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City agrees to 5-foot parking ban on El Toyonal during red flag days

By Sora O'Doherty

Right before a flurry of red flag days, the Orinda city council on Aug. 18 adopted a ban on parking within 5 feet of the edge of the roadway on El Toyonal. The matter came back to the council after staff was asked to come up with the best distance to assure that emergency vehicles can access the top of the hill while residents can safely evacuate if needed. The ban addresses parking alongside the road, and includes private driveways, so that vehicle parking must leave 5 feet of space from where the driveway meets the road. Council Member Inga Miller recognized that it is a hard topic, and inconvenient for people dealing with high fire risk, but she said, "For me it is a safety issue." She mentioned terrible tragedies that have occurred right on the other side of the same hill. Council Member Nick Kosla asked that complaints and compliments be monitored over the next six months, and Director of Public Works/Assistant City Manager Larry Theis agreed. "This is a pilot program," he added, that may be expanded to other streets in the future. He promised to track how it goes on El Toyonal and report back before the next fire season. Council Member Dennis Fay thinks the city will learn a lot from the pilot program, and that it will inform work in other parts of Orinda. While Mayor Darlene Gee acknowledged that there may be some inconvenience, she said, "We are all aware of the danger and how challenging this area is." She agreed with Miller's memories of the Oakland Hills fire. The measure passed unanimously.

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