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Special election to allow Orinda residents to vote on a new school parcel tax

By Sora O'Doherty

The only polls open in Contra Costa County on March 7 will be in Orinda, where residents will be able to vote on a new annual proposed parcel tax of \$295 per parcel to support Orinda schools. The new tax would last for seven years and is anticipated to provide somewhat over \$2 million per year for the schools.

In order to pass, the measure needs to receive two-thirds of the votes cast. Persons over the age of 65 may opt for a waiver and not pay the tax. Because it is a special election, the Orinda Union School Board will have to bear the expense of the election, but this is common for school financing matters.

As is often heard at OUSD meetings, Orinda is among the districts receiving the lowest funding from the state of California. In 2013 the state of California adopted the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) with the object of providing more state funding for districts that inherently had less money, in addition to boosting the money that flowed to school districts that had more English language learners, children from lower income households and foster youth.

Despite low funding from the state, Orinda has received a great deal of additional funding from the community itself. The parcel taxes are in addition to other funding mechanisms, such as bond measures. In addition, local schools raise funds from donations, a field that has recently been brought under the umbrella of ONE Orinda, the Orinda Network for Education, that works with all of the school parent clubs on fundraising.

According to OUSD Superintendent Aida Glimme, the new measure, know as Measure Z, would be added to the existing two measures approved by Orinda voters in 2003 and 2009, neither of which has an end date. Measure A provides the schools with \$385 per parcel and measure B provides an additional \$124 per parcel. If Measure Z passes, Orinda residents would be paying \$804 annually per parcel for school support for the next seven years.

The new parcel tax is intended to maintain core academic instruction in science, technology, engineering, math, arts, music, reading and writing programs by attracting and retaining highly qualified teachers, specialist and staff and preserving small class sizes. The tax will not fund administrative salaries, and will be subject to an independent citizens' oversight committee.

No argument against the proposed tax was submitted, but an argument in favor of the tax was submitted by State Sen. Steve Glazer, former mayor Sue Severson, representatives of ONE and several parents and grandparents of Orinda students.

Polls will be open on election day from 7 a.m. to 8 p.m. at Holy Shepherd Lutheran Church, Santa Maria Church and St. Stephens Episcopal Church. In addition, ballots may be dropped into official ballot drop boxes located at Orinda City Hall and the Contra Costa Department of Elections in Martinez. The elections department expects to have final results of the election available by March 17.

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