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Letters to the Editor

Can Orinda taxpayers afford to be fair?

Dear Editor,

The City has determined that it will cost \$80 million to fix our roads. This is the price of deferred maintenance.

The question is: Will Orinda's residents and taxpayers take this obligation on themselves or will they pass the obligation onto the next generation (in some cases, their own children)?

The City is proposing an additional \$25 million bond, repaid with an ad valorem tax, to help solve the problem. This tax, like the tax repaying 2014's \$20 million bond, will be repaid mostly by Orinda's youngest homeowners. They will end up paying 90 percent of the cost with the longstanding residents, who incurred the obligation, only paying 10 percent.

The youngest one-third of Orinda's homeowners are already paying property tax based on an assessment of 85 percent of their home's market value. They pay 60 percent of Orinda's total \$60 million in annual property tax. Conversely, the oldest one-third of Orinda's homeowners, who have seen remarkable gains in the value of their homes but are paying taxes based on assessed values of 20 percent of the market value of the homes, are only paying 10 percent of the total.

Is this fair? The argument that it is says that the new homeowners will be using the reconstructed roads for a long time; but they will also be paying taxes to maintain them. One of the benefits of the new roads, in addition to less wear and tear on cars, is enhanced home values. So the existing residents will see enhanced home values, sell to new residents who will pay the enhanced price to live in Orinda AND "get to" pay off the road bonds which enhanced the price.

Can we afford to be fair? Should this be a concern to the City and to the individuals in the city who are being asked to vote for this new ad valorem tax? There are alternatives as outlined in the www.OrindaRoadFacts.info website. We can choose to be fair. It doesn't cost that much.

Steve Cohn
Orinda

Funds Needed for Road Repair

Dear Editor:

For more than 20 years, my family has been fortunate to live in Orinda, with its excellent schools, great location, terrific weather and so much more. Over that time, however, one aspect of our idyllic city has degraded badly: Years of tight limitations on budgets for road repairs have led to severe deterioration of our roads. Many of our roads are, quite literally, falling apart.

Through the combined efforts of the Orinda's Engineering Services department, the city council, and the Citizens Infrastructure Oversight Commission - along with a lot of input from Orinda citizens - the city has developed a five-phase plan to repair our roads along with the drains beside and beneath those roads.

This plan has been supported by Orinda voters, who strongly approved the funds needed to start implementation of the plan, voting in favor of a 0.5 percent sales tax in 2012 and a \$20 million bond measure in 2014. With these initial funds, a number of our worst roads have been repaired, and more are scheduled to be repaired soon.

However, these funding sources provide only the first part of the necessary financing. They were never expected to be sufficient to repair all of our roads. As projected in the plan, a large fraction of the existing funds have already been used or are committed to planned repairs. To keep this crucial project moving, we need to assure that the next funding increment is in place before the present funding is exhausted. Road repair is an expensive, complex process, and the city cannot commit to new repair contracts unless it is certain that the necessary funds are in hand.

The ballot this June includes a new bond measure, Measure L, which would add \$25 million to

the city's road repair fund. Passage of Measure L will assure a timely continuation of the funding stream our city needs, so that this badly-needed repair work can continue.

Vote YES on Measure L this June!

Jud Hammon
Orinda

Is Software to Blame for Bad Moraga Roads?

Dear Editor,

Why was one section of Moraga Road repaved but the section from Dreager Drive to Camino Pablo filled with pot holes and cracks left unpaved? Why was a section of Wandel Drive filled with cracks left unpaved while the rest of Wandel got repaved, and all the streets surrounding it got repaved?

I asked these questions of the head of the Moraga Public Works Dept. His answer was that information is fed into a computer software program and the program informs the town which areas are to get repaved and which won't. Just eyeballing the condition of these streets, it seems to me common sense dictates these sections should have been repaved when the rest of the street was being repaved.

Either the software the town is using is faulty or the information being fed into it is not accurate. Whichever it is, the Public Works Dept. needs to get on the ball and repave these sections of street before the holes and cracks become an even greater annoyance to Moraga drivers.

John O'Hare
Moraga

Private Streets Need to Be Funded, Too

Dear Editor,

Orinda voters are being asked to vote for a \$25 million road bond measure to repair Orinda's public residential streets. We support this concept. However, we would like to point out that there are over 1,000 families which are disenfranchised from these improvements. These are the households living on Orinda's 26 miles of privately maintained streets.

