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Letters to the Editor

To the Editor:

Three developers are planning a 16-home planned unit development on the 20-acre property surrounding the Moraga Adobe house in southwest Orinda (near the Del Rey School).

The historic Moraga Adobe house, home of the owner of the Mexican land grant covering most of Lamorinda, may not be preserved in this development. If you wish the Moraga Adobe and several acres around it to be preserved you should e-mail planner Roscoe Mata of the Orinda Planning Department, who is reviewing the plans, and express your concerns. The e-mail address is: rmata@cityoforinda.org. Residents in the general vicinity of the Moraga Adobe will have a strong interest in the effect of the development on the severe traffic congestion near the Del Rey School. The proposed development will add the traffic from 16 homes to the already severe Del Rey School traffic. If you live in the Lavenida area you will be concerned with the possibility of having Lavenida become an Emergency Vehicle Access route for the development. All area residents will be concerned with the possibility of the two sections of Donna Maria Way being connected as a through street. This would cause an influx of students driving to Miramonte High School and severely worsen the Del Rey School traffic congestion.

Express your concerns to: rmata@cityoforinda.org.

If you wish to be kept informed of how the development is proceeding, send your e-mail address to: barbaravau@att.net.

Barbara Vaughn
Orinda

To the Editor:

This is in response to Clyde Vaughn's comments about Measure B and the "high value" of Orinda property in the January 21st Lamorinda Weekly.

Clyde, no one wants new taxes, not now or ever. However, these are desperate times for California schools and especially a school district like Orinda that only receives \$5,273/student per year (unlike Hillsborough which receives \$8,150/student). Thanks to Proposition 13 we (along with most school districts in California) do not have enough funds to meet the demands of a high quality education. Now the state budget crises has put even more of a strain on our schools.

I'm thankful that OUSD does so well on such a tight budget with 85% of their financial resources going toward salaries. As for those teacher salaries, according to the School Accountability Report Card published by OUSD on Orinda Intermediate School the average teacher salary for the 2006-2007 school year was \$60,471. This is certainly not enough given the demands of their jobs and our Bay Area cost of living.

I cannot imagine why you don't think Orinda's property values are not the direct result of our top notch schools. Have you been living in a box all these years? Most of the home sales are to families with children because of the schools. If my

husband and I could have maintained our wonderful, hip urban lifestyle while covering a mortgage and sending our kids to private schools we would have stayed in Berkeley! We along with many other families moved to Orinda for the schools, and only for the schools. Otherwise, I personally don't find ranch homes in the burbs and the fact I have to drive everywhere all that charming! Clyde, you will have the Orinda schools to thank when you sell your little rancher for a bundle for the great retirement opportunity that awaits you.

As for Measure B, I wish we could fund our schools differently and not have to ask Orinda tax payers to shell out more money, but we have to. As a parent of two, and in the near future three Orinda school children I am willing to pay more for this great education we receive here. Not only does a good education benefit my children, it benefits Orinda and society as a whole.

Maya McBride
Orinda

To the Editor:

A famous American has written: "If we're serious about building a twenty-first century school system, we're going to have to take the teaching profession seriously."

This American called for teachers to be paid \$100,000 annually, adding that "[highly skilled teachers in such critical fields as math and science . . . should be paid even more."

He also said: "In exchange for more money, teachers need to become more accountable . . ."

Thus, it is inexcusable that voters in Lamorinda are constantly bombarded with requests for higher school taxes, and yet get nothing in return.

In November 2008, the Acalanes Union High School District received \$93 million extra from voters. In March 2009, Orinda voters will be asked to come up with 32 percent more in school property taxes.

In both cases, voters received no promises of greater teacher accountability. Why don't the Acalanes and Orinda school districts promise teachers more money in exchange for eliminating tenure? Why don't these districts offer higher salaries to mathematics and science teachers?

The answer is simple: These districts refuse to confront powerful, egalitarian special-interest groups (like the teachers' union).

The time has come for voters to say no to any more tax hikes for public schools until and unless voters get guarantees of reform.

And who is that famous American who has called for education reform? His name is Barack Obama, president of the United States. My quotations come from his book, "The Audacity of Hope."

Richard S. Colman
Orinda

Dear Editor,

Many paying attention to education finance in 1978 knew Proposition 13 would cripple public education. And so it has. Its two-thirds requirement for legislated tax increases has similarly crippled state government. Proposition 13 has no sunset and lawmakers consider it the political "third rail."

