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Orinda Okays Major Study of Storm Drainage System

By Laurie Snyder



A repair crew is now working its way down to fix a failed drainage system in the Tarabrook neighborhood, which spawned a massive sinkhole last December. A new, sturdier 36-inch concrete drainage pipe will be lowered into this jacking and boring pit - a challenging 25 feet below ground - before workers tunnel and inch the pipe to its final destination. Photo Chuck Swanson

on this project (\$182,100), was not selected because "their proposal continued to focus more on the hydrology and hydraulics of the overall storm drain system, as previously detailed in their 1994 report, than a condition assessment of existing pipes."

Schaaf, a civil engineering firm with experience in flood control and drainage, has created storm drain master plans for Alameda, Santa Cruz, Livermore, and Los Altos. "Much of the Orinda system is made up of hillside ditch-culvert systems," reads the proposal. "These are in various conditions ranging from good to highly corroded. A critical component of this study will be to determine how these systems function and prioritize elements that are in critical need of repair or replacement." The company's full proposal is available on the city's website, along with the staff report.

The amount of the Schaaf contract falls within the city's current CIP budget which, when approved by council this past June, projected the need to expend up to \$250,000 for a master storm drainage study.

"It seems to me that we don't even know where all of the storm drains are," observed Councilmember Victoria Smith, who asked if the study would also help the city zero in on areas most in need of repair. Councilmember Dean Orr then asked if staff would be creating a work plan linked to the study results.

Public works director Chuck Swanson indicated that the study would certainly help city staff better prioritize and that a work plan would be developed, but also cautioned that the present degree of deterioration may be so extensive system-wide that it will take the city time to get to everything on its lengthy honey-do list.

After deliberating, council members approved the contract on 5-0 vote, and directed staff to share results of the study with members of the Citizens' Infrastructure Oversight Commission to ensure that the planning of city drain and road repair efforts is undertaken holistically.

The Orinda City Council assessed, once again, Orinda's aging drainage system as it considered whether or not to award an engineering services contract to conduct a Master Storm Drainage Study at its Sept. 17 meeting.

"The extent and locations of deficiencies within the City's storm drain system are unknown as recently made evident with the culvert failure at Tarabrook Drive during a major rain event last December 2012," according to city staff. The last time city leaders had truly fresh data was in 1994 when Camp, Dresser and McKee Inc. (now CDM Smith) prepared a storm drainage master plan.

The goal this time "is to develop a comprehensive plan for the entire city that addresses the condition of the existing storm drainage system, identifies and analyzes structural and capacity deficiencies in the City-owned storm drains, provides recommendations for future improvements, and establishes criteria for prioritizing projects," according to the staff report. The study's findings, if eventually adopted by the City Council, would be used to prioritize future improvements under Orinda's Capital Improvement Plan.

Staff interviewed representatives from two of five companies submitting bids, and recommended that the city award the contract to the highest bidder, Schaaf & Wheeler (\$249,180), because Schaaf personnel are qualified to prepare the specific type of study needed and demonstrated that they clearly understood the city's objectives. CDM Smith, a former contractor for the city and the lowest bidder

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[back](#)

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