



Published August 31st, 2022

Orinda to offer grants to homeowners on evacuation routes for fuel mitigation

By Sora O'Doherty

Homeowners living on evacuation routes in Orinda will be able to get grants of up to \$599 to incentivize them to perform specific wildfire fuel reduction measures. Having set aside up to \$400,000 of Measure R revenues for incentive grant programs, the council approved the grant scheme at its city council meeting on Aug. 16. The cap of \$599 was set because amounts over that must be declared by homeowners on their taxes. At that amount, the city should be able to finance about 667 grants. There are approximately 8,000 parcels in Orinda.

In order to qualify for the grants, applicants must be Orinda property owners living on evacuation routes who have had a Fire Adapted Community Assessment or who are in a current Firewise neighborhood. Qualifying expenses would include work on parcels on designated evacuation routes to remove dead trees or Monterey Pine or Eucalyptus trees within 6 feet of a habitable structure or the street and also to clear juniper and/or bamboo within 10 feet of the road.

The grant plan had been discussed the previous evening at the 2x2 meeting of the Moraga-Orinda Fire District and the Orinda City Council. Both at that meeting and at the council meeting, some commenters urged the council to abandon the restriction to evacuation routes and Firewise communities and make the grants more widely available.

In fact, three members of the Supplemental Sales Tax Oversight Committee urge the council to make the grants widely available, although the SSTOC itself recommended the restrictions. Paula Reinman of the SSTOC suggested that the MOFD has been working hard to get residents on the evacuation routes into compliance, and that by limiting the grants to these parcels the council is targeting the most resistant people in the community, people who have been asked repeatedly to bring their property into compliance. The other members of the SSTOC who spoke were Chris Decareau and Latika Malkani, who endorsed Reinman's suggestion. Decareau clarified that they were not speaking on behalf of the SSTOC, but adding their requests to this particular item.

Ultimately, after discussion and consideration, the council decided to keep the restrictions on the grants, but noted that if the program is not successful, it could be quickly changed to delete the restrictions. Council Member Darlene Gee noted that \$599 isn't going to change the world for anybody's property, but might have an effect on "these most resistant homeowners." Vice Mayor Inga Miller said it makes sense to start somewhere, and as the council has the recommendation of the SSTOC which Orinda Senior Management Analyst Micki Cronin has already worked on, she supported starting with the evacuation routes. Council Member Nick Kosla agreed and supported the program, which he deemed, "fantastic."

While Council Member Amy Worth agreed with Reinman that there is a tremendous advantage to offering the grant to everyone, she said that the city needs to evaluate the rollout and put a finite timeframe on it. "If it isn't working," she suggested, "then open it up to everyone, with priority to evacuation routes." She added, "This is the beginning, not the end. Ultimately, everyone will be eligible." Mayor Dennis Fay also agreed. "If we need to pivot," he said, "we'll pivot."

The city council, having approved the concept of the grant program, asked city staff to bring it back to the council for formal approval before the program is implemented.

Reach the reporter at: sora@lamorindaweekly.com

[back](#)

Copyright © Lamorinda Weekly, Moraga CA