



Sudden Oak Death Hitting Our Trees

By Chris Lavin
Contributing Writer

A shadow is slowly passing over the Lamorinda area in the shape of a sickle: Sudden Oak Death Syndrome is descending on the oaks of our region.

It is not too late, however, to do something about it.

"There are some experts who are saying that this disease will kill 98 percent of the coastal live oaks in Contra Costa County in the next 20 years," said Jonathan Goodwin, a Canyon resident who has been trumpeting the word for the past year, advocating prevention.

Tanoaks and white oaks are also particularly prone to infection. Some trees in the EBMUD watershed areas in Contra Costa have already been infected, providing host trees for the spread of the disease.

Sudden Oak Death is caused by a parasitic pathogen with the name of phytophthora ramorum, which unfortunately can hitch a ride on particles of fog – an impossible traveler to block. The burning of diseased oaks can also spread the disease, or the delivery of an infected wood pile can carry the germs into the surrounding vegetation.

Bay laurels, camellia bushes and rhododendrons host the disease, as well, although they are not killed by it.

While dying oaks have not been ubiquitous in the Lamorinda area, more and more trees are being infected – a sign that there will likely be more to come, said Robert Scudder, of the San Francisco Professional Gardeners' Organization.

"I'm sure it will come," said Kenny Murakami, longtime owner and manager of the Moraga Garden Center, about the disease in Contra Costa County. "It's already here."

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Kenny Murakami, Moraga Garden Center

Orinda's Ballot Measure E

This is the first in a series of three interviews with Mayor Steve Glazer by the Lamorinda Weekly focusing on Orinda's ballot Measure E, which comes to a vote on June 5. It calls for floating a \$58.6 million bond to fix the city's deteriorating roads, drainage and water pipes.

This week, we focus on those taxpayers who have owned their properties the longest, and will therefore be paying lower taxation amounts to pay the bond back, should it pass. In our next issue, we will target the issue for recent buyers, and in the final part of the series before the election, we will focus on how the measure might affect prospective Orinda buyers.

By Chris Lavin and Andy Scheck

Q: There seems to be some confusion among long-time homeowners in Orinda regarding how much this is going to add to their property tax bills. Why the worries?

Glazer: We think that some homeowners don't recognize the difference between the assessed value of their property – that is the amount they are taxed on – and the resale value. Sure, a rancher could sell for \$1.5 million, but it might be appraised at only \$200,000. We're talking about a small house, only two bedrooms and one bath. In other words, if the valuation of the property is \$200,000, the cost to that homeowner will be \$38 per year in the early years, graduating up to \$60 per year. For someone with a house that is assessed at \$2 million, it will be \$380 per year, going up to \$600. Assessed valuations and resale values are different. It's a huge difference. Hug

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Real Estate in Lamorinda: A Healthy Stabilization

By Sophie Braccini

To the many families who have sold their houses for over asking price with multiple offers, the news that the average price of homes is decreasing in Contra Costa County brings a smile. For others, whose houses sat on the market for 5 months and were sold 20% below asking price, this is a reality. What is really going on in our little neck of the woods?

First, we have to realize that Contra Costa statistics are not Lamorinda statistics. In April, there are 855 homes for sale in Antioch, 395 in Concord and 529 in Pittsburgh, while Lafayette lists 69, Moraga 19 and Orinda 43. So in Contra Costa statistics, Lamorinda is not very influential, nor is it well portrayed.

What are the figures for our area then? In 2004 and 2005, we saw a double digit price increase. A 21% yearly growth certainly isn't sustainable in the long term. Between 2005 and 2006, prices started to calm down. Orinda grew by 8%, Lafayette 7% and Moraga stayed the same. Keith Katzman, who compiled the figures (from the multiple listing service) for all single family homes sold in Moraga in 2005 and 2006, says the price per square foot has risen between 2005 and 2006 by an average of 2.4%. At the same time the number of homes sold below the asking price rose. The market was

still anticipating a price increase.

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