

Published February 7th, 2018

Orinda library parcel tax increase likely to appear on June ballot

By Sora O'Doherty



Photo Sora O'Doherty

At a special Jan. 25 meeting of the Orinda City Council to receive the results of a poll on the acceptability of a ballot measure to increase the existing library parcel tax, the council agreed to place a measure on the June ballot. The details of the ballot measure are yet to be fixed. Council members also asked staff to return with a capital assessment of the future expenses likely to be necessary for the maintenance and repair of the library building.

The poll was conducted by public opinion and research firm Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin, Mertz & Associates (FM3) via telephone and online polling. Paul Rankin, finance director, was pleased by the very good response to the survey, which also cost less than anticipated. Miranda Everett of FM3 reported the results of the survey to the council. More than 700 registered voters responded online and on the telephone to the survey, conducted in early January.

The city has had a voter-approved library parcel tax since 2001. The tax, approved in 2001 by 75 percent of the voters, established a \$27 tax per residential unit per year. The tax was set to expire in 2009. In 2008, the council proposed and the voters approved the replacement of the 2001 tax with a \$39 per year tax that has no sunset date. The tax did not have a provision for any increases, and it was expected that a future adjustment would be required.

The poll asked Orinda voters if they would approve an increase of \$25, bringing the library tax to \$64 per year, which would generate approximately \$164,000 more per year than the current tax. The poll also tested the acceptability of an annual adjustment for inflation, with no sunset provision for the tax. The library is well regarded by Orinda voters, and is an element of city pride, according to the report. Maintenance and repairs to the structure polled as very important. As a cost savings, some voters were OK with Sunday closures.

Everett reported that overall the poll showed that 66 percent of those polled support the proposed increase, with women registering 81 percent support while men were less enthusiastic - 66 percent is just under the two-thirds requirement for a tax measure. The majority of Orinda voters are Democrats and they favored the increase by 75 percent, while Republicans polled at 50 percent support. People with children also recorded 75 percent approval.

When asked about the tax increase but without the inflation adjustment, the approval rate rose to 73 percent. Without the inflation adjustment, the increase in the parcel tax alone would fund the library only for the next four years. Staff estimates that a higher increase to \$71 annually, but without the inflation adjustment, would be sufficient until 2028, but the poll did not ask about the \$71 option.

A tax measure presented to the local voters must occur on the same ballot as a statewide General Election, which in 2018 would be either June 5, or Nov. 6. In order to meet the June election date, the council needs to act on the measure by no later than March 9. Council members expressed support for the June ballot proposal, because if passed by the voters, revenue would begin to flow to the city on July 1, whereas if a November ballot measure were to pass, the city would not begin to receive funds for over a year, according to Council Member Dean Orr.

Having received a sense of the council, staff will return on Feb. 20 with the proposed resolutions defining the parcel tax and placing the measure on the ballot. This would still allow time for any adjustments and adoption of the final resolutions at the regular March 6 council meeting.



Photo Sora O'Doherty

Reach the reporter at: sora@lamorindaweekly.com

[back](#)

Copyright © Lamorinda Weekly, Moraga CA