Orinda resident Clyde Vaughn, opposed to every measure aimed to better our community, recently stated by paying property taxes for 53 years, "I believe we have done our part" (Lamorinda Sun, 1/16/09). He behaves as if Prop 13 has had no effect on him or the schools.

Since 1978, based on the assessed value of Mr. Vaughn's home (\$78,357 - CC County website), he has paid approximately \$34,700 in assessed taxes (not including bonds and parcel taxes). But in 2003, a new Del Rey neighbor, in search

of a great community with the highest rated public schools in the state, purchased a comparable home for \$500,000. These homeowners will pay at least four times that of Mr. Vaughn's \$1,200 payment. With such disparate levels of taxation, the new owners will have surpassed Mr. Vaughn's 35 years' worth of property tax in just six years! Young families with school-aged children also pay an average of \$1,200 per child to parents' clubs and foundations to enjoy the education our children received before Prop 13.

It is wonderful we seniors can stay in our homes with low tax rates. So when our school officials seek an additional \$124 annual contribution, let's recognize this: honorable Orinda seniors have long supported our public schools, and we stand with them. Vote YES on MEASURE B.

Sincerely,

Sue and Ralph Severson, Carol and Scot Bergren, Mary and John Fazel, Sue and Al Farmer, Penny and Ian Baird, Phyllis and Eugene Gottfried, Ann and Lee Sorenson, Yvonne McDaniel, Jack and Barbara Bontemps, Joan and Bob Montgomery, Pam Gardiner, Nellie and Rudy Glauser, Jeanne and Jack Wickware, Kathy and Bran Yaich, Kate and Max Rittman, Pam Elder, Midge and Peter Zischke,

Jean Lyford
Orinda

Dear Editor:

It was the best of times. It was the worst of times. For many Americans, financial worries are an everyday preoccupation at this time. While with the start of a new year and a new administration in Washington we have hope, residents of Contra Costa County, Lamorinda, and Orinda remain concerned about their economic futures.

The Orinda Unified School District has placed a bond measure on the ballot to be voted on this March. Not supporting a school bond measure in Orinda is akin to being unpatriotic. Last November, Measure E was passed raising property taxes to pay for improvements to the local high school district. As a candidate for City Council at that time I did not endorse Measure E for a number of reasons. Living in Orinda for the better part of two decades I have always supported school bond measures but found myself unconvinced by the need for the magnitude of improvements and the consequential tax increase that was proposed.

At this point I am concerned about the timing of another property tax increase. Orindans are not immune to underemployment, unemployment and living on a fixed income. The solution for desired community improvements invariably becomes property taxes. The reality is our City Plan has not adequately addressed the need for increasing sales tax and commercial property tax revenues thus allowing us to meet our needs for infrastructure, schools and other necessary services through means other than increasing property taxes. The Revenue Enhancement Taskforce was recently dissolved by action of the City Council. It remains to be seen to what degree the Council will effectively negotiate with the fire district. At a time in which a number of Bay Area cities are near bankruptcy due to the cost of police and fire services, our community also must be concerned about fiscal responsibility in addressing such needs. I hope that my fellow residents will ask questions of the school board, fire district board, and City Council members regarding their plans for how we might finance proposed public projects in the future outside of the old paradigm that unnecessarily relies upon property tax revenue.

Wishing you all a happy new year,

Dr. Bob Larsen
Orinda

Editor:

Orinda School Tax Measure B Is Flawed.

Any parcel tax should have an ending date and not go on forever. Because this tax goes on forever, the voters have no right to adjust the tax as state financing for schools is adjusted. With an ending date the Orinda taxpayers would have the right to determine if another tax is needed.

I believe Orinda voters are not provided full disclosure of the requirements to qualify for a Senior Exemption. Seniors are led to believe they will benefit from a Senior Exemption whereas in reality the qualification requirements are so stringent very few Orindans will qualify. According to the Orinda School District Business Office, the Orinda household income must not exceed approximately \$43,050 to qualify for the exemption.

If the School District used the median income of Orinda taxpayers in their calculations, more than 70 Orinda seniors would qualify for the exemption. Instead, it appears the School District will use the overall lower median income of Contra Costa County taxpayers.

Since Orinda taxpayers will pay the parcel tax, the qualifications for a Senior Exemption should be based upon the median income of Orinda taxpayers.

This School tax proposal is flawed because I believe the tax should have an ending date, the Senior Exemption is based on wrong requirements, and voters are not given full disclosure on specifics of the tax.

Vincent Maiorana
Orinda

Reach the reporter at: info@lamorindaweekly.com

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