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# Rules enable Orinda to use federal stimulus money

By Sora O'Doherty

Administrative Services Director Doug Alessio on March 1 presented his first budget to the Orinda City Council, which was a mid-year budget review. One issue that has been uncertain was the allowable use of funds coming to the city from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA). Orinda is scheduled to receive \$4.7 million, but had not yet budgeted it because it was unclear if the city could add the grant to its general fund.

The ARPA contained a number of provisions intended to ease the fiscal suffering caused to Americans by the COVID-19 pandemic. One of the ways the act seeks to affect the economic situation is to help to offset economic losses to local government revenue caused by the pandemic. However, it was a requirement of the act that in order to spend the federal money on general government, a local government had to prove a revenue loss due to

COVID. Under the newly published rules, the first \$10 million to be spent on general government is exempt from revenue loss test. The city's entire award falls under that. Since Orinda will be receiving less than \$5 million, they do not have to prove any loss. Therefore Orinda plans to put the grant into its general fund.

The grant is to be received by the city in two parts, so Orinda is currently budgeting for the first \$2.4 million. Alessio announced increase expenditures of \$100,000 for Information Technology Assessment and Strategic Plan and \$50,000 for implementation of a Records Management System.

In addition, the city will be spending \$3 million on storm drain improvements. These improvements had been targeted to be funded from Measure R funds. The application of federal funds to this project will free up some Measure R funds to be used to improve wildfire sustainability. In addition,

\$80,000 of Measure R funds will be used for enhanced evacuation analysis, which directly applies to emergency preparedness. Measure R funds are kept separate from the general budget.

In general, Alessio said that for the first six months of the fiscal year property and sales tax revenue was better than the previous year, but traffic fines were down some \$40,000. Unexpected expenses included \$100,000 storm damages to city hall and the community center. City Manager David Biggs identified some continued general economic impacts from the pandemic and other national and global events. These include the necessity to fill key management vacancies and adapting to changes in the workforce and labor market.

Council Member Amy Worth agreed with applying these one-time funds to capital programs, because they are one-time funds and there won't be any further revenue from this source. Vice Mayor Inga Miller congratulated the

new administrative services director on his first budget report, finding it succinct and easy to follow. She also thanked all who were involved in securing the federal funding.

Council Member Darlene Gee echoed the vice mayor's comments thanking staff and Alessio. She noted that she was especially happy about moving forward with IT work. "It's very good to see where we are later in the pandemic," she said. "I feel very good about where we are, we continue to be very stable" and able to maintain the city's reserves.

Mayor Dennis Fay thanked staff for articulating in the report that we have more flexibility with the money and "don't have to jump through hoops." And City Manager David Biggs explained that the new regulations eliminate the fear that the federal government could come back and audit the city 10 years later. Biggs also thanked senior accountant Nancy Dangle, who does a lot of this work for the city.

# Residents ask Orinda to join Marin Clean Energy

By Sora O'Doherty

Orinda Mayor Dennis Fay joined a Zoom meeting on March 7 organized by Carol Weed of 350 Contra Costa to hear a presentation by representatives of Marin Clean Energy. MCE representatives Leanne Hoadley and Mariela Herrick gave the presentation to explain how MCE works.

Orinda has on several occasions declined to join the community choice aggregator (CCA); neighboring Lafayette and Moraga are already members of the joint powers authority. However, the Orinda City Council recently requested a new staff report, which will be presented to them, probably in the latter half of April according to City Manager David Biggs.

MCE was the first community choice aggregator in

California following the passage of Assembly Bill 117 in 2002, that allowed the formation of local, not-for-profit government agencies to take over electricity generation services, offering customers a choice about how their electricity is generated. Energy distribution remains the purview of the Pacific Gas & Electric Co.

Currently in Contra Costa County 15 cities have joined MCE, while four have not. MCE has 37 total member communities across four counties: Marin, Napa, Solano and Contra Costa. There are now 24 CCAs in California. MCE's mission is to address climate change by reducing energy-related greenhouse gas emissions.

MCE is governed by its board of directors, composed of 30 elected officials. Fay was interested to hear that a community may choose to be

represented on the MCE board by another director. Thus, for example, it would be possible for one director to represent the interests of Orinda along with Moraga and Lafayette. Moraga is currently represented by Town Council Member Teresa Onoda and Lafayette by City Council Member Gina Dawson, both of whom also serve on MCE's technical committee.

According to Weed, MCE is cleaner and often cheaper. She has started a petition at change.org to ask the Orinda City Council to join MCE. Both MCE and PG&E offer different choices about the source of electricity. MCE offers three choices: light green, which is at least 60% from renewable resources, deep green, which is 100% from renewable sources, and local sol, which is 100% produced from local solar power.

The current open enrollment period for MCE ends on July 1. If Orinda does not choose to join by then, the city would have to wait for the next open enrollment period. In response to questions at the MCE presentation, Hoadley said that MCE does the heavy lifting to help cities join. She said that there is a standard "join MCE" ordinance available. In answer to other questions, she affirmed that a city that joins can opt out of receiving their own energy from MCE but leave the choice open for residents.

Mayor Fay suggested that MCE reach out to meet with Orinda City Manager David Biggs, adding that he would encourage Biggs to meet with them. Hoadley confirmed after the meeting that MCE is putting together a list of frequently asked questions that will be submitted to Orinda.

Information about PG&E's energy sources may be viewed at this link: [www.pge.com/pge\\_global/common/pdfs/your-account/your-bill/understand-your-bill/bill-inserts/2020/1220-PowerContent-ADA.pdf](http://www.pge.com/pge_global/common/pdfs/your-account/your-bill/understand-your-bill/bill-inserts/2020/1220-PowerContent-ADA.pdf)

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# High school club wants city to consider Cleaner Contra Costa Challenge

By Sora O'Doherty

Kaitlyn Roach, president of the Miramonte Climate Action Club, spoke to the Orinda City Council March 1 during the public forum and asked the city to consider participating the Cleaner Contra Costa Challenge, a program run by local organization Sustainable Contra Costa. The challenge is a grassroots program that encourages local residents to take daily actions that can reduce the carbon footprint in their communities. "My club and Sustainable Contra Costa would like to partner to make presentations to groups in Orinda," Roach said.

She pointed out that the challenge is 100% voluntary and requires no staff commitment from the city. Roach said that 40% of carbon emissions in the United States comes from basic household activities. "Our club," she added,

"was inspired to bring this challenge to the city of Orinda after seeing the success by city of Moraga, which has had this program since October 2020." Roach reported that over the last 16 months Moraga has had 500 households sign up and as a result has eliminated 400 tons of carbon dioxide emissions, saved 100,000 kilowatt hours of electricity and saved 700,000 gallons of water.

"I really think that we can have similar success in Orinda," she said. Eight other Contra Costa County communities are involved in the challenge.

Orinda Mayor Dennis Fay responded that he would like to hear more about this, and, making it a matter initiated, asked staff to do a very quick overview of this on a future agenda. Council Member Amy Worth seconded the matter.

For more information: <https://cleanercontracosta.org>

**City Council Regular Meeting:**  
 Tuesday, March 21, 7 p.m.  
 By Teleconference Only

**Orinda City Council/MOFD Meeting**  
 Wednesday, March 16, 5 p.m.  
 By Teleconference Only

**Planning Commission**  
 Tuesday, March 22, 7 p.m.  
 By Teleconference Only

**Finance Advisory Committee**  
 Wednesday, March 23, 6:30 p.m.  
 By Teleconference Only

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