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How to Create a Sustainable Downtown?

By Sophie Braccini



Lindsey, Molly and Emily Sharp enjoying downtown
Photo Andy Scheck

maintaining the city's character or improving the traffic situation. "What is good about this process is that it got people thinking, whether they live in the downtown or not," says Chastain, "they understand that they will be impacted. Their concerns are a positive thing."

"Does (the Downtown Specific Plan) mean that buildings will be smaller ... or we will have to give up our cars and start riding bicycles?" asks Bart Carr, one of the founders of Sustainable Lafayette, "not really, but the Plan does suggest changes to the design and height of buildings, a new mix of development 'uses,' increasing creekside parks and walkways, and other changes that, if made over time, will make Lafayette's downtown more interesting, vibrant and much more 'sustainable'."

Chastain's talk will be followed by short presentations from city staff describing the specific plan adoption process and from Sustainable Lafayette members who will share why they believe a sustainable downtown plan is important to the Lafayette community. The event is free and open to the public.



Dining al fresco Photo Andy Scheck

Greening one's home is an idea that most individuals can get their heads around; but as Lafayette studies how to re-invent its downtown, what will it take to make the design sustainable for generations to come? According to Sustainable Lafayette, a local non-profit group, one feature that makes Lafayette's Downtown Specific Plan unique is that it seeks to reduce the "environmental footprint" of future development. To better understand this concept and answer questions, Sustainable Lafayette is organizing an educational presentation on February 18, from 7 to 8:30 p.m. at Our Savior's Lutheran Church - Fellowship Hall, 1035 Carol Lane in Lafayette.

Headlining the event will be Lafayette resident Thomas Chastain, of STUDIO URBIS, an expert in sustainable architecture and urban design who has been serving on the Lafayette Planning Commission for five years. Chastain, who incorporated the environment into his projects even before it began to be called sustainability, will first define the concept. "Sustainability for a city incorporates many aspects, some big, some small," says Chastain, "it's thinking about how things work together." For example, looking at alternative ways of getting around, making it easier for those who want to ride a bike or promote local shopping. "What also really helps is to create a space where people can get together as community," adds Chastain, "Think about a formal town square or market place, a space where residents exist together and exchange ideas."

As a member of the Planning Commission, Chastain participated in the process that led to the recommendations the Commission presented to the City. He believes that the draft of the Downtown Specific Plan contains elements that are very positive, but he has noticed that many residents still have concerns about such issues as

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