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## Orinda Conducts Public Opinion Poll on New Taxes

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Orinda's City Council voted unanimously at its January 5th meeting to move forward with a public opinion telephone survey to gauge residents' satisfaction with City services and their willingness to support ballot measures for new taxes to fund road and storm drain improvements and City services and operations. The 19-question telephone survey, which will be conducted by the research firm FM3, will poll 400 residents during the 2nd and 3rd weeks of January.

With the City facing a shortfall for the 2010-2011 budget year, two of the survey questions are focused on whether residents would support a small tax, a 1/4 cent sales tax or a \$53 parcel tax, to help fund City services. The amount of the projected budget deficit remains to be determined; a \$53 parcel tax would raise an estimated \$370,000 annually.

The survey queries respondents about their likelihood to support new property tax measures to fund infrastructure improvements, including a \$20 million to \$50 million bond measure (an annual ad valorem tax based on assessed property value) or a parcel tax measure (\$300 per parcel a year). The survey also asks respondents about their support for increasing the local sales tax and establishing a real estate transfer tax or utility users taxes as funding options for infrastructure needs.

To place a measure on the ballot in the next regular election in June, the City must file with the County by March. One of the advantages of placing a ballot measure on the June ballot is the tie in with the City budget cycle, which runs from July 1st to June 30th, noted Council member Steve Glazer. While the City Council has considered pursuing status as a Charter City, which would then enable it to propose a real estate transfer tax, it chose not to include survey questions regarding residents' interest in changing from a General Law to Charter City. A measure for Charter City status must be placed on the ballot in a November general election.

"Are you really ready to put something on the ballot in June?" questioned Orinda resident Alex Evans in his comments to the City Council during the special workshop held to discuss the poll. Too many issues, too little time, and too little money were the challenges Evans cited to conducting the poll as devised. He suggested taking the goal of a June ballot measure out of the equation and proposed first conducting a poll to determine residents' priorities and views toward raising taxes before asking about specific ballot measures.

"We have to do this, because this is what we are here to do," stated Vice Mayor Victoria Smith in her comments during the workshop. She outlined the survey's objectives as way to assess the community's view on how City government is doing and their willingness to support ballot measures for general and infrastructure taxes.

Results of the survey are tentatively scheduled for presentation to the City Council at their regularly scheduled meeting on February 2nd.

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