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Letters to the editor

Clearing up the MOFD Parcel Tax

Nick Warranoff (and probably most of Orinda and Moraga, including members of the MOFD Board) have a misunderstanding of the purpose of the MOFD Parcel Tax (called a "fireflow" tax).

This is simply a "top up" tax to cover expenses in excess of the basic funding provided by the property tax allocation set in 1978 when Prop 13 fixed the property tax rate at 1% and set the allocation of that tax to the agencies funded by the tax from schools to cities to fire departments.

In 1992 the residents of Moraga feared that the property tax funding their fire department was insufficient to pay for the premium services they desired including paramedic firefighters and a dedicated paramedic ambulance. So, they voted in a parcel tax that would bring in up to \$2.1

million, almost equal to what the basic property tax allocation was providing at that time. In 1992 only 20% of the approved tax was needed. That has never been increased.

Since MOFD was formed in 1997, Moraga's basic property taxes going to MOFD have increased by 200% to \$9.6 million. But MOFD's expenses have increased by 265%. To cover this increase, Moraga's "top up" tax should have increased by \$2-3 million, more than the Moraga voters agreed to back in 1992. Instead, it has not increased at all.

So where is MOFD getting its money? From Orinda property owners whose basic property taxes have increased by 300% since 1997 when MOFD was formed. Today, \$19 million of Orinda property taxes are going to MOFD. It costs MOFD about \$16 million to staff and operate Orinda's three stations, in-

cluding administrative overhead. The remaining \$3 million is covering Moraga's underfunding. This should be going to additional services in Orinda, namely fire prevention efforts.

People like Mr. Warranoff, the MOFD Board, and the leaders in Orinda are playing with our safety by not demanding that Moraga pay its fair share of MOFD operating expenses. In 1992 Moraga voters agreed to pay what was necessary to obtain premium service. What has changed?

Steve Cohn
Orinda

Environmental Concerns

Any of us who follow the news (and look at our skies) realize that we have moved from a state of Climate Change to a state of Climate Emergency. The issues can be overwhelming and, as indi-

viduals, it can be difficult not to feel paralyzed and powerless in the face of what is happening. This being acknowledged, there are personal decisions that many of us can make to try to alleviate some of the worst of what we may end up experiencing and to contribute to a healthier, more balanced planet. The four main efforts that have the most impact are to drive much less, to fly much less, to minimize eating meat, and to consider whether we should have children. Other actions we can take include using less energy and water, electrifying and solar-powering our homes, purchasing less, donating to environmental groups, divesting from fossil

fuel investments, voting for candidates who prioritize the environment and getting involved in local climate organizations, which can be very effective in terms of influencing policy and affecting change. We all have an obligation and an opportunity to contribute to the greater good of this one amazing planet that we call home. I hope we all make this effort – individually and collectively we can make a difference in what our future will look like. Not making this effort does not seem like an acceptable alternative, given the gravity of our situation.

Lindy Novak
Orinda

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Local residents gather for ADU arrival



A crane lifts the ADU over the side fence into the backyard.

Photos J. Wake

By Jennifer Wake

Neighbors on Stanley Boulevard behind Acalanes High School lined up on the sidewalk – some in lawn chairs, others standing – across from Georgette Bhathena's home as they awaited the Aug. 19 arrival of the newest neighborhood addition: a 500-square-foot accessory dwelling unit.

The shrink wrapped one-bedroom unit, which was built at an off-site location in Utah, arrived on a flatbed truck on the quiet street. A large crane stood ready to lift



Georgette Bhathena with dog, Rosie.

the ADU into place on its foundation built in the homeowner's backyard.

Bhathena's 77-year-old mother, who is moving to Lafayette from Seattle, will be living in the unit. "It has an open floor plan, her own living room, a full kitchen, bedroom and bath," said Bhathena said, who noted that they still have a yard for her middle-schooler and third-grader to use, albeit smaller. "My mom is eager to be closer to family."

Bhathena had researched several ADU companies, in addition to looking at Rossmoor as an option, before deciding on Redwood City-based Abodu.

A small army of construction workers and traffic calming staff bustled around the home making final preparations for the delivery. "The unit includes high quality finishes, quartz countertops, really nice stainless steel appliances," said Scott Wilson, who is head of construction and manufacturing at Abodu.

The unit has vaulted ceilings with large Marvin windows to let in natural light. The units, which include a 340-square-foot studio, a 500-square-foot one-bedroom or a 610-square-foot two-bedroom, offer a Mini-split AC and heating system, a washer-dryer

combo unit, a tiled shower with glass door that is ADA compliant, and premium cabinetry with soft-close hinges. Cost for a one-bedroom unit starts at \$225,900. There are six different siding styles, and Bhathena said they plan to paint their house to match the deep blue siding of the unit.

Approximately two weeks prior to delivery, the foundation was poured in the back-



The shrink-wrapped ADU arrives on Stanley Boulevard.

yard and site work was completed, including trenching and utility tie-in. "It was a pretty quick permitting process," said Bhathena, who started researching ADUs about six months ago.

Once the ADU arrived, the crew went to work measuring and re-measuring, while the counterweights were installed for the crane. Once all necessary precautions were taken and the unit was moved into position, the flyover installation began with the crane lifting the 500-square-foot structure over the side fence and onto the foundation.

"We try to time it so after the two-week construction we don't leave a hole in the ground," Wilson said. "There's a lot less chance of finding

problems building this way than if you build on site."

Once the ADU has "landed" in the homeowner's backyard (they don't say "dropped") the Abodu Concierge Service ensures all external components such as electricity, water and plumbing are properly hooked up. Abodu coordinates and manages the final city inspection and goes through a final 100-point checklist before handing the homeowner the keys.

Some neighbors stayed glued to their seats, while others took peeks into the backyard after the lift-off took place. "My mom was sad to miss the drop," Bhathena said. "She'll be moving in September and the unit will be ready for her."

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