

[Kathy F.](#)

[Stein Way](#) • 17 Oct 20

More reasons to vote No on Measure R. This is what was on the city's October 6 post (<http://www.cityoforinda.org/documentcenter/view/3024>) regarding the new sales tax and where its revenues would go. It definitely doesn't look like a fire prevention tax: In the first five years \* \$10 Million Critical Storm Drain Location Improvements (77%) \* \$730,000 Disaster Prevention and Response Planning Programs (6%) \* \$750,000 Wildfire Reduction on City Properties (6%) \* \$1.5 Million Roadside Fuel Reduction (12%) And after the first 3-4 years, fire prevention "then needs a reduced effort to maintain" according to the Report on Long Term Needs (item I.3 on the 7/21/2020 City Council agenda). <http://orindaca.igmp2.com/Citizens/FileOpen.aspx?Type=1&ID=1729&Inline=True> According to the City, only 18% of Measure R's revenue will be going to fire prevention in the first five years and then reduced for the next 15 years. 80-90% of the tax is for road and storm drain maintenance. Another interesting fact is that the organization calling itself "Safer Orinda" is actually a group dedicated to maintaining public roads! "Fix Orinda Roads" changed its name on September 24th to "Safer Orinda Yes on R"! They say they are for fire safety in order to sell a road maintenance tax. <http://www.fixorindaroads.org/about-us.html> according to a filing with the City. <http://www.cityoforinda.org/documentcenter/view/3019> Safer Orinda is using the "fear card" to scare voters into passing a 20 year road maintenance tax, making them think it will be spent mostly on fire prevention. Don't believe it. This is a road maintenance tax, which is needed, but a real fire prevention tax is needed more. This tax is not the tax Orinda needs right now and if it is passed it may be all we get. We already have a sales tax that will not expire until March of 2023. What we need is a dedicated fire prevention tax we can count on! We can re-up the sales tax in 2022 when it is about to expire.

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to

**20 neighborhoods**

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[Joel Schaffer](#)

• [Ivy Drive](#)

Gosh. Thank goodness you exposed the fact that Measure R will address all those wasteful, useless infrastructure improvements. I mean who really needs storm drains to be repaired or Disaster prevention and planning or wildfire reduction or roadside fuel reduction? Yes, that was sarcasm.

17 Oct 20

[Kathy F.](#)

Author

• [Stein Way](#)

But I agree with you --we really need funds for fire prevention. I just don't think R will provide them -- it's really a roads tax, which we have already. I want fire prevention funds we can count on, and we can vote in a new sales tax when our present one expires. No sarcasm here.

17 Oct 20

[Renee Blanchard](#)

• [Ivy Drive](#)

We do need these things Joel. But why not be honest and upfront about where the funds would go in the first place!

17 Oct 20

### [Renee Blanchard](#)

- [Ivy Drive](#)

Thank you for sharing this information! Had the city been honest and upfront about this, I probably would have voted for it.

17 Oct 20

### [Charles Brotman](#)

- [Stein Way](#)

This is a large and REGRESSIVE tax increase. It WILL hurt those on fixed and limited incomes more than others. In Orinda, those with financial troubles may not raise their hand, but they exist in our community. This measure has been very disingenuously marketed. While there's broad consensus on the need for fire prevention work, the city knows that spend on other items is not. This is not about a Safer Orinda. Vote NO on measure R.

17 Oct 20

### [Steve Cohn](#)

- [Ardor/Valley View](#)

Joel - Ask yourself, or ask the City Council, how long it has known that Orinda was a high fire risk area and that it should start fire prevention efforts? Was it 29 years ago whe

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### [Diana Honig](#)

- [Glorietta](#)

I agree for many it comes down to how much you trust the council to make the right choices as to how to spend the money. That is why I am supporting Latika Malkani for City Council. Developing a fire safety plan is one of her priorities. Read more about her here: <https://www.latika4orinda.com/>  
(edited)

### [Lynda Hay](#)

- [Del Rey](#)

Thanks Steve.

