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Mayor McCormick-Tough Road Ahead

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Mayor Tom McCormick Photo Tod Fierner

issues and plans for the 25th anniversary of the City's incorporation, but the City's limited budget dollars and significant infrastructure needs dominated his speech. "Believe it or not, Orinda government is considered a poor government [as compared to other cities]," stated the Mayor. "We have limited dollars to spend on road and infrastructure repairs and other necessary services."

While not advocating a wholesale change in the way Orinda operates, McCormick emphasized the need to increase the City's revenues. "Our revenue is not going up," said McCormick. He explained that only 7% of the property tax generated in Orinda actually finds its way to the City budget. Orinda receives approximately \$5 million in property tax revenue, its single largest source of operating revenue, which represents 45% of the City's \$11 million annual budget.

The short-term solution to increasing revenues, raising taxes, will not be pursued at this time according to the Mayor. He focused on longer-term solutions to increasing the City's revenues including the creation of a user-friendly planning process and the revitalization of the downtown district-initiatives that have been integral to his first three years on the Council.

"A revitalized downtown will generate more revenue for the City," stated McCormick. He outlined the recommendations of the City's Planning Process Review Task Force, which has already streamlined the process for residential remodeling and development. He advocated for allowing the downtown building height to increase to 55 feet to allow for retail on the first floor and housing on the top three floors. He shared architectural renderings by Orinda resident Peter Hasselman that depicted a new vision for Orinda's downtown. While he acknowledged that the City and the Council have not sanctioned these plans, McCormick sees opportunity in the ideas.

"You live in a community that really cares," stated McCormick on a positive note. "The great thing about Orinda is that the residents are smart, well educated, involved, and willing to share their opinions."

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"It was the best of times. It was the worst of times," stated Mayor Tom McCormick as he addressed over 150 people at the annual Mayor's Luncheon jointly sponsored by Orinda Rotary and the Chamber of Commerce. McCormick used the Charles Dickens' quote to characterize the current state of affairs in Orinda, which has some of the best schools in the State and resilient property values despite the economic downturn (the best of times) while it also carries the distinction of having some of the worst roads in the Bay Area and a flagging downtown commercial district (the worst of times). "We have many challenges to make Orinda an even better place to live, but they are not insurmountable," said McCormick.

Before launching into his plans for Orinda in 2010, McCormick first acknowledged the commitment and good work of the City staff, which has been faced with a 4% pay cut and a cap on benefits due to the City's dwindling revenues. He also recognized the hard work of his fellow Council members, and thanked his parents for encouraging him to pursue public service. McCormick's parents have both served as elected officials; his mother has served on the Dublin City Council.

McCormick covered a number of topics related to the City's operations, from the healthy volunteer ethic, to community safety