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## Orinda agrees to expand red-flag day parking bans

By Sora O'Doherty

Following the successful and well received red-flag day parking ban in the El Toyonal/Loma Vista area in North Orinda, residents of other parts of the city have been asking that their neighborhoods also get a parking ban to allow easier transit on red-flag days. The purpose of the red-flag day parking ban is to ensure that residents will be able to evacuate in the event of a wildfire, and that fire trucks will be able to access and fight fires.

On June 7, the city council acted to move forward on adopting additional red-flag day parking restrictions on evacuation routes in the very high fire severity zone. All of the additional areas targeted for parking restrictions are located in North Orinda and include portions of Lomas Cantadas, Claremont Avenue, Monte Vista Road, Manzanita Drive, Miner Road, Vista Del Mar, Sleepy Hollow Lane, Dalewood Drive, Sundown Terrace, Tappan Lane, and Honey Hill Road.

The council considered a number of options, but elected to move forward on this option because it could be most quickly and effectively implemented and owing to the significance of evacuation in the event of wildfires. Council Member Darlene Gee, who is a transportation engineer and a member of the 2 x 2 committee with the Moraga-Orinda Fire District, spoke first on the proposal. "I do think this is a really important issue, and I personally am very supportive of tackling the evacuation routes," she said. "We can only do so much at a time and the evacuation routes are important enough for us to act on." Gee agreed with Mayor Dennis Fay that further red-flag day parking restrictions constitute a very legitimate use of Measure R dollars. As she has before, Gee raised the specter of the 25 people who lost their lives in the Oakland Hills fire because they couldn't get out. "This is the right application of our precious tax dollars," she concluded.

The matter was before the council so that Orinda staff could get directions on how to proceed. Following the unanimous approval of the first option presented to the council, it will be necessary for staff to conduct a study and prepare a traffic order for council approval. The council urged staff to act as quickly as possible, as fire season has started. Staff estimates that the cost of setting up signs in the expanded area will be between \$50,000 to \$70,000.

The program includes two types of signs. The first signs alert drivers and residents that the area is subject to parking restrictions on red-flag days. The second signs can be flipped down to indicate that a red-flag day is currently in place and that parking restrictions apply. These signs must be manually opened, and staff time to perform this task has been an issue. At times, Assistant Engineer Kevin McCourt personally came and flipped the signs open.

Another issue considered was parking enforcement. Orinda only has two part-time parking officers, and one just left to go to the Marines. While seeking to hire another, City Manager David Biggs noted that the city may require more staff for parking enforcement. Although the Orinda Police Department is willing to help, how much time they can dedicate to parking enforcement depends on the other demands upon them. He noted that other cities that have red-flag day restrictions have enforcement staff 24/7, and that large jurisdictions like Los Angeles have hundreds of enforcement staff.

Public Works Director Scott Christie discussed the process of placing the signs, and reviewed what it was like dealing with homeowner concerns regarding the placement of signs, the potential loss of on-street parking and the use of staff time to determine which existing parking areas would continue to be available on red-flag days.

In public comments Melanie Light speaking as current chair of the Firewise Council and member of Supplemental Sales Tax Oversight Committee, thanked the council for considering the expansion of red-flag day parking restrictions, which she categorized as "an important program for the safety of our citizens." Gene Gottfried commented that the El Toyonal program has worked well, and expressed his support for expansion.

The city council noted that time is of the essence and urged staff to come back to the council with whatever is required as soon as possible.

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[back](#)

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