18 Oct 20

### [Donna Johnke](#)

- [Lost Valley](#)

Quite a few Lost Valley residents were fortunate to spend Saturday morning listening to all 3 of our City Council Candidates speak to the details of Measure R. All three gave excellent reasons to support R. I'm not going to delve into this argument too far, but I have no problem adding 1/2 of a penny to the infrastructure tax based on the progress made from the past measure to address infrastructure problems. I don't buy that this is unaffordable for those on fixed incomes, because they (like my mom) pay property tax based on assessments made in 1978. Ask yourself this question when thinking on how to vote for measure R. What kind of Orinda would you like to live in? One that cannot afford it's residents a safe, and attractive quality of life? Or one that can meet the challenges of aging infrastructure and climate change? Therefore, I support measure R.

17 Oct 20

### [Steve Cohn](#)

- [Ardor/Valley View](#)

They talk a good story but, as I said, at the same meeting that the report from staff said they should spend \$500-750,000 per year on fire prevention; when the budget document showed \$3.5 million in unspent general sales tax revenues in reserve; they budgeted \$50,000. They have no experience in fire prevention

and have never commissioned a study. Just handing them a \$60 million, 20-year blank check and hope they figure it out is not prudent.

17 Oct 20

[Linda Landau](#)

• [Donald](#)

Our homeowners' insurance (USAA) went up 23% last year, mostly due to fire risk. The state moratorium on non-renewal of insurance is going to expire in December. I already hear from neighbors that their insurance is being canceled. If your house is not insured, you can't sell it. Worthless. We need to do serious fuel mitigation NOW. Measure R will let us do that. It is a trivial cost to each of us, compared to the escalating insurance cost. Please, let's make Orinda safer!

17 Oct 20

[Renee Blanchard](#)

• [Ivy Drive](#)

That sounds good, but where are our assurances the funds WILL go to fire prevention ASAP if at all? Is there an oversight committee to make sure of it? If you can't answer yes to the last question or answer the first, then we might be voting for empty promises that might never be kept if council decides the money should go elsewhere.

17 Oct 20

[Linda Landau](#)

• [Donald](#)

Yes, there is a citizens' oversight committee as part of Measure R. You could apply to be on it.

17 Oct 20

[Steve Catton](#)

• [Donald](#)

We've known all along that the road repair and maintenance costs would require multiple bond/tax measures. So this is just the next step, with some fire protection thrown in. I know what it is, and I have no problem with it.

17 Oct 20

[Renee Blanchard](#)

• [Ivy Drive](#)

If we can't count on the originators of Measure R to be honest about what the tax funds are for and honest about how and why they changed the name of the measure from Fix our Roads to a Safer Orinda that claims it's for Fire prevention, then how on earth are we supposed to count on the money it raises being spent on what it claims it will? If the organization who came up with the measure thought they needed to fool a community of intelligent people into voting in its favor, they must think the citizens of Orinda can't be trusted to make their own choices based on honest credible information.

17 Oct 20

[Charles Brotman](#)

• [Stein Way](#)

Well said! I wish every single resident of Orinda would read your post, Renee.

17 Oct 20

[Linda Landau](#)

• [Donald](#)

They changed the name of the committee to save time, instead of having to set up a new committee. Nothing nefarious going on.

17 Oct 20

[Renee Blanchard](#)

• [Ivy Drive](#)

With all due respect Linda, that is a terrible excuse! They must think we're all gullible fools to believe that one! Who's time were they saving??

18 Oct 20

[Linda Landau](#)

• [Donald](#)

**Renee Blanchard**

I'm on the committee. I didn't make that decision, but there was nothing sinister about it. Can we please focus on the need to keep Orinda from becoming another Paradise?

