

# City considering increased funding options for the Orinda Library

By Nick Marnell

The Orinda City Council at its Nov. 21 meeting unanimously authorized the city staff to issue a request for proposal to hire a public opinion polling firm to measure options for an Orinda Library parcel tax.

“We need additional revenue for the library,” said Vice Mayor Amy Worth, and no one on the council disagreed. The library parcel tax of \$39 has been in effect since 2008, and the staff projected that money for operations will run out in 2018-19. There is no source of funding for long-term maintenance, either. With no additional revenue, the council would consider adjustments to library service levels.

The council members agreed that the polling firm should report on establishing proper ballot language and the level of funding voters will support. If the council wants to place a parcel tax on the ballot in June, it would need to act by March 9, so polling would have

to begin in January.

But how do pollsters get to voters in the cell phone age when people rarely answer calls from numbers they do not recognize? “I’m skeptical of telephone polling and its effectiveness,” said Council Member Darlene Gee, who also questioned the proposed \$25,000 cost to pay the polling firm. “I would risk putting the library on the ballot without spending the money,” she said.

Mayor Eve Phillips suggested doing an online poll after the phone poll and compare the results. “That would tell us how far off we are when we do this kind of outreach,” Phillips said. “It would be an extra testing step.”

In the end the council members agreed to authorize up to \$25,000 for the RFP, with guidance to keep the poll simple and focused only on the library.

“The measure takes two-thirds to pass, so it’s very important to get it right,” Worth said.

# Business registration program on its way to Orinda

By Nick Marnell

Orinda moved a step closer to collecting an annual registration fee from most businesses in the city when a split city council voted to introduce an ordinance establishing a business registration requirement at the Nov. 21 city council meeting. The stated purpose of the registration program, for which the city conducted public outreach in the fall, is to identify and maintain an up-to-date list of businesses in the city.

Planning Director Drummond Buckley presented the main benefits of the program to the council: A structured way for the city to communicate with businesses; building a data base of businesses and commercial activities, including home-based businesses; increased sales tax revenue since distribution of sales tax money by the state can be monitored more closely; and improved economic development, as simple as letting businesses know about community events from which they might benefit. Buckley said that Orinda, Lafayette and Moraga are the only municipalities in the county with no business registration license or requirement.

“It is not a tax, and it is not a permit,” Buckley said. Certain businesses would be exempt from the discussed \$50 annual fee, including businesses that gross less than \$10,000 a year, nonprofits and

religious organizations. The city would outsource the administration of the program.

Orinda Chamber of Commerce President Roy Hodgkinson, who supports business registration, cautioned that the \$10,000 annual revenue figure was too low. “There are people in high school doing website businesses who would achieve that threshold,” he said.

Not so fast, suggested Orinda resident Richard Colman. “It’s a fee, it’s a tax, call it what you want,” he said. “It takes more money out of the hands of business and perhaps adds to higher prices.”

Mayor Eve Phillips remained wary of the program benefits. “I agree with some of the letter writers that this is a solution chasing a problem. The benefits listed could be achieved in other ways,” she said. “On the economic development side, (not having a business registration program) certainly hasn’t hurt Lafayette.”

The motion to introduce the ordinance passed 3 to 1, with Phillips voting no and Council Member Inga Miller recusing herself because she owns a business in Orinda. The ordinance, which will include a proposed registration fee and a start date for the program, will return for adoption at the Dec. 5 city council meeting.

# Homelessness Awareness Month



Photo Sheri Smith

The Orinda City Council proclaimed November as Homelessness Awareness Month. Mayor Eve Phillips presented the proclamation to John Barclay, right, Director of Home and Community Based Services, Good Health and Case Management for the Contra Costa Health Plan, at the Nov. 21 council meeting.

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## ORINDA UNION SCHOOL DISTRICT FACILITIES MASTER PLAN TOWN HALL

As a valued resident of Orinda, you are cordially invited to attend a Town Hall to provide your feedback regarding the exciting improvements planned for Orinda Union School District’s school campuses!

**WHAT:** Orinda Union School District is pleased to host a community Town Hall to provide information about our long term facilities master planning process and share preliminary ideas about ways to improve our campuses so they better support teaching and learning for our students.

**WHEN:** Wednesday, December 6th, from 6-8 p.m.

**WHERE:** Orinda Community Center, 28 Orinda Way in Orinda

**TOPICS TO BE DISCUSSED:**

- Status of current school facilities
- How school facilities support teaching and learning
- Currently identified improvements desired by staff, parents, and students



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