

Lights! Camera! Municipal Finance?

By Cathy Tyson

In an effort to educate the public about the esoteric nature of municipal finance, Lafayette has embraced a two-pronged approach to help get the word out. First, the fall issue of Vistas had a very thorough article about how projects are funded in Lafayette. Despite the timeliness and depth of the story, it's possible that not every resident reads it. Second, is their new video available for viewing on the City's home page

www.lovelafayette.org
or www.YouTube.com.

"We're looking for a way to keep the material alive and, since a video link might be viewed by some or most of the people who stop by our website, it's worth doing," said City Manager Steve Falk.

Beyond the cool factor, and even though Lafayette seems like a prosperous city, only 6 cents of every dollar paid for property taxes goes to the City. This, coupled with the \$24 million unfunded road repair backlog puts, "financial pressure on every other City operation and has led to budget skirmishes over even the smallest programs. Until there is a comprehensive funding solution for Lafayette's roads and police, these issues will not go away," added Falk.

An internet survey was conducted after the loss of last Spring's Road Tax Measure. The bottom line was that residents aren't fully informed about the ways California public agencies are financed. Noting this, the City Council directed staff to do something about it. Hence the Vista's article and now, the video.

While it's not unusual for larger cities to have full service video production facilities, Lafayette is not a large city. Falk tried to make the 6-minute video educational but fun. "It's a little corny, it's a little camp, but we did that deliberately in an effort to keep the viewer's attention."

The video is entertaining, but it serves a bigger purpose. According to Falk, "Without new sources

of funds, Lafayette's residents will continue to receive the lowest per-capita police coverage in Contra Costa County and, without new sources of revenue, many neighborhood roads will continue to deteriorate until they turn to gravel. Some 4,000 Lafayette residents live on failed roads. During some shifts, there are only two police officers on duty to cover the entire town. These services are, by most resident's judgment, totally unacceptable. Indeed, in each of the last four failed measures, six out of every ten voters demanded to tax themselves to improve services in Lafayette. But unfortunately, California's laws requiring a supermajority for new taxes prevented them from doing so."

"We wanted to get the point across in an amusing, interesting way," said Tracy Robinson, Administrative Services Director. See Ms. Robinson, Steve Falk and a cast of other city employees at a computer near you.

Extra copies of Vistas are available in the City Offices, or to find it on-line, go to the Lafayette home page, www.lovelafayette.org, and click on Vistas Newsletters in the blue column. "Where Do Your Taxes Go?" is in the fall edition.