

Letters to the editor

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New taxes in the time of pandemic

Measure R on the November ballot in Orinda is a proposed doubling and extension of the sales tax in Orinda, supposedly to provide additional funds for fire mitigation and maintenance of the roads and infrastructure in the town. Since it is a general tax, the town cannot designate how the funds will be used because that would require that it become a specific tax which, as I now understand, would require that the measure be passed by 2/3 of the voters. Last evening I had the opportunity to participate in an open forum with several of the candidates running for the City Council in Orinda, two of whom are incumbents and strongly support Measure R. Their defense of the measure was disappointing. While they say that the proceeds of this new tax will largely be used for fire mitigation, there is no way for them to assure that either in the short term, or certainly in the long term, that this will be the case. The composition of the Council will certainly change over time as will the fiscal pressures on the City. As such, we can have no assurance that there will be increased expenditures to protect us in the event of wildfires. The Council has not evidenced any urgency in expending funds on fire mitigation in the last several years even though the threat is real and present. Instead we will be saddled with a new tax for the next 20 years. I also question whether this time, at the height of the pandemic and the worst economic crisis that we have ever faced, is the right time to increase taxes. This is a tax that hits hardest on those with fixed incomes and those at the lower end of the earnings scale. This is the wrong time to increase taxes. And Measure R is the wrong tax. Most of us strongly favor improved fire mitigation actions and better emergency preparedness. This is just the wrong way to accomplish that end. Use the existing funds from the sales tax to start the effort and demonstrate a serious commitment. Over time, if additional funds are needed, propose taxes that will assure that the funds will have to be used for these purposes. I urge the voters in Orinda to reject this ill-conceived new tax and vote NO on Measure R.

Art Goldberg
Orinda

Help plan and protect Lafayette

Lafayette City Council Members, you serve our city during challenging times. We are beset by financial, health and social concerns, seemingly at every corner. Yet it is the environmental threat posed by climate exacerbated wildfires that may determine your legacy. We have been relatively lucky in that significant wildfires have not yet consumed much of our city, but make no mistake that Lafayette is NOT safe from this threat. I serve as the Fletcher Jones Professor of Ecology at St Marys College and am a resident and homeowner within Lafayette. I have over 30 years' experience studying the ecology of California and can say with certainty that at some point in the future the open lands and forests that surround and enrich Lafayette will catch on fire and burn. This is inherent in the very nature of these ecosystems, as fire is a natural element that shapes and structures the oak woodlands, chaparral and riparian forests we enjoy. These future fires

threaten the lives, livelihood and property of Lafayette City residents.

You stand on a precipice in your service to the city. Now is time for bold proactive action not passive laissez-faire politics. The city needs to work with landowners, especially those living at the wildland interface to create defensible spaces, it needs to proactively remove vegetation (including some of our beloved trees) and create buffers on city owned spaces, it needs to work closely with landowners and managers of the large tracks of open space surrounding Lafayette (East Bay Regional Parks, Land trusts, EBMUD etc.) to create fire boundaries around our city. Many of these actions will not be fully popular and they will be difficult to enact, but that does not mean they are not the right thing to do. The time is now to be bold in your actions and get ahead of the curve so we can protect the lives and city that we love. Please do not be complacent as we are counting on you to help us prevent the incredible fire tragedies we are witnessing in communities around us. You cannot stop fires from happening, but you can help us plan and protect the city of Lafayette. Isn't that what we all want?

Dr. Michael P. Marchetti
Lafayette

Orinda Fire Prevention: Where's The Plan?

Orinda plans for everything, except fire prevention. Yet, it wants us to commit to a 20-year, \$60 million tax (the largest in the City's history) in the hopes that it may come up with a plan and spend that money prudently. And it is asking us to do this in the middle of the worst pandemic in a century when we have no idea what the economy might be like, for residents and local businesses, when this new tax kicks in.

The City has spent years, and tens (hundreds?) of thousands of dollars on downtown plans. The City has detailed road improvement plans, starting in 2012 with major rewrites in 2014, 2016 and 2019, overseen by a standing 7-person commission. It now (finally) has a major storm drain maintenance plan (although it has omitted accounting for how to deal with the water the City dumps from its streets onto private properties).

But the City has no plan on what it will take to minimize the threat of a devastating wildfire. This is despite the fact that it has had three decades since the Oakland Hills Firestorm to think about it. The only "plan" is a few words in a needs report to the Council in July saying the City should spend \$500-750,000 a year for 3-4 years on fire prevention, and a reduced amount thereafter. Where these numbers came from is unexplained.

