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• **LAMORINDA Community** •

Lafayette Continues to Wrestle with Specific Plan

... continued from page 2

Despite a detailed explanation in his overview, a couple of participants at this reporter's table were very concerned about proposed height limit changes. Although when asked if the table would prefer the existing 76 station or an attractive mixed use three-story building, the unanimous answer was the new structure.

One table mate felt that, "Lafayette is a small town, it's important to build to that scale." regarding refining development regulations. There seemed to be palpable concern about the possibility of changing building height limits from 35 feet to 42.5 feet, even with upper story setbacks. On the other hand, a couple who developed a three story building in the center of town, with retail on the bottom and living space on the upper floors noted, if they weren't able to have three stories the project would not have penciled out financially.

What was an empty lot in the heart of downtown now has shops that contribute sales tax to the city, and happy residents who very rarely need a car because they can walk to nearby businesses.

On the whole it seemed liked most participants agree with the community vision (in italics below), as stated in the Downtown Strategy and Specific Plan, they just didn't quite agree on how to get there:

A downtown that retains its small town charm, is vibrant with pedestrian activity, is safe and comfortable, offers a variety of unique shopping and dining choices and has a unique combination of built form and landscape character in keeping with its surrounding natural environment - characterized by oak-studded hillsides and cool shady creeks. A downtown that encourages economic activity beneficial to the community through the encouragement of small local businesses and enhancement of its tax base - generating revenue that continues to enhance and maintain a high quality public space environment.

For more information go to www.lovelafayette.org for the official Draft Plan, Executive Summary, comments, workshop notes and more.

Businesses Discuss Strategic Plan



Mike Anderson presents the plan to business and property owners
 Photo Sophie Braccini

More than 110 business owners crowded Temple Isaiah's meeting room on Feb 24 for a presentation of the downtown specific plan organized by the City of Lafayette and the Chamber of Commerce. A panel composed of City Manager Steve Falk, Lafayette developer Steve Cortese, Council Member Mike Anderson and Chamber member Ann Denny answered questions. Here are some of the questions and answers:

The city is planning to have certain zones become parking or public areas, will Lafayette use imminent domain to materialize the plan?

Falk said Lafayette has no such intention. The plan will set the rules for when someone wants to redevelop a business/property. Cortese added, "The purpose of the plan is to give a view of what could happen within 20 years; it's what could happen."

The city is planning a public walkway along the creek; when someone has a property there and will want to remodel that property will he have to comply with this project?

Falk's short answer was, "Yes."

Why build housing in the downtown?

Falk outlined the reasons: To provide housing for seniors who want to downsize and stay in Lafayette, and housing for first time buyers and young families; also adding condominiums in the downtown area will help preserve open space. He added that "it's better to develop where there is already some development." Finally, he said, "This could help with the city's affordable housing mandate."

How can the parking problem be resolved?

Falk: "The consultant has proposed a central parking (Campana area) that would be used by employees of nearby business and schools and would free up parking for customers. The plan also proposes to consolidate exclusive small parking that individual stores have to create pocket parking in the back of stores.

Why increase the maximum height to 42 1/2 feet?

Cortese explained, "That's the height of the Mercantile, it allows for higher ceilings for the first floor retail area which is what is required today, plus add two levels above."

How will the problem of traffic congestion be solved?

Anderson answered, "We first need a better understanding of our traffic problem. One solution that has been proposed by the consultant is adding connecting streets that would parallel Mount Diablo and release that street. Another solution would be to build a tunnel under Mt Diablo to directly link Moraga traffic to the freeway." He added that the engineering of the project would be very complex and very expensive.

S. Braccini

Moraga Council Hires New Town Manager

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"This salary is similar to what our previous Town Manager received and is less than what I had in Corte Madera," said Tashiro.

"We want to give our Manager pay equity with the towns and cities around us," added Council Member Chew, "it is important for his credibility."

"To get a well qualified professional you need to stay with the market rate," said resident Jeff Schwartz in support of the Council's choice, "a great town manager can make or break a town with the directions and decisions he makes, the people he hires, his management style... from what I know, we have the right person."

Others expressed doubts about the non-democratic aspect of a process in which residents were not directly involved in the selection of their town manager.

"The Council reviewed this, a sub-committee reviewed

that, but something was missing -- the public. Where was the public?" asked resident Dennis Wanken.

"I understand the concern and we did our best to include local groups in defining the profile for our Manager," answered Council Member Karen Mendonca, "but as the process continued, we could not open it up too much because the position of the candidates would be compromised and we needed to protect confidentiality." She reminded the audience that residents elect their Council Members for the purpose of representing them and to act as their agents in choosing what is best for Moraga.

Council Member Mike Metcalf summarized the Council's position by saying, "Mr. Segrest was brought into a community (Snowmass Village) that had a hard time deciding what it was going to do in terms of development. Under the direction of the Council, he got

things done. We've been dead in the water for the last ten or fifteen years and he is ready to come here and deal with everything that will be thrown at him, and I admire him for that."

Mayor Dave Trotter explained, "We spent many hours interviewing all the candidates in closed sessions, and Mr. Segrest gained a very good grasp of the nuances of this community in a very short period of time. He was head and shoulders above the other two final candidates." Trotter added that Segrest appeared to have been the staff's choice as well.

Council Member Howard Harpham directly addressed the source of the discontent, "I understand the rage which can come when you start off with a lot, but not all, of the information." he said, "I wish I could share with you the resume, the experience and the statements that were made... We hired this man, we should support him, so he succeeds."