

Committee Says Orinda Needs Fire Tax

By **LINDA LEONARD**
Editor

Based on the results of their nine-month study, the Orinda Fire Protection and Emergency Services Advisory Committee concluded that a fire flow tax, not to exceed six cents, is necessary for Orinda to fund paramedic service, badly-needed equipment replacement, and firehouse repair and seismic upgrading.

In 1980 Moraga passed a similar tax, the rate to be set annually. As a result, their district is the only county district governed by the Board of Supervisors that has paramedic firefighters and fire stations that have been seismically upgraded. Furthermore, they have never assessed more than a six-cent tax and none has been assessed in the last two years because they have an adequate reserve.

The fire flow tax proposed for Orinda is based on a theoretical estimate of the amount of water needed to extinguish a fire and is calculated by using a formula that includes square footage of a structure, the materials used in its construction, and the presence or absence of sprinklers. (See chart on this page.) In a community the size of Orinda, each cent of fire flow tax would raise approximately \$92,000.

■ HOW THE TAX WOULD BE USED

According to Orinda Fire District

Commissioner John Wyro, with a six-cent tax:

- two cents would cover Orinda's share of administrative costs, including the salaries of a fire chief, the cost of training paramedics, maintaining the paramedic program, and implementing a reserve program,
- two cents would go into an equipment replacement fund and would be necessary for four years in order to acquire the needed equipment and build an adequate reserve, after which it could drop to one cent, and

• two cents would be used for seismic retrofitting of the fire stations and possibly for improved water supply.

The fire flow tax, requiring a two-thirds approval, must pass for the merger to take place.

Amount of Fire Flow Tax

Tax rate in cents	4	5	6
Square footage of house			
2,000	\$48.24	\$60.30	\$72.36
2,500	54.00	73.90	81.00
3,000	59.12	76.50	88.68

Note: The amount of tax increases at a lower rate than the rate of the square footage of the house.

Between 1997 and 2010, the "two cents" of fire flow tax in Orinda has added up to approximately \$2,500,000. During that time period, \$387,000 has been spent on seismic retrofitting in Orinda. Of the \$2.1mm difference, none has been spent on improving the water supply.



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TRI-AGENCY INFORMATION REQUEST

At the February 19th, 2009 Tri-Agency Funding Meeting, the panel of Council Members and Directors asked for follow-up information pertaining to a few discussion points. One discussion revolved around benefits immediately recognized by the City of Orinda via the merger. Although some community members are particularly looking at how capital monies have been spent since the merger, it is necessary to explain the immediate shifting of assets that occurred when the merger took place.

Prior to the merger, the 'Orinda Fire District' (OFD) was in less than optimal condition. All three Orinda stations either were in need of repair or replacement, nearly all apparatus (fire engines) were past their service life, and firefighting equipment was archaic and in need of replacement. Orinda was also without paramedics, did not have advance life support (ALS) transport capabilities, owned no training facilities whatsoever, and lacked sufficient training practices.

Upon the merger, the once 'Moraga Fire District' (MFD) redeployed its paramedics so that all stations throughout the District provided advance life support capabilities, transferred the backup ambulance to Station 45 (in Orinda) so that it could be cross-staffed, and redistributed medical response equipment throughout the newly formed agency. Shortly thereafter, seven of the original Orinda firefighters were sent to school for paramedic training. That was a very expensive process, but necessary in order to adequately staff the District for ALS capabilities.

Other Moraga Fire District (MFD) capabilities that instantly became equally shared throughout the District included:

- Use of training ground and props behind FS 41
- Complete cache of EMS training adjuncts
- Redeployment of water tender to an Orinda fire station
- Technical rescue vehicle and rescue tooling
- Breathing support trailer
- Rehab vehicle
- Reserve program (20 on-call reserve employees for logistical support)
- Air monitoring equipment
- Classroom facilities

- NOTE: There was no unique or specialized equipment that OFD brought into the merger.

