

Voters will decide to either to increase the add-on Transactions Use Tax (TUT) to one cent or continue with the current half-cent tax. If passed by a simple majority vote in November, the increased tax becomes effective April 1, 2021, expires in 20 years and will generate approximately \$2.4 million dollars annually.

The increased revenue is projected to address high-priority essential services, which require significant dollars and an on-going funding. Finance Director, Paul Rankin described these priorities as fire fuel reduction and emergency planning, critical drainage improvements and continued public road maintenance during the Aug. 4 City Council meeting. He also stated there is currently no dedicated position (employee) to coordinate city emergency/disasters.

According to Rankin, priority needs with the greatest risks during the next three-to-five years are wildfire management disaster planning (\$3.5 million) and critical drainage structures (\$9 million).

"If we took all the other monies we could round up together in our piggybank, we do not have any other source of funds that would either provide enough money or an ongoing stream of money to be able to address these critical needs," said Mayor Darlene Gee.

During public comments, Nick Waranoff said the sales tax increase is "very troubling. You are asking us to tax ourselves to provide essential services, yet at the same time you folks on the council are spending city money on non-essential services....That is completely topsy-turvy."

Citing harm to lower income people who shop in Orinda, Wylie Hughs said, "I strongly suggest the council reject this ballot and find another means of revenue, such as other taxes."

"This is not a time to make 20-year commitments," said Charles Porges, who suggested delaying the vote to 2022.

Councilman Dennis Fay had a differing view: "I think we have such a pressing need for wildfire prevention and fuel reduction that now is the time to proceed with it....This is the most equitable way to proceed."

Linda Landau pointed out the transaction use tax on the sale of new vehicles outside the city, comes to Orinda. "This [tax] is a very small amount....If people can afford to go buy a new car, they can afford an extra half-cent sales tax to keep our community safe."

Fire Chief Dave Winnacker added, "Anything which provides additional resources for fire safety has my whole support."

Letters opposing the tax increase, specifically because it does not include road or drainage maintenance on private roads, were sent to councilmembers via email.

"We strongly oppose a sales tax imposed on all the citizens of Orinda when it does not benefit every citizen....The City Council needs to be transparent with this proposal and ensure any increase in revenues is used for everyone," wrote

Beth and Tim Eliason.

"We should be voting to make all roads city roads!" wrote Tracey Blanchard, a 44-year resident. "[We are] taxed, but not represented as a homeowner."

Scott Fleming noted, "Adding a 1% tax would cause me to avoid downtown merchants when possible, not because of the cost but due to the inequity."

In support of the ballot measure, Sue Severson and Bob Burt, who founded the citizens' committee Safer Orinda, wrote, "[we are] dedicated to making our community safer from natural disasters like wildfires, floods and from pedestrian, bicycle, and motor vehicle danger posed by deteriorating roads....Our first objective is to support the increased funding that the Essential Services ballot measure will provide."

"We appreciate all the feedback we have received," said Mayor Gee, prior to the council's unanimous vote. "There is nothing fairer than the ballot box."