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El Toyonal affected by EBMUD work, parking plan

By Sora O'Doherty

El Toyonal is a long, narrow, twisty road in north Orinda that runs from Camino Pablo to Wildcat Canyon. The narrow street was made more narrow when the city installed berms to stabilize the road. Recently, the school bus route on the road was eliminated as bus drivers refused to traverse the treacherous route. Now the residents are going to be affected by major works by the East Bay Municipal Utility District. And the fear that residents could not evacuate in the event of wildfire, or that Moraga-Orinda Fire District engines could not access a fire has also prompted residents to ask the city for parking restrictions. Representatives of EBMUD were present at the June 16 city council meeting to discuss both issues.

Orinda is central to the work of EBMUD, which currently has six major capital improvement projects scheduled for north Orinda. The meeting was attended by EBMUD Director and Board President Margarite Young of District 3, which includes Orinda, and Senior EBMUD Engineer Chien Wang, who presented the overview of EBMUD's projects in Orinda.

The two pointed out that when these projects were envisioned, no one imagined that everybody would be at home during a pandemic. In response to a question from Paula Reinman about the timing and frequency of trucks, the EBMUD officials said that all offhaul and equipment delivery will take place between 9 a.m. and 4 p.m. Concrete pours need to be for 12 continuous hours to ensure structural integrity of the concrete. Concrete delivery will be from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m., but trucks will not be allowed to queue up or to idle before 6 a.m. There could be six to eight months of concrete activity. Trucks can do about eight round trips, or more than once every 10 minutes starting at 6 a.m.

The EBMUD officials said that many lessons were learned from the removal of dirt from Briones last year. Severin Borenstein, an Orinda resident, said that the last project involved quite a few trucks, and they did not adhere to start time. To ensure rules are enforced, EBMUD has designated a community affairs contact for the project, whose contact information is on its website. Young said she is committed to being "very on top of this," keeping in mind the project two years ago. "The bar has been raised as to what we expect from our contractors and will be raised further," she promised. Director of Public Works and Assistant City Manager Larry Theis said that it would be helpful if EBMUD introduced some sort of fine for non-adherence to time limits.

Joan Chomak, who lives on Monte Vista Road, said that the most troublesome noise from the previous project was the high-pitched noise of backup beepers. Chomak asked that EBMUD and city of Orinda require use of white sound alerts, which are OSHA approved and less annoying than the usual beepers.

Starting in 2020, EBMUD is replacing the Encinal pumping plant with a new Westside pumping plant, including the installation of a new Encinal regulator and the demolition of Encinal reservoir and the existing Westside pumping plant. This project, estimated to last until 2023, also includes replacement of pipeline during 2020 and 2021.

The Orinda Water Treatment Plant will undergo disinfection improvements that involve extensive work, including demolition of the existing grounds maintenance building and construction of a new maintenance and UV electrical building, two new electrical buildings, a standby generator and fuels tank, and parking. The project started with community meetings in 2019, and construction is projected to begin in 2021 and end in 2025.

Next year will also see the construction of the Duffel solar PV project, which will construct a five-megawatt solar photovoltaic energy generation facility on 20 acres, and the Briones reservoir tower retrofit project to seismically retrofit the inlet/outlet tower by installing a reinforced steel line inside the upper 70-foot section of the existing tower.

Construction of the Happy Valley pumping plant and pipeline improvement project is scheduled to begin in 2020 and end in 2023. This will include the construction of a new pumping plant at Miner Road and Camino Sobrante and the installation of 2,500 feet of 16-inch pipeline in Miner Road and 500 feet under Lauterwasser Creek.

Construction of the Dos Osos reservoir replacement project is scheduled for 2024 and 2025. Dos Osos reservoir will be demolished and replaced with dual reservoirs at a higher elevation, and the Dos Osos pumping plant will be rehabilitated.

Regarding parking on El Toyonal, residents have expressed concerns that in the event of a wildfire evacuation, they might not be able to either drive out of their community, or fire engines might not be able to drive in to fight a fire.

The council was presented with a report from contractor W-Trans, which held a public meeting in January with El Toyonal residents after conducting a parking study in December 2019. W-Trans recommended that the city prohibit all on-street parking and stopping on red flag days to keep the roadways clear. The city can model such a program to a similar one used by the city of Pasadena, according to the staff report. According to Orinda staff, there are about 20 to 30 red flag days each year. W-Trans also identified locations where parking should be prohibited owing to the narrow roadway width and obstructed sight lines. If parking restrictions are approved by the council, the city would use existing staff to enforce the rules.

The council discussed the situation in detail, wondering about services such as deliveries, garbage collection, and other services. Rather than create "carve-out" exemptions for such uses, the council decided it would be easier to understand if they prohibited parking rather than stopping, which would allow service vehicles to stop, but not to park. Staff will return with a resolution reflecting the council's preferences.

Reach the reporter at: sora@lamorindaweekly.com

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