Will the City, which has never spent anything on fire prevention in the past, actually spend this money in the future? It has been taking in over \$1 million a year in sales tax for 8 years and has spent nothing on fire prevention. Are there any guarantees that, if we double the tax amount, the City will start spending appropriate amounts on what is the community's greatest concern? No. This is a general tax meaning that there are no guarantees. As the signs say: Wrong Tax; Wrong Time. Charles Brotman
Orinda

Vote for Miller and Gee

I am writing to endorse both Darlene Gee and Inga Miller for the Orinda City Council. As a citizen of Orinda and as a member first of the Traffic Safety Advisory Committee and now of the Citizens Infrastructure Oversight Commission, I have worked with both Darlene and Inga for a number of years. Both have shown a real dedication to the city of Orinda.

Serving as a member of the City Council is an incredibly challenging job, with so much to study, consider, and evaluate. Both have shown a remarkable ability to absorb, assess, and intelligently discuss the complex issues that the City faces. Even more important, Darlene and Inga have also shown exceptional ability to work effectively with the City's staff, committees, commissions, and other members of the Council, to recommend actions that they think will best serve the majority of the city's citizens.

I strongly recommend voting for both Darlene and Inga as members of the Orinda City Council.

Jud Hammon
Orinda

Why I oppose Measure R

I oppose Measure R for many reasons but foremost is my distrust of our city government. I have observed our councils for nearly 30 years. I have the following observations.

- The councils always use "spin" to influence voting. A transparent government should not use marketing techniques. Using our fear of wildfire should not be the means to pass a general tax that will be used predominantly on public storm drains.

- The council does not ask the citizen's preference. Although the polling did consider extending the current ½ cent tax for only ten years, someone decided to double it to one cent for twenty years with no explanation.

- The council does not hold meetings where dialog is allowed, to hear the citizens desires and explain the issues. Democracy requires all voices to be heard. Instead, the citizens are limited to a 3 minute speech and questions raised are not answered. They thank you and move on.

- There is usually no discussion or objections to flawed or questionable assertions in a staff report. Staff is always commended for their excellent work.

- Even when citizens make reasonable alternative suggestions these are not discussed. They are simply ignored as though never made.

Despite current "assurances" future councils over the next 20 years may choose to spend measure R funds in ways we do not want. Past councils have spent our money on a variety of non-essential expensive projects. Future ones will too, unless we prevent them. The current ½ cent sales tax does not expire till 2023 and the city could use these funds to provide fuel reduction and necessary infrastructure repairs for the next two years. The reserve fund has \$10 million and has increased by \$1 million for the last four years.

I am unwilling to make a twenty year commitment during a pandemic whose

economic consequences are not yet known. Had the council proposed shorter taxes that could only be spent for specific purposes I would have supported them. I summarize with "it's the WRONG TAX at the WRONG TIME".

Charles Porges
Orinda

Protect our homes with Measure R

In the fall of 1984, I stood in my driveway and watched a grass fire, started by a tossed cigarette, burn less than 200 feet away. When the fire reached a Monterey pine tree, it looked as though the tree had been napalmed. With an audible "WHOOMP" it burst into flames—an exploding tree.

It was a hot dry day, but fortunately, not windy. Still, I climbed on my roof with a garden hose and wetted down our wood-shake roof.

Times have changed a bit. We've had an asphalt shingle roof since 1994. We removed 13 Monterey pines, and we've changed our landscaping to reflect a hotter, drier climate. But climate change has lengthened the fire season and made us all less safe.

We have a chance to make serious progress on the vegetative fuel load that has grown in Orinda since the 1940s, when it was grass and native oak trees. Measure R on the November ballot will increase Orinda's sales tax by half a cent. The city council has stated that the first years of the tax will be used primarily to tackle the long-overdue project of removing brush and overhanging trees to reduce fire hazards and keep evacuation routes open. We need to do this. The cost of this measure is far less than the insurance premium increases many of us are paying. Let's get to work!

Linda Landau
Orinda

Re-Elect Jex and Jorgens for MOFD

Being a long-time resident of Moraga, I have followed with interest the progress that the Moraga Orinda Fire District board has made since Directors Jex and Jorgens joined the board. They have identified critical needs and provided solutions to address those needs.

