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Orinda City Government Operates Smoothly First Day Following Elections

By Laurie Snyder

Despite claims by a handful of East Bay media outlets and issue-specific bloggers that Orinda's unsettled election results were causing upheaval or sweeping uncertainty within just a few hours of Election Day 2014, life moved on with the sunrise in America's Second Friendliest City. Orinda City Council members were, in fact, productively attending to business just one day after the 2014 mid-terms.

Mayor Sue Severson began her day Nov. 5 with the Mayor's Liaison Meeting, a monthly assembly of representatives from garden clubs to schools reporting on their respective efforts to better Orinda. And later that same evening, the full council came together for its regular bi-weekly meeting - albeit a bit sleep deprived because most stayed awake monitoring the snail-paced returns. Council's agenda included review and approval of the BART-Orinda Downtown Access Ramp and Lighting Project, review and approval of the list of road segments to be repaired with Measure J funds for fiscal year 2015, authorization of staff to proceed with design and preparation of contract plans, specifications and an engineer's estimate for the projected road repairs, and hearing public comments regarding the draft of the Environmental Impact Report being prepared as part of the state-mandated update of the Housing Element of Orinda's General Plan.

The BART project will improve pedestrian access to BART by replacing the current ramp-stair approach between Bryant Way and the elevated sidewalk on Camino Pablo's eastern side with an ADA-compliant ramp with handrails. Lighting will also be added near that ramp and under Highway 24's eastbound overpass. With \$250,000 of the total cost provided by BART and \$122,014 pulled from Contra Costa Transportation Authority's 28C funds, Orinda will likely only need to kick in \$75,000. Bidding expected to open in May 2015 with construction anticipated this summer.

The road paving item was a continuation of public meetings held since voters approved Measure J in June. Since then, council, staff and CIOC members have been assessing StreetSaver data and public input while developing the criteria for determining which roads will be repaired first and in what order. The current projected list and criteria are available on the city's website. Many of the segments slated to receive this first round of attention will be among Orinda's worst; however, some have been chosen because the city will be timing repairs with projects executed in Orinda by outside agencies such as the East Bay Municipal Utility District. Staff hopes this will not only stretch city dollars, but will minimize the likelihood that newly repaved roads will need to be torn up and repaved again. Staff estimates the city will spend \$5,054,479 (Measure J), \$978,971 (Measure L half cent sales tax hike), and \$1,208,631 (Annual Paving Program) for a possible total of \$7,242,081. Observed Vice Mayor Steve Glazer, "Robust action is happening in the north and the south, and the east and the west - and all points in between."

Staff also cautioned, however, that construction cost estimates shown on the 2015 Measure J list are "not based on design level field reconnaissance and therefore should be considered as a planning tool only." The list will be fine-tuned after the final designs are in, and presented in a follow-up report to the council. "Streets may be added or eliminated at that time to stay within the projected funding for FY 2015." Factors which may affect the budget include design, inspection, monument preservation, and striping costs.

The highlight of the EIR public hearing was a presentation from the consultant helping Orinda through its housing element update. "Prior to the enactment of the California Environmental Quality Act," said Patrick Angel, "there really wasn't an avenue for the public or resource agencies to express concerns about environmental effects of projects under consideration." CEQA, he said, is "intended to disclose if you take this action, what are the physical effects to the environment that will happen." It also requires cities to explore ways to mitigate or find alternatives which could minimize or avoid the environmental effect. What the EIR under CEQA doesn't do is to advocate for

or against development projects. "It also doesn't get into social or economic issues," such as loss of property values or school crowding. "It's truly about physical effects on the environment." The EIR's public comment period ends at 5 p.m. on Dec. 1. Afterward, each comment will be included with its detailed response by the city in its final EIR draft. To learn more, visit the city's website.

Reach the reporter at: laurie@lamorindaweekly.com

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