



Published August 16th, 2023

Orinda City Council gets update from grant-writing company

By Sora O'Doherty

After approximately a year of doing business with California Consulting Inc., a grant writing firm, the Orinda City Council got an update on how the city has been doing with grants. Steve Samuelian, who owns the company he founded with his wife 20 years ago, recently gave a PowerPoint presentation via Zoom. Other company personnel on the Zoom call were David Marquez, Statewide Senior Project Manager and Mathew Kamm, Project Manager.

The company, which is the largest grant writing firm in the state, specializes in government grants and also grants from private foundations, and serves almost 100 clients, including cities, counties, school districts, and nonprofit organizations. California Consulting has secured over 1,200 competitive grants that have been funded for more than \$1.6 billion, including some \$32 million over the 90 days preceding the July 18 city council meeting.

Since working with California Consulting, Orinda has secured four grants, although the company gave credit to the city staff for two of the grants that the city secured from California Parks and Rec for restrooms in Orinda Community Park. In 2021 Orinda received \$189,803 and in 2022 another \$125,000 for the park restrooms. In addition, in June of this year Orinda secured a grant of \$200,000 for transit-oriented development at the Orinda BART station and \$40,000 from Caltrans for a local road safety plan.

Orinda was also denied six grants, primarily because the grants were targeted at funding underserved communities, and one because the grantor had very little money to give out.

Two grants are currently pending, and the city is waiting to hear if they get a \$251,646 grant from Cal Fire for prescribed goat grazing for wildfire prevention or \$2,028,767 from Cal State Library Building Forward for library improvements.

Three grants are in the process of being written: Cal OES-HMGP \$568,360 for generators; Cal Waterboards SWRF \$400,000 for the Moraga Way and North Lane Sinkholes; and MTC Priority Sites (\$TBD) for potential sites for developments.

Samuelian said that two grants that are under consideration, he would consider a go: US DOT Protect for Evacuation Routes and US DOT Multimodal for Connecting downtown Orinda to Wilder.

In regard to Orinda, Samuelian said they are on the lookout for grants for wildfire prevention, Icabod stormdrain solutions, parks and rec, and roads. City Manager David Biggs noted that California Consultants also looks out for grant opportunities for local nonprofit agencies, such as the newly formed Firesafe Moraga Orinda group.

Samuelian praised the city staff, and noted that the company meets with staff once a month but is frequently in communication with staff, whom he said are very cooperative. At these meetings, he said, "we do a deep dive to consider which grants to apply for," considering factors such as eligibility, feasibility and practicality.

Council Member Darlene Gee asked about the university of opportunity related to climate change, and whether it is beneficial to work with other agencies on multijurisdictional grant applications. Samuelian said that in 20 years there has never been this much money available regarding climate issues, and Marquez said that federal grants tend to look for regional impact over local impact.

This reporter asked two questions: To the question of whether there is a conflict of interest for the same company to be writing grant applications for multiple California cities, Samuelian said that there is not a conflict because they do not have any say so in who gets the grants. Additionally, although it does happen that the company is writing applications for the same grant at the same time, Samuelian said it doesn't happen with a high level of frequency. Marquez explained that California Consultants staff who work with cities develop a very personal relationship with the cities, almost as if they were on the city staff.

The second question was whether Orinda, which does not have a lobbyist, is losing out on grants because of that. Marquez opined that it is about the relationship between a city and its local elected officials. For some federal grants, lobbying is not allowed. City Manager Biggs noted that lobbying might be influential when it comes to legislative earmarks, and that staff will be bring the question back to the council at a later date.

The PowerPoint presentation can be viewed at

<https://cityoforinda.app.box.com/s/ph3q5jmb3sk0hw5rz2o417ka68qf61i8/file/1262493535754>

Reach the reporter at: sora@lamorindaweekly.com

[back](#)

Copyright © Lamorinda Weekly, Moraga CA