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# Orinda Roads-Council Tackles How to Fund a $73 Million Fix

*By Andrea A. Firth*

To bring Orinda's road system to optimum condition has an estimated five-year price tag of $73 million according to the City's Citizens' Infrastructure Oversight Commission (CIOC).

At the December 15th City Council meeting the CIOC, a seven-member commission comprised of residents with engineering and public works expertise, presented five alternative plans for rehabilitating the City's road and drainage systems. The CIOC's strong preference was that the City pursues a plan to return all of Orinda's roads to good condition. Continuing to maintain the roads at current spending levels, about $2 million per year, will leave the residential streets, which represent 68% of all of Orinda's roadways, to turn to gravel according to one CIOC member.

Less expensive, middle-of-the road alternatives, with five-year costs between $31 and $38 million, were only minimally acceptable according to the CIOC. These plans would maintain the most traveled streets in the City at an optimum condition and prevent further deterioration of residential roads as a whole, but many residential streets would be left at substandard levels.

The Total Cost? Earlier gross estimates of the cost to repair Orinda's aging road infrastructure, as presented by the City's Revenue Enhancement Task Force last year, have been as high as $120 million. Not included in the CIOC's road repair plan is the cost to upgrade water pipes that run under the roads, which the Commission concluded were owned by and the financial responsibility of the East Bay Municipal Utility District. Residents Art Haigh and Steve Cohn strongly encouraged the City Council to factor the water pipes into the road repair mix noting that the upgrades were necessary and much more cost-effectively done during road repair.

The CIOC also identified the ongoing maintenance costs associated with keeping Orinda's roads in optimum condition, which ranged from $2 million to $3 million annually for the preferred and mid-range infrastructure management options.

How to Fund It. The goal of the CIOC report was to identify for the Council a reasonable range of options to manage the City's infrastructure. Where the CIOC left off and the City's Finance Advisory Committee (FAC) stepped in was with how to pay for the infrastructure plan. Carol Penskar, Chair of the FAC, presented an updated report of revenue options, and the Council engaged in a discussion of what tax or combination of taxes would be most palatable to Orinda residents. The Council voted to hire a public opinion research strategy firm, FM3, to develop and implement a community phone poll to assess the residents' views about the infrastructure problem and how best to fund fixing it. A draft of the poll questionnaire regarding infrastructure plan options and funding will be presented at the next City Council meeting on January 5th.

The F.A.I.R Option. Early in the course of the December 15th Council meeting, residents Art Haigh and Steve Cohn, members of the citizen group F.A.I.R (Fire and Infrastructure Renewal), requested the Council hear a presentation from their organization. "Our presentation is about taking control of our property taxes. We want to show you how Orinda can generate $65 million over the next 12 years without compromising emergency services," said Haigh. "The substance is relevant and important in light of the new taxes being proposed," he added.

F.A.I.R. contends that the Moraga Orinda Fire District can be run more cost efficiently and proposes that a portion of the MOFD property tax revenues can then be redirected to address Orinda's crumbling roads, storm drains, and water delivery system. MOFD Chief Randy Bradley was also in attendance and indicated to the City Council that the department encouraged a presentation. F.A.I.R. will give a Power Point presentation at the City Council's next meeting on January 5th.

Reach the reporter at: [andrea@lamorindaweekly.com](mailto:andrea@lamorindaweekly.com)