18 Oct 20

[Charles Brotman](#)

• [Stein Way](#)

**Linda Landau**

Linda, doesn't it bother you that so little has been done, to date? Is that not a germane fact? Why not a dedicated fire tax? Why didn't the city consider that? This city has not earned the right to figure it out with a general tax. There's a proven track record of focusing on the wrong things, time and time and time again.

(edited)

[Linda Landau](#)

• [Donald](#)

**Charles Brotman**

, of course I wish this issue had been addressed earlier. However, I've lived long enough to know this: don't let the perfect be the enemy of the good. This is my last post on this thread. Too much toxicity for me.

18 Oct 20

[Linda Landau](#)

• [Donald](#)

I wrote a letter to what was the Lamorinda Sun back in the 1980s, begging people to remove their Monterey pines, after watching one explode in flames across the street. Sadly it didn't happen. Should have sent that same letter every year. How anyone can watch what is happening all around us, and not feel that fire prevention is critical to saving our homes, is just beyond me. If you won't support measure R, I sincerely hope you're at least going to take care of your own property and fuel load. We all need to do that, or eventually pay the consequences.

17 Oct 20

[Renee Blanchard](#)

• [Ivy Drive](#)

Linda, thank you for writing that letter and being so conscientious! I mean that!! I wish the originators of Measure R were conscientious enough to be honest about where the money raised would go! But they weren't! I, also, hope that all of those voting for it will follow up on where and how the funds are spent

when/if it passes! They will be spending their own time (that measure R people wanted to so call "save" to get it passed, but it will be an education in the reality of politics, etc. that I hope they keep in mind next time the same funds are asked for in another election. I hope I'm wrong! But, I doubt it.

18 Oct 20

### [Steve Cohn](#)

#### • [Ardor/Valley View](#)

Linda, why do you believe that? I know that you are a very logical person. You have been "around" Orinda for years. You know "they" do nothing without a study or two. I understand that there is a lot of low lying fruit that Winnacker could point out and they could spend years dealing with. But what happens if they discover that it is not \$500,000-\$750,000 for 3-4 years but multiples of that? Do they go back to the well? Do they ignore roads and storm drains? I have watched this "Fire Prevention" effort grow very closely. A couple of us (private road inclusion proponents) were the only ones to attend all three Revenue and Tax Measure Committee meetings last fall/winter. No one from Firewise. No one from SaferOrinda (because it was FixOrindaRoads at the time) attended. The meetings existed right up until the results of the February survey were tallied. And it showed people wanted fire prevention (86%) more than infrastructure. The reason fire people did not attend is that the tax was never intended for fire prevention. It was, and still is, an infrastructure tax. Then Covid hit. The City was distracted but it had a tight timeline. If it still wanted to put a General sales tax on the November ballot (a general tax, which the city can spend as it wishes, can only be voted on every two years at a general election). So they, out of the public eye (no more open committee meetings), designed a follow up survey. Instead of asking if people would vote for a road and storm drain tax, they threw in fire prevention even though there were no studies of what the City should do/spend. With the economic uncertainties of Covid, the popularity of the tax went down but it was still over 50% because fire prevention was added to the mix. This was in June. The City had until early August to decide whether or not to put the tax on the ballot. They also could have just let the existing sales tax, generating \$1.2 million a year, run for two years and put a special fire prevention parcel tax on the ballot. But they did not poll that option (even though it was suggested), claiming a 2/3 tax would never pass (despite the last four taxes since 2012 all passed with over a 2/3 majority). So they agreed to a general sales tax with a fire prevention element. Knowing that they could not sell a tax with virtually no rationale of why they needed it, they had Finance Director Paul Rankin deliver a report to the Council on long term financial needs. This included numbers from the CIOC's December report (not specifically stating that \$60 million is required for road maintenance over the next 20 years), plus it included some numbers for fire prevention. It did not state where these fire prevention numbers came from and no one on the Council asked. In fact, the minutes of the July 21 meeting show there was no discussion at all. The report was a pro forma "check the box" with as much substance as a marshmallow. The Council did not want to know where the numbers came from. They had to be big enough to accomplish something but small enough to allow roads and storm drain maintenance plans to move forward uninterrupted. And that is what the City is using to substantiate a vote for \$60 million of taxes over twenty years. People are scared and desperate. They want to believe that their leaders will lead them. And the City, with the help of Safer Orinda and the Firewise Council playing to those fears with images of burning hills and slogans like "vote as if your life depends on it", are playing to those fears. Even though the City has no plan and has only committed \$50,000 for fire prevention over the next year, which is only two weeks of existing sales tax revenue. Why won't the City be straight with the people? If it does not have a plan but has an idea of how to develop one, why not say that? One has to wonder if it really will develop a plan or just spend enough as window dressing (not wanting to know what it really should be spending) so it can move forward with its roads and storm drains as originally planned before that nasty survey got in the way.

