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Meet the Orinda Council Candidates: Victoria Robinson Smith

Laurie Snyder



Victoria Robinson Smith

Orinda has roughly a \$10 million annual budget - small when considering the programs it offers and problems it faces. What shape is the City in - and what must our leaders do over the next 10 years to improve our fiscal picture?

In April 2009, when the banking world was in freefall, we revised the City's Investment Policy to require that all investments are kept in very safe AA or AAA securities ... we adopted a Reserve Policy which requires the City to maintain an operating reserve of 50 percent of the annual General Fund, but no less than five million dollars. We also adopted a Balanced Budget policy. We have met these requirements each year, even though Orinda experienced a three percent decrease in property tax revenue last year.

We have balanced the budget by making tough decisions.... But we must address our greatest unmet need ... right now, the cost to completely rebuild our roads and storm drains, which we inherited from Contra Costa County, is \$52 million.... With the help of the Citizens Infrastructure Oversight Committee, we will have fixed all of our major roads, and the roads around the schools by 2015. However, we do not have the millions of dollars needed to fix our residential roads.

Two months ago, the City Council adopted a 10 Year Plan.... The first step ... a 1/2 cent sales tax, which is on the November ballot for voter approval ... will be followed in later years by two bond measures, so that ... over time, we

will accumulate the money needed to comprehensively repair our roads. While we all recognize that the 1/2 cent sales tax will result in a relatively small amount of money ... it enjoys wide support among the voters and ... we will use the revenue to attack our road deficit and produce measurable results.

What can Orindans do right now to help?

Orinda's residents are our greatest resource in climbing back from the economic downturn! First, we can all "Shop" and "Eat" Orinda! September 18th is the Orinda Chamber of Commerce Restaurant Tour.... September 20th is the Orinda Night Out ... work with your neighbors, fire and police to make your neighborhood safer. September 21-22 is the Orinda Motors Dancing with the Cars Party and Classic Car Show.

Second ... apply to serve on one of the City's Commissions, volunteer with one of the many groups that provide art, music, theater, library support, preserve our environment or our history, raise money for worthy charities, our schools, churches and Scouts; get involved!

In this country we have the privilege and the responsibility to exercise our right to vote, so if you support the 1/2 cent sales tax measure as I do - or if you don't! - get out and vote and help your elected officials do their best to represent you.

Theatre Square is thriving again, delighting residents, but other "downtown development" issues roil the waters. What needs to happen with the downtown, and why?

Theatre Square is a gem, and I am very proud that the City has assisted the property owner and the business owners to help make the Square the lively local spot that it is now. A couple of years ago, the Council rezoned the back lane of Theatre [Square] to allow some service businesses to open up; that helped to bring foot traffic in, and now we have a number of highly successful restaurants and some new, diverse shops for our residents to patronize ... the Square is now at 98 percent occupancy!

How do we spread that success throughout the downtown? I think we continue to engage the public in workshops and informally, at the Farmer's Market Council table and during the 4th of July festivities ... to discuss what we collectively want to see. We want to find our own identity - not that of any of our neighbors, large or small.... I believe that the citizens will support good projects in the downtown which respect the desire that residents do have for additional housing and shops and restaurants in the downtown, while at the same time preserving our small town feel and connection to the outdoor environment.

Reach the reporter at: laurie@lamorindaweekly.com

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