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## Orinda School District Proposes Parcel Tax for March Ballot

By Jean Follmer

Due to an immediate funding need in the Orinda Union School District, the School Board has proposed a parcel tax measure for a March, 2009 ballot. The proposed tax would be an increase to the current parcel tax which was passed in March, 2003 - nearly 6 years ago. California state budget cuts had a \$700,000 impact on Orinda's budget last year and the number is projected to be much worse for next year.

In August the district canvassed the Orinda community to determine the level of support for a new parcel tax measure. They determined an amount somewhere in the vicinity of \$100 would pass. Since Proposition 13 requires that parcel taxes pass with a 2/3 majority vote, the Board has to be sure to ask for an amount it can actually get.

The Orinda School Board held a special session on October 27 to review the proposed parcel tax. "The parcel tax pays for the teachers' salaries. We want to pay to keep these great teachers. We're not talking about something special and nice for enrichment. We're talking about operating our schools.," said Board Member Glenn Alper. Orinda hopes to keep its teachers' salaries competitive. "If we cannot supplement salaries with parcel tax revenue we lose competitiveness with surrounding districts. We are now slipping behind the regional average," said Board President Riki Sorenson. "We've lost programs in the past 1 1/2 years and getting them back is even harder," said Board Member Pat Rudebusch. After some discussion about exactly when the measure should appear on the ballot, the Board agreed to move forward with March. The Board met again on November 3.

Preliminary indications are that the measure will seek to raise the current parcel tax of \$385 by \$120 to \$505. "When we met (on November 3) we were able to agree that we would continue on our course to get a new parcel tax on the ballot for March. The tax would resemble the current tax in being a flat tax (no escalator), with a low-income senior exemption. The current parcel tax amount would be bumped up by \$120 (from \$385 to \$505), but the \$120 figure may change after further discussion (at the upcoming November 17 board meeting)," said Sorenson.

Although many Bay Area communities (including Lafayette) have passed parcel taxes that include inflationary factors, the Orinda School Board believes an escalator could reduce the chances of passing the vital measure. In March, 2002, the Orinda schools suffered a parcel tax defeat when an inflation adjustment was included in the measure. Orinda passed the current parcel tax of \$385 passed a year later as a flat tax.

If the Orinda School Board is not successful in passing the parcel tax measure, they expect a significant impact in the classroom next year. "A parcel tax would help us get through this crisis without a severe impact on core classroom programs. There is nothing left to trim from our budget except in the core classrooms. There is nothing left to trim because EFO (Education Foundation of Orinda) and Parents Club have assumed responsibility for paying for programs that we have already cut including art, music, P.E., library and classroom assistants - none of those programs are part of the OUSD budget anymore," said Sorenson.

The School Board was waiting to see how other Bay Area parcel tax measures did in the November 4 election given the current economy. "I'm told that eleven out of fourteen in the greater Bay Area passed," said Sorenson. The Board is

currently working to establish the leadership team for the parcel tax campaign and will reconvene on November 17 at 1:00 pm.

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