Since the merger, Orinda has additionally benefitted from:

- Development of a Communication Support Vehicle (FS 45)
- Redeployment of Truck 241 to an Orinda fire station (which has recently been sold due to the end of its service life) (FS 45)
- Cross staffed ambulance (3rd due ambulance) is now deployed from Orinda (FS 44)
- New water tender which provides 2500 gallons of water (FS 44)
- Water rescue boat, equipment, and training (FS 43)

For those who have desired a better understanding of what capital monies have been spend on renovating the District's infrastructure, the expenditure list below is provided showing the location of the facility benefited by the expenditure or the physical location of equipment purchased. It would be a major project to contrast and compare every single object purchased over the past thirteen years, so the following list will only indicate larger capital expenditures. Orinda has obviously been provided the lion-share of funding. I will disregard the fact that two new stations have been built since the inception of the District, since one is in Moraga and one is in Orinda. The administrative office in Moraga is also a shared 'Prevention' and 'Training' facility, so any costs pertaining to this asset will be excluded.

		Orinda	Moraga
1997	Reroof fire station (FS 43)	\$20,000	
	Seismic upgrade for Station 45	\$226,000	
1998	Two new fire engines	\$627,000	
	Heart monitors for Orinda-based fire engines	\$30,000	
	Fitness equipment for fire stations (Orinda lacked facilities in all stations)	\$12,000	\$4,000
	New Ambulance	\$150,000	
	Equipment to stock ambulance	\$33,000	
	Vehicle extrication equipment (E43)	\$16,000	
1999	Continued purchase - fitness equipment	\$7,000	
	Exhaust removal system (FS 41 & 45)	\$20,000	\$20,000
	Generator replacement (FS 45)	\$47,000	
	Station security system (FS 45)	\$4,000	
	Hydrant Upgrades	\$9,000	
2000	Exhaust removal system (FS 43)	\$15,000	
	Interior renovation (FS 45)	\$10,000	
	Fuel dispensing modifications (FS 45)	\$7,500	\$2,500
	LTI Truck cost differential (following \$800K donation)		\$200,000
2001	Station upgrades (FS 43)	\$35,000	
	Station upgrades (FS 45)	\$21,000	
	Generator replacement (FS 43)	\$25,000	
	Concrete replacement (FS 43)	\$10,000	
	Orinda hydrant refurb. program	\$20,000	
	EBMUD engineering study	\$30,000	
	Two Type III fire engines	One to each community	

	Two replacement ambulances	One to each community	
2002	RB41 and water rescue gear/training	\$5,000	
	Fitness equipment (FS 45)	\$5,000	
2003	Compressor (FS 45)	\$4,000	
	Water rescue purchase completion	\$11,000	
	Orinda hydrant refurb. program	\$30,000	
	Window replacements (FS 45)	\$5,000	
2004	Replace windows (FS 43)	\$5,000	
	Resurface apparatus floor (FS 45)	\$3,500	
	Paint station (FS 45)	\$10,000	
	Concrete work (FS 43)	\$3,000	
2005	Remove trees (FS 43)	\$9,000	
	Fitness equipment (FS 43)	\$1,500	
	Extrication equipment replacement (Originally purchased for E42 but placed on E44)	\$18,000	
2006	Kitchen remodel (FS 45)	\$24,000	
	Fix roof (FS 41)		\$3,000
	Repair drainage (FS 42)		\$5,000
	Repaving (FS 45)	\$15,000	
	Station painting (FS 42)		\$3,000
	Asphalt curbing (FS 44)	\$3,000	
	Remove trees (FS 43)	\$6,000	
	Upgrades to compressor (FS 45)	\$2,000	
	Replace gutters (FS 45)	\$2,000	
	Dry suits (B43)	\$2,400	
2007	Replace deteriorating patio (FS 45)	\$15,000	
2008	Underground fuel tank removal	\$140,000	
	Station 41 gender improvements	\$30,000	
	Type I fire engine	\$500,000	
	Type III fire engine	\$280,000	
	Two replacement ambulances	One to each community	
	Replacement water tender	\$310,000	
2009	Seismic and ADA retrofits (FS 41 & 43) (Will be completed in 2009/10)	\$161,000	\$27,000
Total Capital Upgrades 1997 - 2009		2,974,000	264,000
Total Seismic Upgrades in Orinda		387,000	