



Published February 14th, 2024

Split city council agrees to look at private roads and drains in Orinda

By Sora O'Doherty

With vigorous opposition by Council Member Inga Miller, the Orinda City Council voted 4-1 to form an ad hoc subcommittee to evaluate both private and public options for better integrating and maintaining community infrastructure, as proposed by Mayor Darlene Gee. As proposed and passed, the new subcommittee members will be Gee and Vice Mayor Latika Malkani, and the subcommittee will be a Brown Act body capable of receiving input from the public. Without further action, the subcommittee will last only until December and will then sunset.

The council received almost five dozen written public comments on the proposed subcommittee, and two members of the public appeared in person to comment. Bob Finch suggested that the situation is like requiring every citizen to pay school taxes but not allowing 20% of residents to send their children to public school (20% of Orinda's roads are estimated to be private). Joel Libove called the system of public and private infrastructure "grossly unfair."

Gee's vision includes not only private roads but also private drains. She expressed concern that having the maintenance of some of the city's drains in private hands puts the city at risk of massive damage, and also liability. She said, "If I could wave my magic wand, I'd like to be able to make it all one public system." In her proposal, Gee stated, "I have always believed and voiced that a better integrated and maintained city infrastructure will need additional money beyond what is currently available." She added, "I also believe the community should have the information to thoroughly understand what the benefits and costs of a more integrated and better maintained system would be and the opportunity to vote on whether they support that."

Gee, prior to becoming a member of the council, served on the Citizens Infrastructure Oversight Commission, which oversaw the major renovation of public roads in Orinda. Miller said that the issue was "all new to her," and "really interesting." But as the discussion progressed, she made it clear that she strongly opposed the creation of the subcommittee.

There was some discussion about forming the subcommittee but returning to the matter to define its scope, but Council Member Brandyn Iverson believed that the scope could be defined, and included it in her motion to form the subcommittee. City Manager David Biggs confirmed Iverson's motion to approve the subcommittee with Gee and Malkani as members with the written scope attached to the agenda item, with the proviso that the subcommittee will refine the scope and bring that back to the council at a future date.

Reach the reporter at: sora@lamorindaweekly.com

[back](#)

Copyright © Lamorinda Weekly, Moraga CA