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Orinda City Council Mulls Nuts and Bolts Matters

By Laurie Snyder

The most recent Orinda City Council meeting was an efficient one. Held on the evening of a statewide special election when Orinda Mayor Steve Glazer was vying with four other candidates for the California Senate's District 7 seat, the March 17 affair was reminiscent of pre-Housing Element sessions for its relative brevity (lasting just 113 minutes), and was focused primarily on operational matters.

The meat of the meeting began with a report by Vice mayor Victoria Smith on council's closed session held earlier in the evening. Closed sessions are permissible under state law (the Brown Act) for a range of matters, including but not limited to personnel issues, public safety threats, or when government officials need to confer with legal counsel regarding pending litigation.

All four items on the March 17 agenda fell under legally permissible categories. Item one involved labor negotiations with unrepresented management employees and city personnel represented by Teamsters Local Union No. 856. Explaining there was nothing reportable at this juncture, Smith moved on to item two - Painter versus the City of Orinda, Contra Costa Superior Court Case No. N14-0068, a lawsuit launched in 2014 by the owners of 34 Broadview Terrace to challenge the city's denial of their design review application. Smith reported that council directed the city attorney to refrain from challenging an adverse decision in the case. Due to the length of the first two matters, the remaining items - Skoumbas versus the City of Orinda and Moll versus the City of Orinda - were deferred to a continuation of the closed session later that same evening, and will be addressed by council when there is news to report.

Council then adopted the majority of items on its consent calendar before engaging in a "For the Good of the City" matter - proclaiming March as "Red Cross Month." Council members praised the American Red Cross for its important work, and received information from ARC representatives about two helpful programs - a home fire preparedness initiative and "The Pillowcase Project," which teaches children about disaster preparedness and response. Developed after Hurricane Katrina devastated New Orleans in 2005, the project now reaches children in schools and summer camp settings in the majority of U.S. states and Puerto Rico thanks to funding from The Walt Disney Company. For more information, visit: www.redcross.org/prepare/location/school/preparedness-education/the-pillowcase-project.

Council then addressed three policy matters: financial auditing, the city's new draft storm drain master plan, and signage to be displayed during Orinda's infrastructure overhaul. Regarding auditing, Orinda finance director Susan Mahoney explained that accounting best practices dictate that, even if a public agency is well served by a specific financial auditing firm, that agency should still change auditors periodically to ensure that it receives the most reliable auditing services possible. Staff reviewed the services of four firms; two were ruled out due to high fees. Council then weighed proposals from the other two firms, ultimately awarding a three-year contract totaling \$76,670 to Maze & Associates based on that firm's depth of experience. Maze will prepare Orinda's Comprehensive Annual Financial Report (CAFR), Appropriations Limit Review, Single Audit, and State Controller's Report.

The overriding theme of council discussions regarding the draft Storm Drain Master Plan was clarity. Individual council members took turns asking staff and a representative of Schaaf & Wheeler, the consultant hired to prepare the SDMP, to clarify segments of the SDMP's executive summary, ultimately directing staff to work with the consultant in improving the document's overall comprehensibility for the average Orindan. One of the salient points made was that, although the SDMP is an important first step, it is not truly a "master plan" because its creation did not involve a comprehensive analysis of every pipe in Orinda's drainage network. According to the staff report, while the SDMP assessed Orinda's system for both capacity and existing pipe status, the consultants were given just two weeks to conduct "field inspections to determine condition ratings at 48 locations throughout the City. Most of these were selected to focus on larger diameter (greater than

30-inch diameter) corrugated metal pipes (CMPs)" since many are 30 to 40 years old and "more susceptible to corrosion and eventually buckling/collapse." It would have been cost prohibitive to inspect Orinda's entire system, added staff, so 48 locations were chosen "to represent a good sampling" with several sites "prioritized based on known past issues." Field data was then plugged into modeling software "to determine where flooding is likely to occur" with potential water surface elevations and flowrates calculated via a "10-year storm" scenario.

The SDMP currently projects that \$13.5 million in capacity and condition improvements will be needed - \$9.2 million of which relates to public storm drains (with \$4.3 million related to privately maintained systems). No formal action was taken by council other than to direct staff to bring back an improved version of the report at a future council meeting.

Council members then approved staff's request to purchase signage for placement at road construction entrances to increase residents' awareness of how Measure L and Measure J funding is being utilized to repair Orinda's aging infrastructure. Six to 10 signs will be mounted on moveable barricades at a cost of roughly \$400 each for fabrication and placement, and will be recycled from project to project.

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