Their background and experience have been crucial to the progress that MOFD has made financially and operationally in addressing fire prevention at a critical time for our communities. Two key things they have done have been hiring new creative and effective leadership, and developing policies to improve the financial ability of MOFD to redirect and expand fire prevention programs such as the development of fire safe neighborhoods, and the chipper program to support these efforts.

We need their continued effort and leadership now more than ever to ensure MOFD remains a strong community resource as we face the challenges of becoming fire safe. Re-Elect Jex and Jorgens to MOFD.

Charles R. Larsen
Moraga

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Carl Anduri

Lafayette City Council

Carl has the PROVEN EXPERIENCE to deal with our most pressing challenges:

- ▶ Proactively manage the development of our downtown corridor, including affordable housing
- ▶ Protect our hillsides, ridgelines and open space
- ▶ Deal with the causes and effects of climate change, including planning for wildfire evacuation
- ▶ Promote inclusiveness and equity
- ▶ Revitalize our downtown in the wake of the pandemic
- ▶ Improve traffic flow and parking
- ▶ Prudently manage our City's limited resources

"We need Carl's proven experience, judgment and vision on the Council. He will be, once again, a great Councilmember for our entire community." - Anne Grodin, Former Mayor and Lafayette Citizen of the Year

"There is a reason people who served with and worked with Carl are supporting him -- they know his experience and leadership will make Lafayette a better place to live for all of us." - Teresa Geringer, Councilmember, Lafayette

Please Join Your Friends and Neighbors Who Support Carl!

Mike Anderson and Courtney Murphree	Kathy Daly Susan Dannenfelser	Nancy Hu Ronald Hufft	Karen and Tom Mulvaney
Brandt Andersson	Carl DiGiorgio	Gary Huisingsh	Suzanne Muraki
Sharon Anduri	Francine Donner	Rick Humann	Carol Murota and Neil Zelin
Ann Appert	Joe Dougherty	Don and Linda Jenkins	Terry Neifing and Doug Sterne
Bob Athayde	Ann Drevno	Cody Keller	Matt Pease
Patty Battersby	Tom Duckworth	Liz and Matt Keyser	Caesar Perales
Joe and Lucy Beck	Marechal Duncan	John Kiefer	Jennifer Perlmutter
Geoff Bellenger	Roger and Pat Falcone	Kristin and Ken Kisner	Earl Piermattei
Terry Ann and Jeff Black	Carol Federighi	Wei-Tai Kwok and Violet Hsu	Mark Poole
Steven Bliss	Beth Ferree and John Eaton	Chris Lane	Annette and Wil Roberge
Larry and Karen Blodgett	Jim Fitzsimmons and Kris Torske	Todd and Betty LaPorte	Steve Richard
Bill and Betty Brown	Danielle and Sean Gallagher	Bill Lau	Bob Russell
Bill Bucher	Dennis Garrison	Jay Lifson	Beryl and Ivor Silver
Cam Burks	Judy Garvens	Sharon Lingane	Carol Singer
George Burt	Teresa Geringer	Will Lovitt	Dave Smith
Susan Price Callister	Danielle Gogo-Gallagher	Budd MacKenzie	Karen and Pete Smyth
Bart Carr	David Gold	Lynn MacMichael and Howard Weamer	Linda Staaf
Lorinda Carson	Anne and Marshall Grodin	Karen Maggio	Dale and Carol Statley
Larry Challacombe	John Hall	Bruce Marlowe	Alice and Gary Stern
Michele Chalmers	Martha and Jamie Harris	Kathleen and Richard Marshall	Martha Strock
Dianne and Jim Chandler	Lynn and Dave Hiden	Greg Mason	Kristina Sturm
Tom Chastain	Alison Hill	Byrne and Oystein Mathisen	Tony Suh
Sereta Churchill	Jeanie and Jimmy Hill	Ruth McCahan	Don Tatzin and Ellen Reintjes
David Clark	Mary Ann Hoisington	John McCormick	Janet and Ramsay Thomas
John Coleman	Barbara Hollenbach and Bill Abbott	Mary and Daryl McCosker	Tracy and Donn Walklet
Steve Cortese	Robin and Dick Holt	Jan McHale	Jesse Wellen
Richard Craig	Patricia and Erling Horn	Kathy Merchant	Joan West
Janet and Rick Cronk		Gordon and Nancy Mills	Barbara and Mark Wille
Sue Cross			Avon and George Wilson
Patricia Curtin			Diane and Fred Wilt
			Hugh and Mary Anne Wini
			Anne Wondolowski
			Mary-Jane Wood
			Carol Yates

(Partial list)