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Next Step for Specific Plan - Environmental Scoping

By Cathy Tyson



Mayor Don Taztin speaks to a diverse group of residents, and business/property owners at a breakfast meeting Photo Andy Scheck

the project not feasible. If you stick with 25 foot height limit - might as well call it a historic district - nothing will ever change or improve." Tom Whitten agrees, "The 25 foot height requirement is a 'no development plan.' Period." The existing General Plan has a 35 foot height requirement.

Susan Callister recommends staying with the existing General Plan and scrapping the Downtown Strategy and Specific Plan altogether. Capacity management was brought up by Avon Wilson, specifically concern about a spillover of excess traffic on Lafayette's already crowded streets. Despite some public opposition, the scoping of the plan will go forward.

"The City Council entered into an agreement two months ago with an EIR consultant to prepare the environmental document. The subject of not proceeding with the EIR and therefore not proceeding with the downtown planning has come up before, but the Council has decided to continue with the process. It would be a Council decision to stop the process," said Ann Merideth, Community Development Director.

On Friday Mayor Taztin addressed a group at the Chamber of Commerce offices, with a summary of the process, and a focus on economic feasibility. "If you plan it, will somebody build it?" He pointed out, "Understanding how a rational investor would act is very important input for the future of the community."

The estimated cost to complete the EIR is \$278,088., any in-contract cost overruns are to be absorbed by DC&E. More than half of that fee will be covered by a \$150,000 grant from the Metropolitan Transportation Commission. One of the requirements to receive the funds was that the EIR had to be wrapped up by spring. The completed Draft EIR is scheduled to be finished on December 14, which will be followed by a public review period from December 15 - February 2, 2010.

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The Revised Draft Downtown Lafayette Specific Plan is inching ever so slowly forward and is poised to scope the Environmental Impact Report (EIR) as required by the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). The goal of the EIR is to examine potential significant environmental effects of the plan and potential alternatives via a very thorough analysis of factors from aesthetics to noise to traffic. Consultant Design, Community & Environment, Inc. (DC&E) will be crunching the numbers for three alternatives: first off, the "no project" alternative which sticks with the existing General Plan; the second option, the "low intensity" alternative, includes a 25 foot height limit by right, along with 35 foot height limit with conditions; and finally the "high intensity" alternative assumes the heights and densities described in the Revised Draft Downtown Lafayette Specific Plan.

In noting the range of possible alternatives, Steve Noack of DC&E said, "We look at them in a qualitative way and look at relative differences." They try to be as conservative as possible in their assessments, anticipating a worst case scenario.

Height and density continue to be the most controversial aspects of the plan depending on perspective. Chris Watson, who along with partner Kurt Setzer owns three commercial properties on Lafayette Circle, said at a recent Planning Commission meeting, "I am cut off at the knees if a 25 foot height restriction is implemented - it makes