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Refuse collection rates rise again; no relief for private roads

By Sora O'Doherty

The Orinda City Council discussed another increase in solid waste collection fees for Orinda residents at the Nov. 2 city council meeting. The proposed increase will be voted upon by the members of the Joint Powers Authority RecycleSmart. Orinda Mayor Amy Worth and Council Member Inga Miller represent Orinda on the JPA.

The 3.88% increase will be effective March 1, 2022. Based on container size, the rate increase is estimated to increase monthly garbage rates by an additional \$1.85 for the smallest container to \$3.96 for the largest. The rate increase also includes an increase in the vehicle impact/street maintenance component.

The council received public comment from Doug Stella, a resident of Wilder where most of the residential streets are private. Stella pointed out that "the fee charged to the garbage company should reflect the wear and tear of all the roads in Orinda - both public and private." He suggested that "the city should allocate the money collected back to the residents that live on roads not maintained by the city so we can maintain them." Stella added that he will use his vote to help remedy this inequity.

Stella's message prompted discussion by the council, including the two representatives to the JPA. Miller said that she had asked if there is a way to legally be able to collect for wear and tear on private roads and was told that there was not. Vice Mayor Dennis Fay said that the increase is based on damage to public roads only, but for roughly 80% of Orinda residents the actual cost will be under \$2 a month.

Council Member Darlene Gee said she was disappointed that there doesn't seem to be any ability to appear to be more equitable to private road residents. She said she is empathetic with private road residents, and doesn't think it is practical that they haul their garbage down to a public road to avoid damage to their roads caused by garbage trucks, which, Gee added, cause the most damage to roads.

Speaking generally about the increase, Gee said the rate increase won't be very popular as "people see rates go up while service goes down." Noting that collection is now taking two days whereas before it only took one, she added, "the board needs to emphasize that as rates go up performance needs to return."

There was also a brief discussion of the upcoming contract renewal for collection services and the possibility that lighter weight trucks that would be less harmful to the roads could be on the horizon.

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[back](#)

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