Very few know what these streets are. They are not gated enclaves. However, they represent 30 percent of Orinda's residential streets and 20 percent of Orinda's population. The people on these streets pay the same property taxes as the people on public streets; they pay the same Measure L sales and Measure J bond taxes for public residential street road repair; and if the new bond measure passes, they will pay that tax too. Yet, they see almost no benefit from these road taxes.

The claim is made that they use the public residential streets like every other Orinda resident, but this is not true. The website www.OrindaRoadFacts.info/-private-streets shows that:

- * Almost 60 percent of private streets feed directly into Orinda's Collector and Arterial roads which none of the new tax money will go toward repairing.
- * Only 20 percent of private street residents traverse publicly maintained Residential Streets for over a quarter mile before they hit a Collector or Arterial.
- * And while one of the major benefits of bringing our Residential Streets up to acceptable conditions is the increase in home values on those streets; this benefit will not apply to Private Street homeowners.

We are not saying that Orinda's private street holders should not support the common good, but there should be a quid pro quo. The greater community should also show some support to the private street dwellers. Share some common tax and fee revenue with the private streets. Allow private streets to become "public" if so desired. Offer some recognition of commonality. Until then, we encourage others to reject more taxes dedicated only to the public streets which we do not benefit from.

Mark Bresnik and Madelyn Mallory
Orinda

Keep Leigh Creekside Park Pristine

Dear Editor,

The very explicit Public Forum letter (April 20, 2016) about the history of Leigh Creekside Park written by Mr. and Mrs. Cass impressed me and made the situation clear about the past of this piece of land. Now, my support for a passive park is stronger than before.

I sent the article to my daughter brought up in Lafayette and living temporarily in Australia. This is what she says: "I do feel that our community should, as far as possible, preserve open, green spaces that are accessible to the entire community. I do believe that Open Spaces and greenery should be preserved for our original townspeople who settled in this community long before either of us were born. They trusted that the community they invested in would look after them. Knowing that times are changing and change is inevitable, it would be gracious if you could take a step back - a breath - to consider why Lafayette came to be. And the people who made it."

This is an appeal to keep Leigh Creekside Park in the pristine state the original owners desired it.

Elisabeth Branczyk
Lafayette

Orinda Road Repair Funds Are In Good Hands

Dear Editor,

As members of Orinda's Finance Advisory Committee, we have seen first-hand how the city's finances are handled and reported. Orinda's road repair funds are rigorously tracked and controlled.

As of February 2016, 90 percent of the funds made available for road repair (including \$10 million of bond proceeds from the sale of Measure J bonds) has been spent or committed to construction contracts awarded.

In accordance with Attachment 2 of the City's Road and Drainage Repairs Plan, the remaining \$10 million of Measure J bonds will be sold and the proceeds spent in Fiscal Year 2017 (beginning July 1, 2016) and FY2018. The Plan, including Attachment 2, is available on the city's website (cityoforinda.org: "Roads and Infrastructure").

Like the Measure J bonds, if approved by voters in June Measure L bonds will be sold in tranches (portions). These proceeds will DOUBLE total road repair expenditures in FY2017 through FY2020 (per Attachment 2 of the Plan). To handle the additional construction activity, Measure L will also pay for a professional project manager to supplement city staff and the city's construction management firm which oversees the construction contracts.

Road repair funds come from many sources including (1) the Measure L sales tax, (2) the Measure J bond proceeds, and (3) city funds received from gas taxes, garbage franchise fees, county "return to source" sales taxes, and infrastructure grants secured by city staff. All monies received and spent from each of these (and future) sources are accounted for in separate funds created in the City's general ledger. The status of each fund is regularly reported to the Finance Advisory Committee and the city council and are included in the City's financial statements, which are audited by the City's certified public accountants as part of the annual audit.

Orinda's taxpayers can rest assured. Road repair funds are well stewarded.

Bob Thompson, CFA, Chair, Orinda Finance Advisory Committee
Carol Penskar, MBA, Member and former Chair, Orinda Finance Advisory Committee
Bob Burt, CPA (retired), former Member, Orinda Finance Advisory Committee
Each acting as private citizens.

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