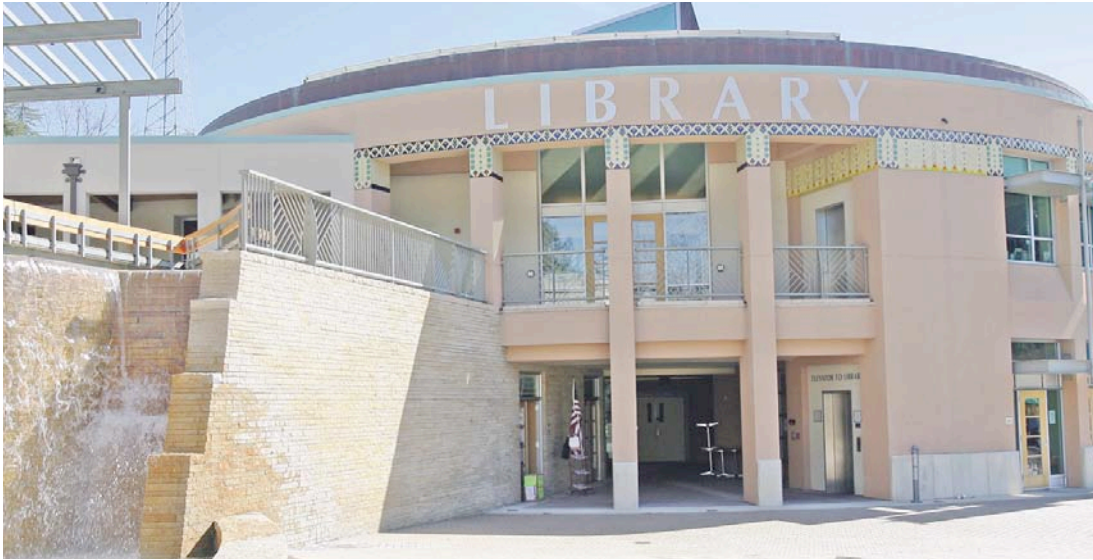




Orinda Library Parcel Tax—A Question for the June 3rd Ballot

By Andrea A Firth



Orinda Library

Photo Tod Fierner

Following many meetings, much analysis, and some vigorous debate, the Orinda City Council unanimously passed a resolution to place a measure on the June 3rd special election ballot regarding the Orinda Library parcel tax. The current library parcel tax sunsets in midsummer of 2009 and requires a voter approved ballot measure to renew. Voters will be asked to authorize the continuation of the existing parcel tax with an upward adjustment from \$27 to \$39 per parcel per year for the purpose of maintaining library hours and services. “I am hopeful that the people of Orinda will recognize that this is something important to maintain,” stated Council member Tom McCormick, “I fully support it.” Mayor Pro Tem, Sue Severson concurred, “I whole heartedly support this effort. It truly benefits all citizens in our community.”

In 2001, Orinda residents originally approved the library parcel tax—known as Measure H—with 75% of voters in support. “The County provides funding to keep the library open 27 hours per week,” according to Pat Rudebusch a member of the Board of the Friends of the Orinda Library. “Thanks to the parcel tax we are able to keep the library open 60 hours per week, an additional 33 hours—more than double.” With the parcel tax due to expire next summer, the Friends of the Orinda

Library identified the need to secure continued funding to maintain library hours and services at the current level. “[The Friends’] primary goal is to keep the library open 60 hours per week,” explained Nancy Kaible, a member of the Friends of the Orinda Library and long-time library supporter.

The City of Orinda and the Friends of the Orinda Library joined forces to hire the firm of Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin & Associates to conduct a feasibility study of the community’s interest in keeping the library open 60 hours per week and to test their support of various funding scenarios. Telephone poll results of 301 Orinda residents revealed a very positive attitude toward the library and its services. Over 90% of those interviewed had used the library facility in the past year and 92% approved of the performance of the library.

Council members Amy Worth and Steve Glaser worked with City staff and members of the Friends of the Orinda Library to determine an annual parcel tax amount that would address the effect of inflation and cover the library operating costs (associated with the additional hours) through the next decade. This led to the recommendation of \$39 per residential parcel tax with no sunset. “I think the \$39 number is fair and reasonable,” stated Nancy Kaible when she addressed the Council. “The library

will be there when you need it and provide what you expect...I think the citizens will support this.”

The relationship between the Friends of the Orinda Library and City has a long and complex history. The Orinda Library sits on land owned by the City while the Friends of the Orinda Library own the Library building and maintain a lease to purchase agreement with the City. The City maintains responsibility for insurance, maintenance, and utilities and has the option to purchase the Library building for \$1 in 2051. Library operating expenses are covered by the County subsidy and the current parcel tax, and the Friends pay for materials and programs through books sales. “It’s always been a very successful partnership,” noted Council Member Amy Worth.