

Orinda Takes a Look at the Budget

By Andrea A. Firth

Orinda City Council, staff, and several committee members met last week to review the Capital Improvement Plan and draft Operation Budget for the 2008-2009 fiscal year as the Council tries to manage the significant and immediate infrastructure needs of the City while planning and saving for the future.

Summarizing the status of the City's budget for the current year, Administrative Services Manager Beverli Marshall stated, "For the most part we will hit our mark on expenses." Due to some surplus attributable to positions that were not filled and some additional property tax revenue, she added, "We will have a surplus this year."

Marshall also explained that despite the budget woes at the State level, the impact of the State budget cuts on the City's operating budget would be minimal. The City would still receive gas tax credits from the State; however, payment would likely be delayed until September resulting in a loss of three months of interest revenue.

City Engineer Janice Carey reviewed an extensive list of infrastructure projects including work to the roads, drainage, bridges, slopes, bikeways and walkways throughout the city. The projected budget for Capital Improvement Plan for 2008-2009 as currently drafted is just over \$5.8 million with the Moraga Way Rehabilitation project representing over 40% of the total budget. In addition, over \$1.2 million will be spent as part of the Annual Pavement Management Program with similar appropriations planned for the next three years.

Regarding the City's projected revenues, Marshall noted that while many cities in the Bay Area have seen a decrease in real estate sales, Orinda has experienced an increase in property sales from March 2007 to March 2008. "Property tax revenue will continue to grow," stated Marshall. She also anticipates the same level of retail tax revenue from last year to this year despite some indicators of a slow down in retail sales elsewhere.

Marshall also reviewed several recommended changes included in the draft budget. One item that generated a fair amount of discussion was the proposal to fund a Police Services Study in conjunction with the cities of Danville and Lafayette to compare and analyze alternate law enforcement options to the current contract with the Contra Costa County Sheriff's Office.

Although Council members and staff were quick to note their current satisfaction with the quality and level of service provided through the Sheriff's Office, members of the City's Budget Committee explained that this area of the budget had increased the most on a percentage basis. With the rising costs of maintaining the contract, the Budget Committee recommended that issue be studied critically and alternatives evaluated. Council members Steve Glazer and Tom McCormick both noted that it would be valuable to examine the model for police services used in Moraga as well.