31, 2018, issue of the Real Deal, a real estate publication, ". . . Senate Bill 828 requires local officials to zone for the need ' . . . for all income levels.' "

Currently, the state legislature is considering Senate Bill 50, which, if enacted into law, will require local communities to construct more housing within one-quarter mile of a frequently-used bus stop or within one-half mile of a train station.

The constitutionality of constructing more housing for California's low-income people is unclear. In 1950, the state's voters passed a constitutional amendment, now called Article 34, that restricts the construction of housing for low-income people. Article 34 states: "No low rent housing project shall hereafter be developed, constructed, or acquired . . . until a majority of the electors of a city, town, or county . . . approve such project by voting in favor thereof at an election . . ."

California's current housing shortage may disappear. In June 2018, the Bay Area Council, a business group, released a survey which found that "46 percent of [Bay Area] voters are ready to leave in the next few years . . ."

The Nov. 30, 2018, issue of Alert, a publication of the California Chamber of Commerce, reported "that earning enough income to enjoy a middle class lifestyle is becoming almost impossible in my part of California."

Another factor that may increase housing supply is the demise of the Baby Boom generation, a generation born between 1946 and 1964. Baby Boomers who currently are retired or almost retired may not exist in five to 15 years, freeing

See High Quality Schools on page 4

Wine & Weight

Continued from page 1

less commonly noted in women.

One's drinking pattern (how often and how much consumed) makes a difference. While heavy drinkers risk gaining weight, light-to-moderate wine consumption, one drink (3 to 4 ounces per day) for women and two drinks (6 to 8 ounces per day) for men, does not seem to be associated with weight gain or changes in waist circumference. However, binge drinking and frequent heavy drinking are linked to obesity and other health risks in both men and women.

Genetics is always a factor. Alcohol intake can be a problem if you are genetically prone to obesity, especially if you consume alcohol when you are overweight.

Age may change risk. A few studies find that, for adolescents and elders, alcohol in any amount might promote weight gain.

In conclusion, everyone is different. The critical ingredient is self-monitoring. Weigh yourself regularly. Keep track of the calories you eat and drink.

For example, you'll find no significant caloric difference between white and red wines. Yet, 12 ounces of beer, a beverage rich in carbohydrates, can range from 55 to 320 calories!

Lastly, if your personal weight-loss plan includes alcohol, the science leans toward recommending wine -- in moderation, of course.

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. ■

Regional Governmental Agencies Usurp Control of Local Communities

Unelected regional governmental bodies have decided to seek control over land use and other policies now governed by local communities.

In December 2018, the Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC) voted to have a 21-member steering committee support the Casa Compact, which is designed to ameliorate the shortage of housing in the nine-county San Francisco Bay Area.

MTC is a regional governmental agency involved in transportation planning.

The Casa Compact, which is also known as the Committee to House the Bay Area, contains a multitude of policy recommendations. These recommendations call

for caps on rent, rules to make the eviction of renters more difficult, the removal of zoning restrictions near transit hubs, and the unlocking of public land to create additional housing. A Bay Area-wide tax increase, possibly in excess of \$1 billion, is also planned

On Jan. 17, 2019, the board of directors of

Association of Bay Area Government (ABAG) voted 21 to 9 to support the Casa Compact. One ABAG member did not vote.

ABAG is involved in land use in the Bay Area.

At the Jan. 17 meeting, members of a group called Livable California held a rally to protest the Casa Compact. At the ABAG meeting about 65 people spoke.

MTC and ABAG were once separate organizations. Today, ABAG is under the aegis of MTC.

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

One member of MTC is Amy Worth, a member of the Orinda City Council. Ms. Worth was elected to a sixth consecutive term on the city council in November 2018. She was first elected to the city council in November 1998.

At press time, Ms. Worth could not be reached for comment on the Casa Compact. ■



In San Francisco, members of Livable California rallied against the Casa Compact.