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Meet Lafayette's City Manager

By Cathy Tyson



Photo submitted

Lafayette residents would be hard pressed to find someone more qualified to manage the city more efficiently during these troubled times.

Steven Falk has a B.A. in Economics, a Masters in Public Policy from Harvard, and work experience as a Budget Analyst for the City of Long Beach and as a Senior Finance Analyst for San Francisco International Airport.

With the City of Lafayette since 1990, first as Assistant City Manager, now as City Manager and Executive Director of the Lafayette Redevelopment Agency, Falk is responsible for the day-to-day operations of the city and oversees the city's departments - police, community development, parks and recreation, engineering, public works and more. Even in these trying economic times his job is to deliver services smoothly and efficiently to the community. With revenue down and expenses up, delivering those services is getting more and more challenging.

"The city manager is the CEO of the organization and - same as a private company - reports to the elected board of directors. In a city's case, that board is the City Council, which makes all the major policy decisions. I spend a lot of time gathering, analyzing, summarizing and preparing information for council members - helping them make the best decisions for the community," said Falk.

He adds that his job description is pretty simple, "my staff and I do whatever council members want. If they want a new ridgeline protection ordinance, we write it. If they want a new library we figure out how to finance, design and build it."

While residents prefer the dearth of big box stores and auto dealers, the city could surely use the sales tax revenue that they would generate, resulting in more pavement repair and police officers on duty. Lafayette has, "about \$18M in unfunded road repairs and the smallest police force in Contra Costa County. The disparity between private affluence and public needs creates a cognitive dissonance that is hard for some to understand or accept. Many residents just plain don't believe it when I explain that Lafayette doesn't have the money to fix their problem," noted Falk. With four failed ballot measures to increase revenue, it looks like that isn't going to change anytime soon.

The independent Lafayette Finance Review Committee concurred. Composed of local volunteers with a strong background in business and finance, the Committee has been working since April of 2008 to examine the city's financial situation. Among the findings in their Final Report: "the City has generally done a very good job of identifying and acting upon opportunities to manage the

taxpayer's money with prudence and leveraging outside sources of revenue" and also that "the City's expenditures are in line with peer cities and in some cases, Lafayette appears to be more fiscally prudent than many of the cities in the study." Residents interested in more detail can attend the a public hearing tentatively scheduled for January 13 or check out the complete report at www.lovelafayette.org.

Falk credits his time in Long Beach as an introduction into the colorful range of tasks necessary to run a city: an irrigation problem one day, a SWAT team surrounding a bank the next. "Every day is different," said Falk. "Twenty-two years ago I was inspired by the promise and rewards of public service, and I've never regretted the decision to pursue it as a career. I am a public servant, and proud to be one."

Falk lives in Lafayette with his wife, kids and puppy. In his spare time he surfs, camps, climbs, paints and tries to spend time with his family and friends and be outdoors as much as possible.

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