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Library parcel tax increase to be on June ballot

By Sora O'Doherty

A compromise on the parcel tax to fund the library resulted in the Orinda City Council unanimously agreeing to put a straight \$30 per year increase on the June general election ballot, but without built-in inflation increases. If passed by a two-thirds vote in June, this would bring the library parcel tax up to \$69 per year for each property subject to the tax. At that level, the library is expected to be able to continue to maintain the 17-year-old library building for another seven years before having to go back and ask the public for another increase. With the increase, the library will continue to provide the extended hours currently enjoyed by Orindans. Without it, hours would have to be cut.

Owing to previous cuts to the Contra Costa County library budget, the county only funds 35 library hours per week; the remaining 25 hours per week that the library remains open are funded by the parcel tax. The Friends of the Orinda Library now number 400 members, and raised \$5 million to build the library. The library is clearly a very popular institution, with Linda Landau, treasurer of the Friends, saying that her son brought his first date to the library. Volunteer Lauri Patel noted that different types of patrons use the library at different times of the day, meaning that cuts could impact some groups more than others. Landau told the council that the Friends supported the increase to \$69 per year as the best choice, although she noted that the parcel tax for the Oakland library is \$75 per year.

Earlier, Orinda had undertaken polling on a \$25 increase, but with an inflation factor. This would have put the library parcel tax at \$64 per year. While the increase polled positively, the inflation factor did not, and put passage of the measure in doubt. At the Feb. 20 meeting, the council considered proposals to raise the tax by a range of numbers. A \$30 per unit increase would result in a positive fund balance for the next seven years, while an increase of \$34 per unit would have resulted in a positive fund balance for the next 11 years. The council opted for the lowest proposed amount, which means that it will have to return to the electorate in a shorter time.

The calculations for the tax were based on the assumption that operating expenses will increase by three percent and utility costs will increase by four percent annually. A maintenance reserve funded at a level of \$100,000 per year was also counted.

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