

# Letters to the Editor

Measure J

The Measure J committee is delighted that Orinda voters once again supported our wonderful library by passing Measure J with a 72 percent “yes” vote! This will ensure that the library is open seven days a week, and will continue to offer numerous popular programs, well into the future.

Thanks go to all the yes voters, as well as to our great campaign volunteers who put out signs, wrote thank-you notes, and helped with all the other campaign work. Michelle Bea designed our beautiful logo. Special thanks to Linda Landau, volunteer extraordinaire, who served as our campaign treasurer, but was crucial to every aspect of this effort. Kudos also to local newspapers who helped spread the word and educate voters. More thanks go to all those who donated and helped pay for the campaign flyers, signs, and website.

Special thanks go to major donors Jane and Mark Zuercher, Finola Fellner, Betty Lou Cutter, Lynn and Ira Dubinsky, Senator Steve Glazer, Sue Severson, Sharon Simpson, Republic Services, PG&E Corporation, and Village Associates.

We love our Orinda Library!

Susie Epstein and Liz Daoust, Co-chairs  
Measure J Committee

Opinions in Letters to the Editor are the express views of the writer and not necessarily those of the Lamorinda Weekly. All published letters will include the writer's name and city/town of residence -- we will only accept letters from those who live in, or own a business in, the communities comprising Lamorinda (please give us your phone number for verification purposes only). Letters should be 350 words or less; letters of up to 500 words will be accepted on a space-available basis. Visit [www.lamorindaweekly.com](http://www.lamorindaweekly.com) for submission guidelines. **Email:** [letters@lamorindaweekly.com](mailto:letters@lamorindaweekly.com); **Regular mail:** Lamorinda Weekly, P.O.Box 6133, Moraga, CA 94570

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## Lamorinda municipalities report healthy reserve balances

By Nick Marnell

With the improved economy since the Great Recession, the three Lamorinda municipalities have focused on beefing up their general fund reserve balances, with the agencies projecting to stash away nearly \$20 million in 2019.

A general fund reserve is a savings account, or a “rainy day fund,” that government agencies can use to help stabilize tax rates, address revenue shortfalls or to fund emergencies. Each Lamorinda agency follows a different general fund reserve policy.

The Lafayette reserve balance goal is 60 percent of annual expenditures. The anticipated general fund reserve balance on June 30, 2019 is \$10.1 million, which is 64 percent of the \$15.6 million of projected expenditures.

“I suggest that the council increase its reserve target goal from 60 percent to 100 percent, with the intent to reach that target in five years,” Lafayette City Manager Steve Falk told his city finance committee. “The likelihood of a recession in the next several years is increased because this very long period of economic expansion cannot persist. A recession that reduces sales and property tax revenue could result in deficits.”

Moraga’s policy for its reserve balance is 50 percent of general fund expenditures. The expected general fund surplus, combined with a \$1.4 million reimbursement for the Rheem sinkhole from the Federal Highway Administration, will bring town reserves to 44.4 percent in 2019. The reimbursement payment is expected in September of 2019, and including that money, the town general fund reserve balance will jump to \$3.8 million.

“Keeping a general fund reserve at a certain level is absolutely vital, because of unforeseen circumstances like a sinkhole or a bridge washout. Cash is king for a reason,” said Joe Tanner, Moraga administrative services director. “But there is a fine line between keeping a reserve and providing needed services.” Tanner said his staff will do an analysis on what level of fund balance is appropriate and report the findings to the town council.

Figuring the Orinda general fund reserve balance requires a more complex calculation. While the other Lamorinda municipalities base their reserve policy on expenditures, Orinda bases its on revenue, calling for \$5 million plus 20 percent of budgeted annual revenue in excess of \$10 million, not including Measure L revenue.

“As an agency heavily reliant on property tax, we can go through a rough period. If you have a robust retail sector, you can get by,” Finance Director Paul Rankin said. But Orinda hardly sports a robust retail sector, putting added pressure on maintaining an adequate reserve balance, which is projected at \$5.7 million for 2019.

What is the right dollar amount to carry in a general fund reserve? Each Lamorinda municipality has dealt with a sinkhole over the years, but how much cash does an agency need to prepare for a catastrophic emergency, like the devastation of the North Bay wildfires, which fire officials say could happen in Lamorinda?

According to Santa Rosa City Manager Sean McGlynn, “Whatever amount you have in your reserve, it is not enough.”

## Back to the drawing board on Deer Hill Road, as voters reject Measure L

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Lafayette Mayor Don Tatzin said he thought that the result was a combination of voters who didn’t like the project, thought they could get a better project, or weren’t worried about negative consequences.

Vice Mayor Cam Burks, making it clear that he was speaking as a resident and not in his roll as council member, commented, “We know that Lafayette residents were dropping off ballots on election day all the way until the polls closed at 8 p.m. I think it is respectful for those voters and fellow community members to allow all of the ballots to be counted,” adding, “We are proud of the campaign we ran and we were honored to have so much community support.”

In his roll as vice mayor, Burks commented that he respects and values that the community has spoken and made a decision on this important matter. “This represents a civically engaged community and we are profoundly fortunate to

have this.

“Most importantly, though,” he added “I would like to stress the critical importance that I personally place on moving forward as one community and that we focus on being positive, civil and respectful to one another. Civility and a sense of community is what makes Lafayette so great. The intense community division that evolved during the campaign was significant and frankly discouraging to me – and to some degree just not healthy for our city. It is my goal to work on bringing our community back together.”

Sommer noted as a positive that the measure engaged the public in a robust discussion, particularly on social media forums.

“The voters got their decision,” said Tatzin. “This is democracy in action.”

Stay tuned for continued discussion of Deer Hill.



Vernon G McCalla

Coldwell Banker - Orinda

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Vern.mccalla@camoves.com

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