

City Engineer Keeps Lafayette Running

By Cathy Tyson



Tony Coe, Engineering Services Manager

Photo provided

Just inside Lafayette’s City offices, right behind the Planning counter is the sunny, spacious office of Tony Coe, Engineering Services Manager. Most residents don’t know that he and his staff of six literally keep the city rolling along. The Engineering Department is responsible for Capital Improvement Projects and the ever popular Pavement Management Program, as well as development review, traffic operations and transportation planning issues, both local and regional, and encroachment permits.

When he started out with the City in 1994 as an Assistant Engineer, Lafayette wasn’t quite so complicated then, but that soon changed. Originally the department consisted of just two people, he and his predecessor, along with a secretary. After a brief reassignment to the Public Works department, he became Engineering Services Manager in 1997. In his eleven years, he’s seen a lot of changes, “My job has evolved along with the way the town’s needs and demands were evolving,” says Coe. The Engineering Staff includes one Senior Engineer, two Associate Engineers, a Transportation Planner, an Engineering Technician/Public Works Inspector, and one Administrative Assistant.

Reflecting on his job, Coe notes “It’s gratifying work, that’s why I’ve been doing it so long, building things that will be around for a long time. It affects a lot of people, although maybe not in a very direct way – you drive down a street, you go across a bridge, and when it rains the water is drained

away; things that work smoothly in the background but have a real impact on people’s quality of life. When it doesn’t work is when you see how critical it really is.”

The biggest responsibility for the position is the Capital Program – from the completed Veteran’s Hall to on-going library construction. “Once people settle on the design and agreed on what the building generally looks like, that’s where I come in. My job is really dealing with the nitty gritty and nuts and bolts of the project,” said Coe. The construction review process that he refers to ensures the technical aspects of a building like electrical, plumbing, mechanical, structural systems, landscape concerns and grading are fully addressed in construction documents before a project goes out to bid.

Coe is also involved with the engineering review of private development, including the new Lafayette Mercantile Building and the pair of condominium projects in development flanking each end of town.

Transportation concerns are another aspect of the position, including signals not working, intersection traffic safety and more. He and the department are proud of the traffic calming plan that was instituted a couple of years ago.

Although Encroachment Permits are a very big function within the city, not many residents are familiar with them. “There are many utilities that own facilities within the city; water, sewage, cable TV, phone, all those people from time to time will be digging up the street installing new facilities or upgrading existing equipment. We administer an oversight system to insure that when they work in the street that they are safe – that they manage traffic properly and we oversee their restoration efforts,” Coe explains.

Finally at the regional level, Engineering works with neighboring cities and the Contra Costa Transportation Authority on transportation planning issues, such as action plans on routes of regional significance and inter-jurisdictional congestion management.

“Tony allows you the opportunity to expand your job responsibilities, because of that our staff has a very diverse and value-added skill set,” said Matt Luttrupp, Associate Engineer. Indeed there’s been very little turnover in the Engineering Department; happy employees are less likely to leave.

Coe, his wife, and going into 7th grade daughter live in Pleasant Hill. When asked if he was particularly handy around the house, the short answer is “no.” He’s done some projects at home but, “I can’t say that I really enjoyed them.”