

Orinda Zone vs. City of Orinda

The Orinda Zone is an artifact of the fire districts in existence prior to the formation of MOFD. It included all of Orinda plus a few properties in adjacent unincorporated areas. The only missing “piece” were about 750 homes in South Orinda. These homes can be identified by the Tax Rate Area they are in: 18012. The “18” means they are in incorporated Orinda. A map of TRA 18012 is attached.

The main thing that differentiates these homes from every other home in Orinda is that they pay the Moraga Fire Flow Parcel Tax as opposed to the Orinda tax. And the difference between these two taxes is the cap on the rate set which is set annually by the MOFD Board. The Moraga tax has a cap of 30 “cents” while Orinda’s cap is 6 “cents”. Since the District was formed, the rate for the Orinda and Moraga zones have been set at the same level.

It is also a fact that the portion of general (1%) property tax that gets allocated to MOFD is 20% from TRA-18012 where the rest of Orinda has an allocation of the property tax pie of 22.8%. In addition, where the average home in the rest of Orinda is assessed at \$820,000, the homes in TRA 18012 are more modest with an average assessed value of \$625,000. Meaning these homes provide about 2/3 as much tax per home to MOFD as the rest of Orinda. Not that Orinda should start segregating neighborhoods on the basis of property values, just a fact of what these homes bring into MOFD in the way of revenue. In total, everyone pays the same 1% on their value of their homes and the ad valorem tax is scaled by home value, but, if TRA 18012 was out there on its own, it could only afford 2/3 the services as the rest of Orinda. This is just a fact. Therefore, if they wanted the same service, they might have to pay a (big) parcel tax to fund the shortfall.

How these homes came to pay the Moraga Parcel tax instead of the Orinda tax is that before MOFD was formed, they were served by the Moraga Fire Protection District. I am not sure (Dick Olsen could probably clarify), but this probably goes back to before Orinda was even incorporated. When MOFD was formed, Moraga’s services were far superior to Orinda’s. Not only did they have paramedics on their engines but they had a paramedic staffed ambulance while Orinda had to wait for service from AMR to come from Walnut Creek. TRA 18012, essentially Ivy Drive and the streets off it and the streets on the other side of Moraga Way from it, were well served by Moraga’s Station 41. Every home in this area could be accessed by equipment from Moraga’s station 41 within 6 minutes. (Station 41 is just as close, but no closer, to this area as Orinda’s Station 44).

Today the story is different. While every home (and school) in TRA 18012 can be serviced by Moraga’s station 41 or 42 within 6 minute (most much quicker), every home in TRA 18012 can also be serviced by the response unit at Orinda’s Station 44 within 6 minutes (again, most much quicker). Both Stations 41 and 44 are staffed by firefighter paramedics and both have an ambulance to use for medical emergencies (there is no ambulance at Station 42). The midpoint between Orinda’s Station 44 and Moraga’s Station 41 is, in fact, the midpoint of TRA 18012. Therefore half the homes in TRA 18012 are actually closer to Orinda’s Station 44 and the others are only marginally closer to Moraga’s Station 41. The midpoint between Orinda’s Station 44 and Moraga’s Station 42 is just off Rheem Blvd. The few homes in that area which are part of TRA 18012 are truly “on the cusp” between the two stations. To say they are better served by Station 42, which does not have an ambulance, and Station 44, which does have an ambulance, is probably no longer the case.

If Orinda and Moraga were to again become separate districts and there was no such thing as mutual aid, then the north half of TRA 18012 would be better serviced by Orinda and the south half better serviced by Moraga. But the "better" is a marginal better. This area gets better service by either of the two stations serving it than does 30-40% of the rest of Orinda and the fact that it is serviced by both stations means its service is extraordinary. Therefore, claims by "some" that "children in Orinda schools will be put at risk" if there is Tax Funding Equity (because Moraga stations are not going to provide mutual aid?) is nothing more than a scare tactic to squeeze money from Orinda taxpayers and should be identified as such.

If these homes were to be "allocated" to Orinda or Moraga today, with uniform service throughout the District and with equal access by Stations 44 and 41, there is little doubt they would be considered "part of Orinda" since they literally are in incorporated Orinda. Mutual aid from Moraga is helpful but not necessary.

My opinion is that TRA 18012 is part of Orinda and should be considered as such. TRA 18012 is an artifact of the past. If Moraga is providing net service to Orinda because of its service to this area and the Tax Funding Equity analysis needs to take this into account, so be it. The fact that this area pays the Moraga Parcel Tax and any change to that tax rate will impact these Orinda homeowners, again, so be it. They are receiving probably the best service in MOFD and paying less than the rest of Orinda (probably about the same as Moraga on a per household basis). It costs more to run MOFD at current service levels than these homes provide. It would be nice to convert these homes to the Orinda Parcel Tax but I believe that is very complicated.