



Published June 8th, 2022

MOFD, Orinda City Council 2x2 committee meets, considers recommendations by SSTOC

By Sora O'Doherty

At its second meeting, a 2x2 group comprising two members of the Orinda City Council and two members of the Moraga-Orinda Fire District board considered recommendations by Orinda's Supplemental Sales Tax Oversight Committee. The SSTOC, formed after the passage of Measure R, considered how best to spend revenue of the increased sales tax. Although the revenue will eventually be used for additional Orinda purposes, the first priority was increasing wildfire safety.

The group, which was welcomed by public speakers, including Melanie Light, chair of Orinda's Firewise Council and a member of the SSTOC and Jud Hammon, chair of the SSTOC, heard a presentation by SSTOC member Paula Reinman, and then discussed the SSTOC's recommendations on education and outreach efforts, the chipper program, grants and incentives, wildfire prevention (boots on the ground) and home assessments, and upcoming fire code updates.

The SSTOC report stated that in its initial year, the committee created near-term and longer-term goals. The near-term goals set by the SSTOC are: 1) hire and train an additional dedicated city staff member to provide "boots on the ground" support for wildfire risk reduction, emergency preparedness, and home hardening efforts; 2) provide roadside fuel reduction and vegetation management, particularly along evacuation routes; 3) create a vegetation and structure inventory of city and residential properties in order to utilize novel computer modeling of fire in the Wildland Urban Interface; 4) continue to clear city property to comply with MOFD Fire Code, and budget and plan for annual clearance; and 5) establish an extensive community education and motivational program regarding wildfire risk reduction, home hardening, and emergency preparedness.

Additional goals include defining police and other emergency staff required to assist the public during evacuations and assure adequate staffing levels will be available; publicizing the existing chipper program and explore implementation of a gridded program; exploring alternate funding to incentivize residents to achieve fuel reduction, home hardening, and emergency preparedness; and expanding the pilot program for red flag days parking restrictions.

MOFD Chief Dave Winnacker mentioned that he has often seen properties where he has personally spoken with the owners about what needs to be done, and yet the work has not been done. "We have an annual fire safety messaging plan, and it is very simple to integrate someone," said Winnacker, who noted that the MOFD has about 13 points they would like to communicate. "We'll talk to just about anybody on this stuff," he said, adding, "The message is not hard, it is the execution that is hard."

Orinda City Manager David Biggs was optimistic that the city will soon receive grant funds. Biggs also addressed issues concerning the chipper that has been purchased by the city but is scheduled by MOFD, which Biggs recommended. Senior Management Analyst Micki Cronin is working on a gridded chipper program and Biggs noted that they are looking at what would be the right size of target neighborhoods. Current demand is pretty high, he said, so perhaps the city will roll out the gridded program later on. In order to accommodate the gridded program, the city will have to pull days out of the generally available schedule.

Charles Porges, who spoke during public comments, said his concern was with getting the actual work done once the need has been documented. Winnacker confirmed that MOFD has a list of fuel mitigation providers who are considered trusted partners, having recently completed training by the MOFD. As trusted agents, the providers were walked through the fire code requirements and were certified. These providers can self-report on compliance. The list of trusted providers is on the MOFD website (www.MOFD.org).

On the subject of grants and incentives, without presuming board action, Winnacker noted that there is a proposal coming before the board on a \$500,000 home hardening grant program, which would provide a 50% match to homeowners for ember resistant vent hardening. If approved, it would go into effect early this summer and would provide grants of \$1,000 for home hardening. Winnacker added that the MOFD just ordered a number of rolls of ember resistant metal mesh, and is willing to explore opportunities for providing the mesh to people to harden attic vents.

In connection with grants, the issue of gifts of public funds was raised, but Winnacker noted that MOFD counsel has been clear to the MOFD board that there is no problem with grants as long as there is public benefit. He warned that if the city attorney takes a different view, it would also affect MOFD's grant program. Biggs also mentioned that state grants for low to moderate income households may be coming as early as 2023.

Gee was very supportive of the idea of using Measure R funds to create grants or incentives. "I think it is a hugely positive way to make action happen, and a really good way of making sure we are getting good use of our Measure R dollars," she said. Mayor Dennis Fay agreed, and saw substantial public benefit to the work on fire safety.

It was agreed that the 2x2 committee will continue to meet, and that the next meeting will be in late June.

Reach the reporter at: sora@lamorindaweekly.com

[back](#)



