

One Minute to Evacuate: a personal perspective from the Oct. 10 fire

By Cynthia Brian

When it's 2:15 in the morning, the power is out, the air smells of smoke, yet you are fast asleep, then you realize that firefighters are pounding on your door shouting, "Evacuate Now," what do you do? I thought I was very prepared for an emergency with packed Go Bags in our vehicles and one in our hall closet that had a list in large letters of what to grab. But when my husband and I were given exactly one minute to get out because the fire was only 100

feet from our house, there was no time to gather items. In the dark, with a flashlight leading the way, there was just enough time to throw on clothes, grab my computer, purse, phone, keys, and Go Bag. Outside the front door, I put on my garden clogs and off we went as two trucks of firefighters battled the blaze. Here are the Cliff Notes of what I learned that frenzied and frightful morning that could have improved our one-minute evacuation.

1. Put keys, wallet, handbag, phone, glasses, and

other essentials in the same place every time. (My husband left without his wallet and glasses.)

2. Everything on your list should be stored near your Go Bag. On my list, I had written: computer, back-up discs, passports, insurance papers, family DVD's, and my first-edition books that I wrote. (There was time to only get my computer.)
3. Have duplicate keys to homes, offices, or other keys you may need in your Go Bag. We were allowed to only evacuate with one car. (My

car had everything we needed in it, but we were directed to take my husband's car that had nothing.)

4. Keep a pair of shoes near the front door. (Check!)
5. A headlamp is the best flashlight option when you are searching in the dark and attempting to find things. (Two hands are better than one when you can take only what you can carry.)
6. Bring a warm coat, blankets, socks, and maybe your pillow. (It was cold and the two thin blankets in my emergency bag were not suf-

ficient. I wish I had stuffed my pillow in my bag.) Today I've amended my emergency Go Bag. This may be the new normal.

The firefighters were calm, professional, and truly heroic in saving lives and homes. Our sincerest gratitude to all these brave men and women from many fire districts who orchestrated a successful save. Bravo!

All is well that ends well. *Cynthia Brian is the columnist for Digging Deep with the Goddess Gardener. www.CynthiaBrian.com*

Private roads workshop facilitator reports back to Council, where now?

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And, could the city assist with making private road residents eligible for federal or state emergency funds?

The council is expected to have further deliberations about how to frame future funding measures, according to Bourgart, and what to include in them. The citizens of Orinda will likely be asked to provide more resources to address infrastructure needs.

The presentation by the facilitator was followed by public comments and council discussion. A few members of the public expressed negative views about the city taking any further action concerning private roads, but more speakers reiterated their concerns about the burden of private roads on the residents.

The main argument from

the private road advocates was presented by Steve Cohn, who has been at the forefront of the private roads movement. He made four points, which he considers essential for the city to resolve before it can move ahead. His first point was that the private road advocates will continue to push for some resolution of the problem, and that Resolution 59-18 did not solve the problem. But he argues that the problem is not as large as some say, and can be solved. And, he said, the risk that might be associated with accepting liability for the private roads needs to be quantified. His last point was regarding the storm drain issue, which involves private property and private drains having to deal with water coming off public lands. Kathleen Finch agreed with Cohn, saying it was so important to get some relief from

the burden.

Karen Lum-Nackley and her husband John Nackley, 20-year Orinda residents, spoke against the private roads issue. Karen said, "the issue of fairness doesn't quite fit; to demand, blackmail, badger seems not right." She urged the council to take the issue of fairness off the table, while her husband expressed concerns about rising property taxes. Daniel Gutu spoke of the problem he had accessing his property from the rear entrance, which was on a private road. Steve Westfall raised two questions: the legality of gift of public funds, and the amount of money spent to date on this issue.

Other speakers in favor of doing something about the private roads and drains pointed out that if a street is impassible, it doesn't help the community, that some private roads provide access to

pedestrians who wish to walk to downtown or to PG&E for essential maintenance of their facilities.

The council discussion was wide-ranging, including questions from newer Council Member Nick Kosla about the private roads, with explanations being provided by city attorney Osa Wolff and Director of Public Works Larry Theis. It was generally agreed that the situation regarding private drains may be significantly affected by public streets and drains and should be studied. All council members acknowledged that further funding is required to complete even the task of maintaining public roads, the repair the public arterials and collectors, and to fix and maintain public sewers and drains, and that that funding will need to be raised by some form of tax or bond that will need to be ap-

proved at an election.

There was general agreement to some form of polling of public opinion to see what ballot measure should be pursued in the future, as well as a further survey of private roads to evaluate the costs of fixing them and maintaining them. Theis suggested that this would best be done by a contractor, and pointed out that time will be needed to produce a request for proposals and hire a contractor. Theis also made note of the fact that, should the city accept more responsibility for private roads, the city would require additional staff. Theis also agreed that Street-saver had been a pretty good barometer of the public roads and the predictions were relatively close to final costs.

To view all the "ideas for possible exploration" in the facilitator's report, see <https://www.cityoforinda.org/DocumentCenter/View/2603/Orinda-Workshop-Report---by-Facilitator-Jim-Bourgart>

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