

Lafayette Downtown Strategy ...update

By Cathy Tyson

Developing a vision and strategy for the long-term future growth of Lafayette is the objective of Lafayette’s ambitious Downtown Strategy that was initiated in May of 2007. Although limits on development are spelled out in the city’s General Plan, the purpose of the Strategy is to guide development that will likely unfold over the next 20 years to enhance Lafayette’s functionality and prioritize improvements like parks, circulation and parking – making the downtown area more inviting and livable.

So far Wallace, Roberts & Todd, (WRT), a city and regional planning firm, with a substantial amount of community input, has: defined the issues and vision - while noting opportunities and constraints, explored alternatives, and outlined a preferred concept of development, but stopped short of preparing the strategy and specific plan while the Advisory Committee clarifies draft goals.

Kicking off the Strategy process was a city-wide mailing explaining the process, next came a survey sent to 11,000 homes and businesses. Representatives from WRT walked and mapped the downtown, examined parcel sizes, density and traffic. Three community workshops, scores of interviews with key stakeholders and public meetings followed.

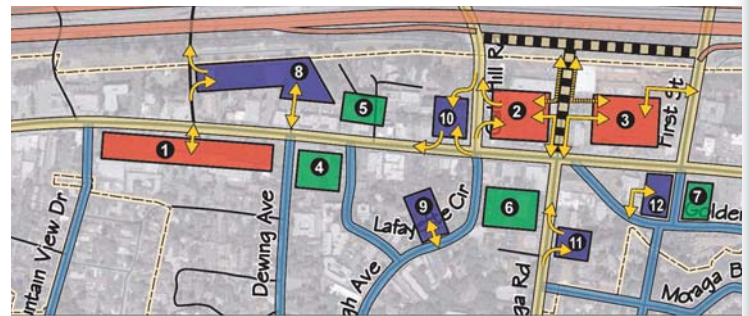
Experts from WRT analyzed all of the data gleaned from their research and surveys and came up with a Preferred Plan in April of this year. The revised draft goals established at that time are now being revisited by the Advisory Committee.

All of this is easier said than done, when you have to take into account BART, higher density housing, walkability, parking, open spaces, height limits, mixed use projects, creek protection and more.

Having a substantial amount of money available from the Redevelopment Agency to invest in the city that can only be used toward public projects and toward stimulating affordable housing is what makes this strategy and its future execution possible.

A plan is critical to allocate funds of up to \$20 million over the next 20 years, with an additional \$30 million earmarked to stimulate affordable housing projects. Spending \$50 million in Lafayette over a number of years will certainly have an impact on the city.

Redevelopment is a tool created by state law to assist local governments to achieve the goals of development, reconstruction and rehabilitation of residential, commercial, industrial and retail districts. It can be used for public projects and for stimulating housing – affordable and otherwise – and economic devel-



Downtown Parking

- Older lots, often full
- Newer lots
- Potential new parking sites

Courtesy of the Lafayette Downtown Strategy available on the City’s web site: www.lovelafayette.com

opment through public/private partnerships, according to Ann Merideth, Community Development Director. No Redevelopment Agency money can be used for paving or police services.

“Our charge is to define how we want the downtown to grow,” said Ruth McCahan, at a recent Advisory Committee meeting. “When I moved here over 45 years ago, Lafayette looked very different from what it does today, I’m sure forty years into the future it’ll look different from what it does today - it continues to evolve to meet the needs of the community without losing its small town environment and unique sense of place.”

“The Advisory Committee is still going through the background information and talking about downtown generally. The preliminary preferred option from April is the latest plan, but the Committee won’t be talking about that or any of the earlier alternatives until they finish this phase of their work. Sometime in the fall the work with the consultants will start again,” said Merideth.

Another Advisory Committee meeting is scheduled for August 20 at 7:00 at the City Offices at 3675 Mt. Diablo Blvd. To take a closer look at what’s gone on to date, go to www.lovelafayette.com for agendas, notes, economic analysis, survey results and more.