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EBMUD will strive to put lessons to work in soil removal

By Sora O'Doherty

East Bay Municipal Utility District's Ward 3 Director Marguerite Young attended the March 1 Orinda City Council meeting to explain to the council and Orinda residents how EBMUD plans to remove soil from the Briones area with fewer problems for the city. Casey LeBlanc, senior engineer, told the council that EBMUD has "taken the lessons learned from 2018 about issues brought up by the community to put in place accommodations that will hopefully be welcomed." Acknowledging shortcomings from the earlier work, he vowed, "We plan to do better this time."

The project is intended to move an excess of trench soils collected from EBMUD pipe work, such as installation and maintenance. The soils have been stored beside the Briones reservoir at a site in use since the 1960s. The haul route plan goes over Bear Creek Road, south on Camino Pablo, then onto Highway 24. EBMUD plans to reuse most of the soil at Oyster Bay Regional Shoreland in San Leandro for recreational use. Some soil will also go to Martinez.

In 2018, EBMUD hauled off a large quantity of the soils. This year, the improvements include: half as many trucks being used; fewer truck trips per day; reduced work hours; no queuing, idling or parking on local roadways at any time; monitoring trucks along the haul and identifying and removing haulers that do not abide by the rules. While in 2018 trucks could arrive at the site at 6:30 a.m., this year the hours will be from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday through Friday, with an earlier end time of 3 p.m. on school days. All soil loads will be required to be covered. In addition, EBMUD is exploring options to reduce the use of the Briones stockpile site.

The Utility District has reached out to the city as well as residents concerning complaints about the 2018 project. Council Member Amy Worth told EBMUD, "I am heartened to know that you are trying to improve on last time," and she thanked them for identifying East Bay locations where the soil can be used to benefit the park district.

Members of the public also commented that the plan looks like a big improvement over 2018. Council Member Inga Miller thanked EBMUD, which she termed, "Orinda's biggest neighbor." She emphasized how important roads are to the city, which has invested heavily in repairing them. Council Member Darlene Gee shared her concerns about public safety. "We have a lot of bicyclists," she said, "and more people now than ever are walking or using alternative means of transport." She also thinks that perhaps people are not being as careful as they should be because of the much-reduced traffic during the pandemic.

Director Young summed up by saying that "Orinda is the heart of EBMUD, you are very important to us. I'm not going to lie, it's still going to seem like there are a lot of trucks going down the road when this is going on, but we'll try to mitigate the impacts as much as possible."

Public inquiries should be directed to Kathryn Horn, EBMUD Community Affairs Representative at construction-east@ebmud.com or call (510) 287-2053. EBMUD will confirm the final plan with the city manager and staff before commencing work.

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[back](#)

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