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Now is the time for testing the appetite in Orinda for new taxes

By Sora O'Doherty



Image provided

that the firm had contributed to the Measure X campaign in 2016. The vote was 4-0, with one recusal. Council Member Dennis Fay has extensive transportation background from his earlier career with Alameda County and Council Member Amy Worth sits as an ex officio commissioner of the CCTA.

The combined total sales tax rate for Orinda is currently 8.75%, including state, county and city sales taxes. The city of Orinda is now considering what to do about its own sales tax. The existing one-half cent sales tax adopted in November 2012 will expire in 2023. Those funds have been used to pay for the repair of public roads. Without an extension, the city will not be able to maintain the improvements. The city also acknowledges that additional funding is required to deal with the city's sewer and drain systems. Additionally, work remains to be done on the city's arterial and collector roads, although the funding for those roads comes from different revenue sources.

The city council's revenue and tax measure subcommittee held its second public meeting on Oct. 23 to work with polling company FM3 Research to try to craft a questionnaire to test the appetite of Orinda residents for extending the half cent sales tax and maybe increasing it from one-half cent to one cent to provide some measure of service for private roads and drains. The meeting was attended by subcommittee members Gee and Worth, Finance Director Paul Rankin, Director of Public Works Larry Theis, City Manager Steve Salomon, Dave Metz from FM3, and four proponents of private roads: Steve Cohn, Melissa Roeder, Charles Porges, and Cathy Finch. The group reviewed a draft questionnaire that will be circulated to a representative sample of Orinda residents. A number of changes were suggested to clarify the issues, and Metz agreed to return at a later date with a further draft.

During the presentation by Deputy Executive Director of CCTA Tim Haile to the city council on the proposed CCTA tax, one thing that was emphasized was that the matching funds that come back to the city from such taxes also enable the city to qualify for other grants; at least one such grant opportunity was missed by the city in the past.

In addition, CCTA funding allows them to leverage local funding at a 3:1 ratio. The CCTA raised \$1.4 billion from Measure C and based on that CCTA was able to obtain state, regional and federal funds of \$4.1 billion, bringing the total investment in Contra Costa's transportation system up to \$5.5 billion.

Proposed projects that could be funded by the sales tax that would specifically benefit Orinda include: \$450,000 per year to Orinda to modernize local roads and improve access to jobs and housing; reducing congestion on Highway 24 by improvements to old bores of Caldecott Tunnel and auxiliary lanes; improved transit reliability such as shared mobility hubs, shuttles to employment centers, and incentives for alternative modes; improved traffic flow on major roads such as Camino Pablo and Moraga Road; improved access to BART; bicycle and pedestrian improvements to streets and trails; accessible transportation for seniors, veterans, and people with disabilities; additional funding for Lamorinda's School Bus Program to reduce congestion around schools; investments to reduce emissions and improve air quality such as electric vehicle charging stations, rideshare/bikeshare services, and zero emissions programs; and funding to attract jobs to Contra Costa County (reduce and reverse commute).

CCTA placed a similar tax measure on the ballot in 2016. The yes vote of over 63% fell short of the two-thirds majority required to pass a tax measure. The current CCTA sales tax will expire in 2034, the first 10 years focused on capital projects and second 20 years paying off capital projects, such as Caldecott Tunnel

or the 680 interchange.

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