

Orinda Council Supports Protecting Local Taxes

By Andrea A. Firth

At the last City Council meeting, Orinda City Council members voted unanimously to support a resolution to protect local revenues from tax grabs by the State. The resolution supports a measure to be placed on the November ballot that, if passed, would close tax loopholes and prevent the State from borrowing or otherwise redirecting local government taxes and transportation and public transit funds. A coalition led by the League of California Cities and others is working to collect one million signatures to guarantee the measure a spot on the November ballot.

“There has been a history of the State trying to grab local property tax monies and public safety and transit revenue,” states Eric Figueroa, Public Affairs Manager for the League of California Cities. Figueroa cites several examples of the State tapping into local resources during 2009 including the borrowing of \$2 billion in local tax funds, the redirecting of \$1.7 billion in redevelopment monies, and the shifting of \$710 million away from local transit authorities. Accessing the local revenues from the State gas tax (Proposition 42 funds) were also threatened, he adds.

The goal of the proposed measure is to prohibit the State

from taking, borrowing or redirecting local taxpayer funds dedicated to public safety, emergency response and other local services along with protecting dedicated transportation and public transit funds. “It will protect these local revenues constitutionally,” says Figueroa adding, “It provides assurance that local revenues stay local, providing certainty and protecting important essential services.” More information about the local taxpayer, public safety and transportation act of 2010 can be found at www.savelocalservices.com.

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Wendy Holcenberg
wendy@holcenberg.com
925.253.4630

Michelle Holcenberg
michelle@holcenberg.com
925.253.4663

5 Moraga Way
Orinda CA 94563



Orinda Conducts Public Opinion Poll on New Taxes

By Andrea A. Firth

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 ¼ 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.

F.A.I.R. Proposes to Dissolve MOFD and Contract with ConFire

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Later in the meeting, Orinda Council Member Steve Glazer countered the inequity argument citing the conclusion of a Tri-Agency Committee which found the cost-share of the MOFD, which is currently about a 65% to 35% split between Orinda and Moraga, is fair based on the scope of service and area of coverage each municipality receives.

ConFire Annexation Fear. FAIR reported that they had numerous conversations with commissioners from LAFCO (Local Agency Formation Commission) who refuted the idea that ConFire would like to annex the MOFD to take the property tax revenue for the County. However, Council Member Victoria Smith suggested caution with respect to LAFCO noting the serious financial deficits faced by ConFire and the deeper fire tax

revenue pockets of Orinda and Moraga.

Next Steps. At the conclusion of the FAIR presentation, Resnick strongly encouraged the City Council to create a subcommittee to confirm that fire service tax revenue can be transferred to the cities; to validate the accuracy of the FAIR presentation; and to work quickly to complete the review within sixty days. Staff was directed to coordinate a Tri-agency meeting with Moraga and the MOFD, and Mayor McCormick and Council Member Amy Worth were appointed to this subcommittee.

The MOFD has planned a question-and-answer session with FAIR representatives at its February 3rd meeting to be held at 1280 Moraga Way starting at 7:00 p.m.

FAIR Proposal

- Orinda and Moraga dissolve the MOFD, or Orinda detaches
- Contract with ConFire for fire service, keeping the same configuration: 5 fire stations, 3 firefighters and 1 paramedic per truck
- All employees absorbed by ConFire; one dedicated Assistant Fire Chief
- Contract with AMR for emergency service: staff the 2 existing ambulances with AMR paramedics
- Not in favor of annexation to ConFire or of forming own department

Average Property Tax for Fire/Emergency Service per Household*		
City/Town	% of total tax	\$ per household (average)
Orinda	22.6	1,650
Moraga	18.9	1,000
Lafayette	14.1	830

*As presented by FAIR. % of total tax as established by Proposition 13.

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