

Future of Potential Sales Tax Doubtful

By Cathy Tyson



Jay Lifson, Executive Director Lafayette Chamber of Commerce
 Photo Wendy Scheck

In the first of two City Council meetings looking for public input regarding a potential additional sales tax for Lafayette, many anti-tax advocates expressed their opinions including the influential Chamber of Commerce. A recent survey of Lafayette residents by the Tramutola/Godbe research firm showed general support for the measure; 59% of polled residents were in favor, even after hearing arguments against it.

At issue was a potential increase of .75% to the current 8.25% tax rate, which if approved would have made Lafayette, at 9.00%, the city with the highest sales tax in the Bay Area. The additional funds would be used to pay for badly needed road repair, pay for downtown twinkle lights, banners, landscaping, parks and preserved open space and police services.

“After a two hour discussion our Board of Directors voted to oppose. This is not the right time; our downtown is made up of small businesses that are already feeling the effects of a poor economy. A sales tax is not the way to solve the revenue problems our city faces,” said Jay Lifson, Executive Director of the Chamber of Commerce.

“It was an agonizing, painful decision, because we want the city to succeed, we want our streets paved, we want police

services increased,” said fellow Chamber member and long time business owner Larry Blodgett. Referring to the difficult business climate for his store lately he continued, “Our story is one of many up and down the boulevard; I don’t think now is the time for a sales tax.”

The majority of public input was definitely not in favor of a potential tax increase. Marianne Adams of the Yarn Boutique said, “I can’t tell you how much I oppose this measure.”

“I’m disgusted that you would do something to harm business – it’s just as close to go to Walnut Creek or Moraga and way less hassle,” said Gloria Lenhardt.

One of only a few residents that didn’t oppose the measure was Geoff Bellenger who said, “I think it’s very appropriate that citizens have the opportunity to vote on the tax. I believe we are short on services.”

Public comment is encouraged at the second meeting addressing this issue on July 28 at the Lafayette Community Center, 7:00 p.m., a final decision as to whether or not to put it on the November ballot will be made at that time. If the mood of this meeting was any indication, the future of a potential additional sales tax does not look good.