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New Mayor Dennis Fay wants to improve plight of private roads residents

By Sora O'Doherty



Mayor Dennis Fay Lamo archive

As he enters the last year of his term on the Orinda City Council as mayor, Dennis Fay would like to do something to help residents of private streets not in homeowners associations. He would like to get a pilot program started this year to work with residents to bring their streets up to standard and then have those streets accepted by the city of Orinda. However, he is only talking about a specific segment of Orinda's approximately 20% of streets that are private. In fact, he is looking at helping residents on perhaps 25% of those streets, or about 5% of Orinda's streets in total.

The residents whom Fay is seeking to aid live on streets that were offered by their developers to the government - most likely the county government before Orinda incorporated in 1985, which are also not included in HOAs. According to Fay, HOAs have budgets for street maintenance and insurance for major incidents, such as sink holes. But residents on streets without HOAs must agree to work together to maintain their streets, which can be a challenge.

During his term as vice mayor, Fay is happiest about implementing Measure R, the one-cent sales tax voters approved in 2020, as it relates to wildfires. "We need to be working on all the things that would help reduce our

wildfire risk," Fay says, "including fuels mitigation and home hardening, as well as anything new SSTOC (Supplemental Sales Tax Oversight Commission), a commission set up to oversee the use of the Measure R funds over the 20-year life of the tax, might come up with." Fay expressed his appreciation to Moraga-Orinda Fire District Chief Dave Winnacker for providing a lot of guidance on what to work on. Fay said high on the list of things to be done is getting the word out that fire safety is an issue. "Surprisingly," he said, "some citizens are still unaware of fire danger and what they can do about it." He added that the city's work to promote fire safety has to be followed up by site visits by MOFD, which has the power to enforce the fire code.

Fay's next priority is finishing up Orinda's downtown plan, which he views as a catalyst to revitalize the downtown. Nobody can guarantee it though, he pointed out. "What gets built will be built by the private sector. The city won't be actually building in downtown, but the planning is intended to incentivize developers." Demographics are changing, Fay observed. Younger people with children have a changed perception. Fay says that when he was campaigning for his seat on the city council, he frequently heard that people wanted a more vibrant downtown. "The real question," he says, "is how do you get there."

Speaking about the effects of the pandemic on the city, Fay noted that "we've lost at least two restaurants during the pandemic, Taverna Pellegrini and Brothers Public Kitchen. There are a lot of empty spaces in Theatre Square.

"Orinda Village is kind of sad," Fay remarked, "there is almost nothing going on on Sundays. The Bank of America has closed permanently. It feels like slow decay. If we don't do something to provide opportunities and incentives, 20 years from now it will look even worse." Although he recognizes that there are some who like the current architecture, like parking right in front of stores, he wonders how good that will be in the long run.

On the infrastructure side, Fay believes that Orinda's roads are in pretty good shape. The 2021 roads project was delayed by contract difficulties, but will start in the spring, with 2022 coming right up behind it. There will be a fair amount of road repaving activity in 2022.

Storm drains are the next priority for expenditure of Measure R funds. Fay notes that Orinda cannot afford to have large storm drains fail, because they go under the collectors and arterials. He doesn't want another Miner Road sinkhole type incident. With limited resources, the city will focus on the big drains.

Fay is in the last year of his term, having been elected in 2018. He would be up for reelection in November if he decides to run. However, he might decide that he needs more family time. His son, currently living in New York, will be moving back to the Bay Area, and his daughter lives in Huddersfield, England with her

husband and child. "We haven't been able to see them during the pandemic." Fay's grandson is now 9.

In addition, Fay and his wife might be house hunting, for a place with fewer stairs. His wife recently broke her ankle, making them realize that their current home is not ideal for physical challenges.

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