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Capital Improvements and a new Director of Public Works for Orinda

By Sora O'Doherty

Orinda's Department of Public Works and Engineering Services submitted to the city council its annual update of the Capital Improvement Plan on May 3. The council took the opportunity to welcome Senior Engineer Scott Christie as Public Works Director. Annually, the CIP comes before the council on three occasions. At the first meeting, staff seeks the council's feedback and guidance. The second meeting takes a deeper dive into fund balances and scheduling. The CIP then goes to the planning commission, returning to the city council for approval.

At this point, Christie said, the budget is really only an estimate, as the rising price of crude oil will affect the cost of asphalt. Although Orinda's roads are now much improved, Christie said that it is still necessary to make progress under Measure R. The second priority for the department is the city's drainage system, and the storm drain repair plan.

Christie informed the council of an unexpected problem that has arisen, damage in a large concrete culvert from the Safeway parking lot down to Orinda Way, which is partially in the city's right of way along Camino Pablo. Repair will be a multi-year project and is estimated to cost \$5 million. Currently, the design effort is underway. The project will include soil boring work and testing. The department hopes to find out how erosive type damage that has occurred since the 1950s might be prevented in the future.

Council Member Amy Worth expressed a desire to bring forward the proposed Moraga Way crosswalk to facilitate safe passage for children getting on and off school buses. She also thanked Christie for teeing up projects for grants.

Mayor Dennis Fay was satisfied with the CIP. "I think it is a very good program," he said, noting that he was really happy to see LED lights in there. "It doesn't take much time to convert lighting fixtures to LED," he added, "and it is a very good thing to do that is also good for the environment." LED retrofits are proposed for the tennis courts and Wilder Fields No. 1 and 2.

The mayor asked that as a general rule, the city consider climate change in CIP projects. For example, he said, Orinda's vehicle fleet will contain more electric vehicles over time. Speaking of vehicles reminded the mayor of one of his pet peeves: Parked police vehicles left running just to keep the computer running. "I don't know if we can fit it into the budget," he said, "but can we look at that carefully?" He suggested that perhaps an uninterruptible power system might be possible.

During the discussion, the council also heard about a small sinkhole that developed at the intersection of El Toyonal and Camino Pablo. The council heard how city staff jumped right on it and got it fixed right away before it could become a larger problem.

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