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Orinda adopts two-year budget, adjustments and Capital Improvement Plan

By Sora O'Doherty

At the June 18 city council meeting Paul Rankin, Orinda finance director, introduced a final proposed two-year budget, which was adopted by the council and will begin July 1 and continue for two years.

Additionally, the city adopted adjustments to the fiscal year 2018-19 budget. The adjustments provide \$55,000 for recently incurred costs associated with the Rheem trail easement, and \$200,000 for improvements made by the developer at Wilder Fields Park, although only \$100,000 will come out of the city's general fund, with the remaining \$100,000 to be provided by the waiving of payments from the developer to the city.

In the new budget, the city council approved the establishment of a trust for retiree medical expenses, with a provision for an initial deposit of \$100,000 to be made from General Fund reserves to fund the trust, which will be established by the end of this year.

The budget also corrects an error in the interest on Orinda's general obligation bonds which had been estimated at \$422,423, but was actually \$612,038. The budget provides for the additional \$189,615 required.

Council approved transfer of \$350,000 out of the General Fund into a General and Long Term Plans Sub-Fund. With this transfer, the fund will have a balance of approximately \$672,136 as of the end of June, which is below the target of \$1 million established by the city. Funding for the capital improvement plan for the next two years is included in the budget, but is funded by bonds.

Several staffing changes are covered. Although Orinda operates with a very small staff, it was recommended that a full-time senior engineer be added to assist with capital projects. Also, the limited position of paving manager, held by Farah Khorashadi, was extended up to June 30, 2021. Hired in 2017, Khorashadi was brought on for a three-year period with two one-year extensions possible.

Rankin identified some changes that were included in the final budget. Fire safety brush and tree removal as a capital project was shifted into the operating budget. The funding of \$50,000 for each of the two years is limited to publicly owned city properties. Funding was also included to step up staff training for disaster response. A CIP project to rehabilitate the El Toyonal emergency vehicle access bridge is also intended to address emergency preparedness. This summer, as part of the Miner Road paving project, more shoulder paving will be added in spots between Camino Pablo and Camino Don Miguel. The general fund emergency fund is being maintained at \$6.8 million through the end of 2020, then rises to \$7 million the following year. Some elements also got moved around. Park tree removal was taken out of the CIP and included in the operating budget, and \$40,000 was transferred from reserve funds to building internal service fund to finance the initial geotechnical and conceptual design work on city hall slide stabilization. Subsequent work will be delayed until funding is identified to perform the project, estimated to cost an additional \$510,000. As there is currently no funding available, the Martha Road to Catherine Court Pedestrian Path has been pushed out beyond the timeframe of the CIP. However, it might be a candidate for a future one-time funding.

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