

Downtown Dilemma

By Cathy Tyson

Because a key downtown property owners' tax that would have split landscaping maintenance among other things did not pass over the summer, the City Council recently had the difficult job of figuring out a way to reduce expenditures.

This fiscal year, projected costs will be \$558,079 to keep Lafayette's medians green and trimmed, as well as keep seasonal banners and the beloved twinkle lights, but property owners are only required to pay \$158,000. That's the problem, that the City's burden has increased over the years, but the portion paid by property owners has substantially remained the same. If passed, costs would have been split 50/50 between the Core Landscape and Lighting District and the City of Lafayette.

The City has spent a considerable amount of money beautifying these medians and providing the extra polish to Lafayette that arguably brings more shoppers and restaurant-goers to town. This in turn brings more sales tax dollars to the City, which accounts for 24% of general fund revenues.

"To cannibalize the downtown is to bite the hand that feeds us," summed up Lynn Hiden, one of the concerned citizens at the meeting.

City Staff took everything into account and came up with five scenarios to reduce expenses in the downtown core area. The options ranged from A to E. On the more severe end of the spectrum Option A proposed a 75% reduction in landscaping services and no plant replacements, having property owners repair their own sidewalks and maintain landscaping along their street frontage, turning off streetlights, and eliminating banners, twinkle lights and community events. Towards the other end was Option D, no reduction in landscape services, but sharing the cost of twinkle lights, banners and community events, with property owners repairing their own sidewalks and maintaining their own landscaping. Finally Option E was the status quo. It was suggested that the title of Option E be changed from "Do Nothing/Business as Usual" to "Continued Investment in the Vitality of the Downtown Core."

Jay Lifson, Executive Director of the Chamber of Commerce saved the day once again, suggesting the Chamber can work with the City Council toward a mutually beneficial solution, "I would like the Council to consider Option E because it's the right and fair thing to do." Larry Blodgett continued the theme, stating, "let us be a part of the solution."

Other possible options to increase revenue included, "Adopt-a-Median," to a city sales tax increase of 1/10th of a cent, to a business license tax.

City Manager Steve Falk suggested the City should look to find a comprehensive solution incorporating roads, police and the downtown budget.

On the bright side, since City Staff estimated conservatively, it's projected

that Lafayette will have revenue of \$1,000,000 over their targeted amount of \$590,000 this fiscal year. According to the Staff Report, submitted by Tracy Robinson, Administrative Services Director, if Option E is selected, "the issue of funding the Core Area can be reviewed in the context of the whole budget either at the December 2007 meeting or in the spring, when the FY 2008-09 budget will be proposed."

In the end, the City Council selected Option E. Lafayette residents can sleep soundly tonight knowing banners, street lights, sidewalk repair and tree trimming will continue as usual. Hopefully they'll be so well rested, and enchanted by the twinkle lights and banners, that they'll spend a small fortune on Christmas gifts downtown.



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