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Mayor Severson Declares 2009 the Year of Action

By Andrea A. Firth



Mayor Sue Severson Photo A. Firth

Mayor Sue Severson declared 2009 as the year of action in her speech to an audience of almost 100 attendees at the Mayor's Luncheon last week, which was jointly hosted by the Orinda Rotary and Chamber of Commerce. A moving rendition of the song *The Impossible Dream* performed by Orinda resident and mezzo-soprano opera singer Lisa Vanderploeg Pugh, who was accompanied on the piano by Severson's husband Ralph, set the stage for the Mayor's speech. Then, like Don Quixote before her, Severson lay down the gauntlet and set forth her quest for the year ahead-to achieve a seemingly impossible dream and make some real progress toward fixing Orinda's roads.

Severson started off with a review of the City's achievements in 2008 highlighting the work of the Citizen Infrastructure Oversight Committee and the Revenue Enhancement Task Force, which have provided the foundation for the City Council's road-repair action plan. The money that Orinda currently spends each year on infrastructure work barely scrapes the surface of the City's road problems according to Severson. "Our ability to address the City's infrastructure needs with our current revenues is not possible," she stated. The City's total operating budget approximates \$11.5 million, of which about \$1 million goes to road and sewer repair, and the City's infrastructure needs are estimated to be well over \$100 million. "We must move forward to develop additional sources of revenue," Severson added. "We need to act on the recommendations of the Revenue Enhancement Task Force."

Noting that no single revenue source would provide a complete fix for the City's overwhelming infrastructure funding needs, Severson presented a multi-pronged approach to the problem. In addition to the current budget allocation, Severson identified grants, like the ones procured to repave Moraga Way; partnering with the East Bay Municipal Utility District and the Moraga-Orinda Fire District; and a draw down of the City's reserves as potential funding sources. Severson also listed new and additional taxes as possible elements of the revenue pie; these included a general obligation bond, a city sales and/or user tax, a utility user tax, and a real estate property transfer tax.

"We need broad scale local support for revenue enhancement measures,"

stated Severson, "Now is the time to act."

Severson acknowledged the negative impact of the State budget crisis and the weakened economy, which may lead to cuts in the revenue received from the State and reduced local sales tax revenue. She also noted that although Orinda's home values have remained more buoyant than many communities throughout the State, permit applications to Orinda's Planning Department for home building and remodeling are down 30% from a year ago.

Despite the gloomy economic outlook, Severson remained optimistic and encouraged all members of the community to work together to achieve the impossible dream. She closed her comments with her vision for Orinda-a City with smooth roads, a revitalized downtown, safer access to schools and businesses, increased public safety and awareness, adequate and affordable housing for seniors and families, enhanced scenic beauty, and shared community pride.

Achieving Orinda's **Im**possible Dream



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