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The Curious Case of the Yellow and Black Yard Signs

Taking a closer look at Fix Orinda Roads Now!

Laurie Snyder

"Come on Orinda" signs featuring a pothole-slanted automobile and urging, "Let's FIX OUR ROADS NOW!" have caught the eyes of even the most distracted of drivers passing through Orinda over the last several months, largely due to their bright yellow and black design.

As a result, inquiring Orindan minds have been seeking out the web site of the signs' sponsoring organization for details (www.fixorindaroads.org). But the web site has not been completely built out as yet. For example, there is no "About" page - an overview page typically found on many web sites that is often used to indicate the names of an organization's management and its mission statement or objectives. Nor is there an explanation regarding the purpose of the site's online petition, or an indication of how the funds that are being raised by the organization will be used.

The web site does, however, provide the following basic data about the road signs' sponsoring organization:

Fix Orinda Roads Now!
Campaign ID #1343654
PO Box 54
Orinda, CA 94563-0054

Conversations with both the California Secretary of State's office and the City of Orinda City Clerk's office have confirmed that this campaign identification data is correct. Because the group did not begin fundraising until after the first of the year, according to representatives from those governing bodies, the financial reports for Fix Orinda Roads Now! are not due to the City until July, 2012.

The Faces Behind Fix Orinda Roads Now!

"Our committee is really just a group of concerned citizens," said Darlene Gee, City of Orinda Citizens' Infrastructure Oversight Committee member. Gee invited anyone in Orinda who is interested in learning more about the condition of Orinda's roads to contact Fix Orinda Roads Now! for more information.

The organization, she said, started with a core group of people that participated in earlier, failed road improvement bond measures. That core group includes current Mayor Steve Glazer and Orinda City Council Member Sue Severson. Gee said that, although Glazer and Severson are members of the Council's Roads Subcommittee, they are simply participating, like other members of the group, as Orinda residents and not as part of their official Council duties.

Severson confirmed that she is indeed a participant, but reiterated that she has been "involved as a concerned Orinda citizen."

Other members of the core group of roughly 30 to 40 residents include Pete Hasselman, who provided the roads-related cartoons for the organization's web site, and Carol Penskar, of the City's Finance Advisory Committee and the Orinda Community Foundation, who is serving as the group's treasurer.

Penskar, who was unwilling to give a dollar figure for the amount of funds that have been raised to date because the organization is not legally required to do so until July 2012, confirmed the data provided by the offices of the California Secretary of State and Orinda City Clerk. "I can tell you that zero dollars were raised before January," she said.

Gee explained that the petition on the group's web site is not designed for a specific parcel tax, bond measure, or other goal but is, instead, designed to simply demonstrate the level of interest of residents in improving the city's streets.

Severson explained that the group tried several different ways of posting the online petition, but not having a volunteer with computer programming skills has proven challenging. Each of the various petition formats has had its own set of frustrating glitches.

The group, said Severson, also has not posted a list of its leaders because it has no leadership- it is just a grassroots group of folks who are sincerely concerned about the condition of Orinda's roads and drainage systems.

And, while the group has been set up as a political campaign and funds are being raised in the hope that there will be a campaign in some way, right now there is no specific campaign underway because the group's members are waiting on the Orinda City Council to make a final decision regarding whether or not to try for another infrastructure improvement ballot measure.

If the City has a measure for 2012, said Gee, "then we will gear up and become the 'yes' for that campaign measure."

Severson also indicated that the group is in a somewhat dormant mode, explaining that their grassroots community effort initially raised funds just to cover the cost of the yellow and black yard signs plus an informational mailing sent to Orinda households and that they exceeded their goal.

Severson said the group felt it was just time to do something about the condition of Orinda's roads, and encouraged Orinda residents to contact the organization if they wish to become involved or simply want to learn more.

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