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The Hills Are Alive - With the Sound of Paving

By Laurie Snyder

"Roads in a standard community - where things are fairly flat with sandier soil - can last 20 years or more," says Dennis Fay. "They're not going to last 20 years here because of our terrain and our soil." Fay, chair of the Orinda Citizens' Infrastructure Oversight Commission, sat down recently for a two-part series about Orinda's road conditions.

"Part of the problem is that our roads were built by the county or by developers a long, long time ago, and in many places there just is not good sound base material. Plus, there's a lot of clay in the soil. It expands in the wintertime when it gets wet, and then contracts in the summer when it dries out. We get cracks in the road bed, and the water gets in there because it has to flow during the summer. When it flows, it takes some of the soil with it and undermines the road. That puts a lot of stress on the pavement and the foundations in Orinda," Fay explains.

The damage is aggravated further because Orinda's hills are very much alive, shimmying and sliding during earthquakes and every rainy season. City leaders constantly battle "a dynamic where it just plain costs more to keep the roads up." Even if Orinda did have better soil, its roads would still deteriorate from heavy equipment use and simple aging. "Asphalt loses its elasticity over time." But with a daunting 92 miles of roads to maintain on a budget that remains elfin despite voters passing measures L and J, repairs simply cannot be made everywhere by the city overnight. "It's the poorest rich city in the Bay Area. Per capita, the sales tax revenue that reaches city hall is very small," says Fay. Most of that revenue is produced when residents buy cars - unlike the City of Walnut Creek, which has Macy's and Target. Putting it further into perspective, Orinda's budget is roughly \$10 million per year - the same amount generated by the average Indian casino for the city in which it operates.

"So we're doing triage, and we're starting with the most heavily traveled roads first to deliver the most benefit for the most people as quickly as possible. We will do all of the worst segments of all of the residential roads with worst defined as a Pavement Condition Index of 25 or less. A single street could have a PCI of 10 in one area and 45 in another. We will do the 10, but not the 45. That will have to wait for additional funding."

Orinda residents are likely to feel blessed by this round's sound of street music. The city's public works department has been experimenting with a new technique on certain roads - digging down as deep as two feet, churning up material, and introducing hard concrete before repaving. "So now you've got a road that's got a really solid base with a new top over it."

Read part one of this series, published Sept. 10, in our online archive at www.lamorindaweekly.com.

Orinda Intermediate School Neighborhood Meeting Tomorrow Night

The City of Orinda is inviting residents to learn about upcoming projects along Ivy Drive and Coral Drive at a special meeting Sept. 25. "We're hoping to apply for grant funds to support improvements, and are reaching out to residents living near the Orinda Intermediate School for their input," says Daniel Chavarria, associate engineer with the city's department of public works. This is the second of two public meetings. Roughly 650 of the residents most likely to be impacted by the proposed sidewalk were invited to the first on Sept. 4, which was lightly attended due to a conflict with Del Rey Elementary's back-to-school night.

The city hopes to have more OIS neighbors in attendance tomorrow night. The forum will be held from 6 to 8 p.m. at the Orinda Library

Auditorium, 26 Orinda Way. "The safety of children and anyone who wants to walk on the street is at stake," said Chavarria.

If you are unable to attend the meeting and have questions or would like to provide input, please contact Chavarria at (925) 253-4219 or dchavarria@cityoforinda.org.

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