

Orinda's ballot Measure E

By Chris Lavin

This is the last in a three-part series by the Lamorinda Weekly focusing on Orinda's ballot Measure E, which comes to a vote on June 5. It calls for floating a series of bonds totaling \$58.6 million to fix the city's deteriorating roads, drainage and water pipes.

In this interview with Mayor Steve Glazer, we focus on those taxpayers who may be considering buying homes in Orinda, and will therefore be paying higher taxation amounts to pay the bond back, should it pass in the special election. The first two parts of the series, which focused first on long-time property owners and then on recent buyers, can be read at www.LamorindaWeekly.com.

Q: How will Measure E affect new home ownership?

Glazer: You have to look at what a new resident wants: They want a safe environment, strong schools and new roads. In that respect we are battling two out of three. Our road conditions will impact the attractiveness of our community and act as a detriment to the new residents, which has the affect of, eventually, influencing property values.

Q: Orinda is one of the wealthiest cities in the East Bay, so it seems kind of surprising that the roads are in such bad shape. Do you think the state of the roads has started to affect property values?

Glazer: Well, when you have a potential homeowner, and a starter house here now is \$1 million, arriving to see that house in a high-end car that is low to the ground, yes, I think it's an issue. People may look at homes on the Internet but no one goes out to buy a home without looking at it, and if the road is barely passable they are not going to consider it. People who can buy into Orinda are driving nice cars, that's just a fact, and potential buyers are going to be arriving in nice cars. I'm not so worried about the SUVs, but I'm thinking more of the Porches, high-performance cars that just don't need to be driving through potholes.

Q: Orinda has two new major housing developments in the making. Won't new homeowners there be expecting decent roads when they go to the grocery or the dry cleaners?

Glazer: Yes, I think they will expect that. And I think we can do that for them.

Q: Since new homeowners will be paying more for this measure, because their property valuations will be greater than those of Orindans who have lived in the city for decades, how are you guaranteeing to them that roads will be kept up?

Glazer: First, Measure E is a long-term plan to fix our roads and keep them in better shape. I think, when it passes, it will take us through the next 20 years. But once we do get our roads up to good condition, it's a lot easier to get them there and keep them there. We have to remember that fixing a road that has been let go for 20 years is a lot more expensive, five times more expensive, than it is to keep it in good repair. And that's what we want to do. Get it fixed and then keep it repaired.

Q: There seems to have been some attention to the fact that most American cities have not put a lot of money into their infrastructure since the 1950s, and that Orinda is in good company with other cities across the nation. Do you agree with that?

Glazer: No, you cannot compare us to them. In the Bay Area, we're comparing our housing market to ... what? And Orinda has the worst, the worst! roads. Much worse than Moraga or Lafayette. What's happening elsewhere isn't really significant. We have to fix what we have to fix.

Q: Do you see a day when the people of Orinda will not be relying on roads so much, using more public transportation, and actually walking to their activities?

Glazer: In a city where probably 98 percent of the population needs to drive, not really. But we do have wonderful amenities to our town and we've worked hard to make it that way. But just think of the bicyclists. They need good roads more than cars do.

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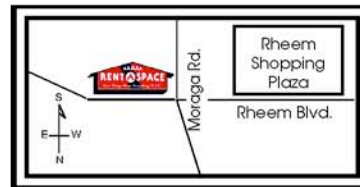
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