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Texting and Driving Not Just a Teen Issue

Special community event at Miramonte focuses on distracted driving March 5

By Laurie Snyder

“Sending or reading a text takes your eyes off the road for 5 seconds. At 55 mph, that’s like driving the length of an entire football field, blindfolded.” – National Highway Traffic Safety Administration

The danger of distracted driving became all too clear one day in April 2014 when an Orinda father of two young children was seriously injured by a car driven by a local teen. The teen, also an Orindan, was al-

legedly texting while driving on San Pablo Dam Road near Wagner Ranch Elementary School. The injured man is still working on his recovery.

Viewing that accident as a wake-up call, Orinda Traffic Safety Advisory Committee members David Libby and Mark Roberts advised the Orinda City Council Feb. 17 that they’ve been talking with other Orindans about ways to prevent similar accidents from ever happening again.

The end result is “Impact Teen Drivers,” an educational event for the entire community that will be held at 7 p.m. March 5 in the Miramonte High School auditorium. Funded by the state’s Office of Traffic Safety and the California Highway Patrol, it also has the backing of the California Teachers Association.

“We’re really happy to be able to partner with the city on this,” says Miramonte High School Principal Julie

Parks. Although MHS already has a program that addresses the dangers of drinking and driving, she believes that it isn’t comprehensive enough. Texting is so ingrained for so many teens and adults now that not responding to a text message is perceived as a faux pas – a belief that often leads to risky behaviors. In recent studies, 20 to 25 percent of teens admitted that they respond to text messages every time they drive.

“We sent a team of students to watch one of the Impacts events,” says Parks. They gave the program solid marks, but felt that adults also really needed to hear the information. So it was changed from a daytime assembly to an evening program for the general public.

“Distracted driving affects everyone – whether you’re a driver or not,” she observes. “This truly is a community-wide issue.”

Orinda City Council Approves Mid-Year Budget Corrections

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Orinda received 63 – including one anonymous, 72-page letter demanding the city respond to 330 separate points. That letter alone “was several days’ worth of work,” and “basically blew everything out of the water,” she said. Council tabled PMC’s request, pending receipt of additional documentation, and will reconsider it March 3.

During its annual mid-fiscal year budget review Feb. 3, council learned that city administrative expenses rose above projections by \$290,000: \$50,000 in added costs for the city attorney’s work on the Housing Element update and “an unusually high level of litigation” – active and threatened – and the resulting “negotiation, implementation or modification of

multiple settlement agreements;” \$79,000 in Public Works costs for road and street sweeper repairs; \$15,000 for 2015 election costs; and \$46,000 to fix Pine Grove Park field damage, purchase Parks and Recreation supplies and meet the transportation and facilities demands of campers flocking to Orinda’s programs. Plus, planning staff needed \$100,000 to cover rising development applications and study alternatives to the current county delivery of building department services.

That latter \$100,000 will likely be a wash due to a corresponding \$100,000 revenue boost from added development activity, as will Parks’ outlays with added spring and summer class revenues. But the big news

was the county’s projection that an estimated \$200,000 in additional property tax revenue is headed to Orinda.

Then, at its Feb. 17 meeting, council considered staff requests to replace Public Works’ 1997 bobcat skid-steer loader and two “undercover” police cars (non-black and whites with concealed emergency lights). All three are near or past the end of their useful lives. The replacement SUVs could also make it easier for police to navigate Orinda’s hilly terrain.

Council also debated whether to use \$453,000 of the roughly \$800,000 available from the East Bay Regional Park District’s Measure WW parcel tax in order to increase the allocation for Orinda Grove Park improve-

ments. City staff made the request to compensate for inflation caused by construction delays plus enhancements to pedestrian lighting, drainage and irrigation systems, site furnishings and tot lot surfacing requested by the city after its 2008 agreement with the developer, Pulte Homes, was signed. Measure WW funds are restricted to parkland acquisition or park and recreation-related capital project development, and must be used by December 2018. According to the staff report, Pulte will cover 60 percent of the project’s total cost.

On Feb. 3, council accepted the staff and second quarter financial reports, and amended the Fiscal Year 2014-15 budget. On Feb. 17, council increased the Oak Grove allocation

and approved, via consent calendar, replacement of the bobcat with a new loader with backhoe and bucket accessories at a cost not to exceed \$55,000 plus two Ford Edge police vehicles at a total cost not to exceed \$60,000. All three will be paid for from funds already budgeted under the city’s Vehicle Replacement Fund. Council also increased the Oak Grove allocation.

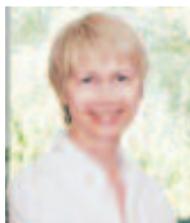
Horizon events which could further siphon city dollars include a resident request that the city purchase security cameras for public right-of-way installation at \$750 each, partial transfer of unassigned general fund monies to slope emergency stabilization and a potential parking study.

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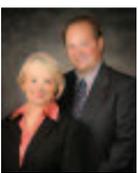
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