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Council Decides to Take Smaller Bite, Puts \$25M Bond Measure on June Ballot for Roads

By Victor Ryerson

The Orinda City Council has placed a \$25 million general obligation bond issue on the June 11 ballot to continue the city's road and drainage repair program, despite the reservations of at least two council members who would have preferred to seek the entire \$47 million necessary to complete the job. In a dramatic about-face, Council Member Darlene Gee voted in favor of the smaller bond measure on Feb. 16 to provide the four council votes necessary to put the measure before the voters this year and keep the program moving forward. Council Member Eve Phillips cast the lone dissenting vote.

"We have tried the whole enchilada (twice) before" without success, observed Mayor Victoria Smith. But if this measure passes, the risk is that voters may not approve raising the final \$22 million down the line if they perceive it as unnecessary. "The reality is, almost everyone votes their own pocketbook," and not necessarily in the community's best interest as a whole, lamented Gee. With the majority of the road work completed and a lot of residents satisfied, it might be harder to obtain the two-thirds vote necessary to approve the final round of road work.

Council Member Amy Worth was more optimistic. Expressing "very serious concerns" that Orinda voters would approve the full \$47 million at once, she favors the more cautious incremental approach as one that has already been accepted by the electorate. Smith agrees that this social compact has essentially been made. With the reluctant support of two of their more hesitant colleagues, they paved the way on Tuesday not only for this spring's campaign, but likely for another in two years.

The current measure will require a two-thirds vote to pass. Voters can expect to receive a lot of material in the mail this spring as efforts are made to explain or oppose the council's action. In the meantime, scheduled road repairs will continue unabated - until the money runs out.

Reach the reporter at: victor@lamorindaweekly.com

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