17 Oct 20

### [Tandra Ericson](#)

#### • [Oak Springs](#)

I am not understanding the reasons to vote no. This is largely an extension of the existing sales tax with a small increase with the money earmarked for drains and fire mitigation. There most likely is expected larger turnout and the ability to pass a tax during a Presidential election. Will an additional parcel tax be

needed later to address fire risk? Yes. Do we need a Climate Action Plan in Orinda? Yes. Do I think this money will be used to meet basic infrastructure needs? Yes. Why not provide the certainty of revenue of Measure R while planning for a dedicated fire parcel tax?

18 Oct 20

### [Steve Cohn](#)

#### • [Ardor/Valley View](#)

Tandra - (1) The doubling of the tax and extending its ten year term another twenty years is not a small increase. It is quadrupling the existing tax commitment. It's \$2.4 million projected revenue is one percent of \$240 million each year. The ads for the tax give the example that the tax increase is only 50 cents on a \$100 purchase. But that is only for the next two years (the remaining term of the existing tax). After that the increase is \$1 on \$100 of purchases and the projection is that the average family will not make \$100 of taxable purchases a year but \$35,000 each year. Agreed, \$350 a year is only \$1 a day per household but try to sell a \$350 per year parcel tax running 20 years with an inflation index increasing it each year. (2) You say the money is "earmarked". This is a GENERAL tax. That means the City can use it for whatever it wants. Today it may be fire prevention and they remove a few bushes and trim a few trees but tomorrow, with a different makeup of the City Council which changes every two years, it might be a teen center or low income housing (all commendable, or not, but not what you had thought you were voting for). The city did not burn up this year so the "emergency" is forgotten and we move onto new things. (3) The claim is made the expenditures will be "audited" to show they are sticking to "the plan". But there is no plan. No study of what we need to do to maximize fire safety. There was one report, delivered to the Council (7/21/2020) by the City's Finance Director (who is good at his job which is NOT fire prevention) saying the City should spend \$500-750,000 a year for 3-4 years and then, job done. Where did those numbers come from? Are they even close to reasonable? No one on the Council asked. And then, at the same meeting, they budgeted \$50,000 for fire prevention this year when they had \$3.5 million in unspent general sales tax money in reserve. (4) I agree that we need money for infrastructure, and right now we have it. The existing sales tax, which does not expire until March 2023, is generating \$1.2 million per year. In addition, there is another \$2 million each year in State and County taxes plus garbage fees. What we need now is money for fire prevention. And a plan for fire prevention. Giving the City, which has spent virtually nothing on fire prevention in the past, and has given no indication that they will develop a real plan, a \$2.4 million a year blank check lasting 20 years in the hope that they will start doing the right thing is magical thinking. It is irresponsible. It's like giving your kid a Ferrari for his 16th birthday.

