

## Tracy Robinson – Using Your Tax Dollars Wisely

By Cathy Tyson



Tracy Robinson

Photo provided

**I**t all started with a resume, then came a series of questions via e-mail, an interview in front of five department heads and a meeting with the City Manager. Then some testing, a detailed financial analysis of a theoretical scenario and presentation of her work to a panel of City Managers from Lafayette, Orinda and Danville, then another meeting with future boss, Lafayette City Manager Steven Falk. Who knew Tracy Robinson, Molecular Biology graduate of UC Berkeley would use that as a springboard to municipal finance. Perhaps it was her MBA from UC Davis with an emphasis in finance and accounting that sealed the deal on being hired as Lafayette’s Administrative Services Director.

Working as a Budget Analyst for World Savings, now Wachovia, for a dozen years in their Oakland headquarters might have helped too. Robinson rose to Assistant Vice President and joined the Information Technology Department. With the City of Lafayette since May of 2000, she thought the requirements of management and budget experience coupled with technology expertise would be a good match for her skill set. “I am a nerd who loves spreadsheets, what can I say?”

Managing a \$50 million budget is no easy task. “Personally, I think that the budget is the most important document the City has. The budget is a tool that allows the City Council to function effectively and to set priorities. When I got this job, Steven told me that it was expected that I would ‘strap on a keyboard’ and input the budget myself. And I was thrilled. It’s really the favorite part of my job. Stretching the dollars is always a challenge. I’m staffing the Lafayette Finance Review Committee whose mission to is independently review the City’s finances to see if there are efficiencies we can take advantage of to

squeeze every last drop out of the precious revenue we do get.”

Like many positions within city government, she wears many hats during her work day. “My job duties include Human Resources, Finance & Budgeting, Risk Management and Information Technology. In addition, I edit the city’s quarterly newsletter, Vistas. So basically, I view my job as making sure that there are sufficient resources to implement the City Council’s policies. That means that I ensure we hire and train the right people and give the staff the tools and resources they need to do their jobs efficiently. That can include everything from designing and maintaining the City’s website, making sure the phone and computer systems function properly, analyzing budget proposals, issuing bonds for capital projects, conducting salary and benefit surveys, tracking expenses and revenues, recruiting for open positions, even making sure that we get all our office supplies at the best possible prices.” In addition, when Falk is out of the office, Robinson fills in as Acting City Manager.

What’s the one thing you want the public to grasp about city finances? “They are a lot more complex than people think,” said Robinson. “We have regulations, mandates and statutory limitations on how we can spend the money we get. Probably the biggest thing that people don’t realize is that out of every \$1,000 they pay in property tax, the City gets only \$65. That surprises most people.”

Robinson lives in the Oakland hills with her husband, two daughters and cat. During her lunch break you might find her at Oakwood on a treadmill watching the Food Network or reading a trashy novel. At home Robinson manages the family budget. She confides that her talented, creative husband, who has an honors degree in Economics, still comes from the, “if we still have checks, we must have money” school of thought.