18 Oct 20

### [Jim Evert](#)

#### • [Del Rey](#)

There is perhaps a good reason you don't understand. What you may be missing is that most of the people saying "vote no" in this post are people who have promised to never vote for any tax which has proceeds which will fund maintenance of Orinda's roads. Even though there are thousands of municipalities in California with both public and private roads, these people demand that Orinda, alone among all of these municipalities, pay for the maintenance of their private roads. Until Orinda does so, they promise to vote "no" on any measure which contemplates road maintenance. They are just following through on their promise. And using the arguments they advance here as their purported rationale. Don't be fooled.

18 Oct 20

### [Madelyn Mallory](#)

#### • [Stein Way](#)

Tandra, I voted No on Measure R for many reasons. The primary one for me is that I don't believe a sales tax is an appropriate way to pay road maintenance. I would much rather see a real estate transfer tax levied at time of sale. This has been done effectively in communities west of Orinda for years. It would generate reliable, repeatable revenue and wouldn't be yet another line item on our property tax bill that

has to be voted on every few years. The few small businesses in Orinda do not need another reason for people not to patronize them and order either on-line or drive to another city center to do their shopping.

18 Oct 20

[Steve Cohn](#)

• [Ardor/Valley View](#)

**Jim Evert**

- You know that? You've done a poll? You realize that "only" 800 people have signed that pledge out of 14,000 voters. And yet City Council Members, Safer Orinda and the Firewise Council are making outrageous statements and publishing horrible ads with pictures of wildfires and kids playing with matches and statements like "your life depends on this" because they are afraid of not getting their 50% (Over 7,000 voters opposing). No Jim, it's much more than a few people on private roads seeking tax benefit equity (not that equality, in itself, is a bad thing to fight for).

18 Oct 20

[Eskay Jee](#)

• [Stein Way](#)

Jim Evert: What nonsense! And you are not fooled by "Your Life Depends on It" scary Halloween Ads?! Please read the East Bay Times "No on Measure R" pasted here: Orinda Measure R – No Orinda passed a half-cent sales tax in 2012 that's due to expire in 2023. Measure R would extend the tax until 2041 — and double it. That's too long without voter review. And that's too much. The sad part is that Orinda leaders know how to do this right. In 2012, to kick start their highly successful program to repair their roads, they went to voters and asked them to approve a sales tax increase. The money had no spending restrictions, but city officials promised it would go for roads and built in a 10-year voter review to ensure they kept their promise. And in 2014 and 2016, they won voter approval for bond measures dedicated to road repair. Now, with the roads project almost complete, they want to extend and double the original 2012 sales tax. This time, they have a long list of improvements they say they want to spend the money on: wildfire risk reduction, emergency preparedness, storm drain repair, road maintenance, and other city services. And no clear spending plan. Even if they had one, the 20-year length of the new tax does not provide a timely opportunity for voters to review whether they're happy with how the money is being spent. In sum, there's less clarity than in 2012 on where the funds would go, the tax is twice as big this time and it will be twice as long a wait before voters get to weigh in again. Vote no.

18 Oct 20

[Renee Blanchard](#)

• [Ivy Drive](#)

Jim, it's just not true about people voting no usually voting no! And, I am evidence of that. I have lived in Orinda almost 32 years and have voted "yes" on most fund raising measures! Please don't categorize us as curmudgeons who vote no for everything involving money!

(edited)

[Kim Applegate](#)

• [Stein Way](#)

I am voting No on R for the following reasons: 1. If the main argument to vote yes is "Your life depends on it" referring to fire safety, then please define the amount we will sp

... [See more](#)

18 Oct 20

[Charles Brotman](#)

• [Stein Way](#)

Kim, very well said. The city's track record on fire prevention through today has been dismal. Quite the chutzpah to market on fear. (chutzpah is Yiddish for "shameless audacity"). And we DO need to revisit

taxation in this state. We used to be known for lower sales tax compared to other states without an income tax - now we are hitting people hard on all fronts - during a pandemic that has wreaked economic havoc on many. It's fair for us to ask very hard questions - where is the plan?? No on R.

18 Oct 20