



Independent, locally owned and operated!

www.lamorindaweekly.com 925-377-0977

Published September 1st, 2010

Lafayette Candidates' Positions on Growth and Roads

By Cathy Tyson

Convenient transit, great weather, and fantastic schools are all reasons that folks are drawn to Lafayette. But beyond the BART station, rolling hills, and manicured lawns there are serious concerns about growth - how much is enough, where should it be located, and how to handle additional traffic? There are many factors that play a role - pressure from population growth west of the tunnel and along the 680 corridor, aging seniors who don't want to leave the community, restrictive hillside ordinances and very little new housing and voila, this is where Lafayette finds itself. To call it a perfect storm is a tad dramatic, but it's fair to say there are a number of issues percolating away that will impact growth now and in the future.

The City Council will be faced with heated discussions of height and density restrictions downtown, vocal proponents of providing state mandated low income housing units, not insignificant environmental concerns and the controversial Downtown Strategic Plan. Will Lafayette remain semi-rural or become increasingly semi-suburban?

Candidates were asked an open-ended question about their position on growth.

Candidates were also asked to comment on how they plan to address the road repair issue. There is a roughly \$16 million dollar road repair problem and the city doesn't have an extra \$16 million dollars hidden away under the municipal mattress. Residents, at least those that attend city council meeting have zero desire to tax themselves to pay for the fix. The City Council will find itself between a rock and a hard place.

Once again, in alphabetical order, here are the candidate responses to both questions:

Brandt Andersson

Growth: We must maintain the semi-rural character of our neighborhoods and the beauty of our open ridges and hillsides, characteristics of Lafayette dear to us all. Added density in our residential neighborhoods or subdivisions on our open hills should not occur.

Growth in the downtown has its issues as well. A case could be made that high traffic use downtown should preclude growth there as well. However, state mandates require that we allow for some growth in housing, particularly affordable housing. The legal and financial repercussions of failing to meet those mandates can be dire.

Therefore, land use planning that allows for growth in the downtown should encourage housing at locations and densities that minimize the impacts on traffic, encourage pedestrian use of our retail core, and focus on our need for senior housing.

Roads: It is necessary to understand the nature and scale of the road repair problem. We currently have a road repair backlog of 15.9 million dollars, above and beyond the money we spend on upkeep and maintenance. For years Lafayette has kept all other expenditures down in order to direct money to road repair. Our recent Finance Committee report concluded that the City has "manage[d] the taxpayer's money with prudence and leverag[ed] outside sources of revenue," but "cost savings alone are not sufficient to meet all the City's needs." A revenue source is needed.

We received support for a 2007 parcel tax from a strong majority of voters (64%), but failed to achieve the 2/3 requirement. We have proposed a sales tax increment and a property transfer tax, but there has not been consensus on any single approach.

We could just continue to chip away at the problem and hope future budgets will allow greater expenditures on roads, but I believe we owe it to the 4000 citizens still living on failed roads to continue to seek a new revenue source to rebuild those roads. I plan to initiate a dialogue to bring ideas together for discussion and identify a set or sequence of actions that can generate broad voter support.

Traci Reilly

Growth: As much as we love our town, we can't keep Lafayette frozen in time. Like all cities, we need to plan for the future. There must be a balance between development and the preservation of our quality of life.

Property owners and developers have a right to income from their investments. Residents have a right to thoughtful, planned growth that takes into account the impact on roads, traffic and public safety.

Specifically, I have been following the Downtown Specific Plan (DSP), and feel that it would have a negative effect on Lafayette's downtown. It would create traffic problems that could not be mitigated. While I would support redevelopment in parts of downtown, I do not support the DSP that has been proposed. We have spent approximately \$2 million on consultants and staff time to come up with a plan that most residents do not want. That is not good fiscal responsibility.

Roads: One of a city's primary responsibilities is to maintain its roads. I would make it a priority. The City and my opponents support a Charter City/Property Transfer Tax as the main way to fund road repair. I respectfully disagree. I would like to see the RDA pay back the \$5 million it borrowed from the General Fund. This money could be used immediately to repair failing roads. Recently there was a Waste Management fee imposed on all its Lafayette customers to help maintain roads and drains. I would ensure that all this money, which is about \$400,000 yearly, would be used to fix roads. In 2008, an independent Finance Committee made many recommendations for cutting costs. Some, but not all, of the suggestions were followed. We should implement the recommendations, and the money saved would be put towards roads. Lastly, only after we have exhausted all of these measures, and have earned the confidence of our residents, I would be open to exploring a minimal parcel tax for roads. It is important that we finally get the job done.

Dino Riggio

Growth: I believe smart growth is achievable in Lafayette as long as we sincerely understand the impact any change has on all aspects of the community. With the understanding that Lafayette has always been a semi-rural community it is important that we ensure the quality of life Lafayette residents currently enjoy is not put in jeopardy by a failure to prepare for the inevitable change the city will face. Cities change. Their landscapes change. Therefore, the city council needs to put policies in place that ensures any future development in Lafayette is done by developers who understand our community and property is developed with the purpose to benefit the residents.

The future city council needs to do the right thing by ensuring any project is communicated effectively to ensure that all residents stay informed throughout the entire process. I will work with the Planning Commission as well as the residents to guarantee growth in Lafayette is done in a respectful manner that is clear in its intent and objective, clear in its purpose and accomplished through a transparent procedure.

Roads: The condition of the roads in Lafayette has been an issue in every election that I can remember since I was a kid. The poor and unacceptable condition of the roads where a few thousand of our almost 25,000 residents drive on a daily basis affects all of us in Lafayette because poorly maintained roads negatively affect property values in those areas which in turn drives down the average price of all homes.

Fixing the roads is a top priority the future council needs to not only address, but give the attention the residents demand. Realizing that the roads cannot all be repaired at once, I would take incremental steps by first shifting funds in the current budget allotted to roadwork from any non-repair uses. At this point Lafayette needs drivable roads, not flowers alongside them.

Don Tatzin

Growth: While we see some new buildings downtown, the California Department of Finance reports that Lafayette's population grew from 23,908 in 2000 to 24,342 in 2010. The Council has not adopted a strategy to grow the City rapidly.

I advocate growth that maintains our semi-rural neighborhoods and enhances the downtown's small-town character. As Chair of the Hillside and Ridgeline Committee, I helped develop current guidelines for ridgeline development in residential neighborhoods.

In the downtown, several sites would benefit from redevelopment. We should encourage projects that the community wants and that private investors will build. We must also ensure that over time, the incremental effects of many small projects do not overwhelm the capacity of our roads, other infrastructure, or the image of downtown as a vibrant commercial center with majestic views of the surrounding hillsides

Roads: Since 1996, the failed roads that carry the most traffic, and many other residential streets, were reconstructed. However, 4,000 residents still live along failed public roads?we must not ignore them.

I will direct as much funding as possible from four sources to road repair and maintenance. First, the gas tax and a portion of the countywide voter-approved half-cent sales tax are dedicated to roads.

Second, increasing, if possible, the \$1 million or more of discretionary funds the Council allocates annually to repair roads.

Third, one-time sources of funds including payments due Lafayette from Moraga's Palos Colorados development, repayment of loans made to the Redevelopment Agency, and grants.

Finally, the 2008 Finance Committee concluded that a voter-approved tax is needed to fix all failed roads. If the first three sources are not sufficient, I would consider asking voters to approve a local tax measure focused on road repair if three conditions exist. First, the Council has managed the budget efficiently and focused spending on high priority programs. Second, the new funding proposal is simple. Finally, many citizens and Council members will participate in creating and passing the measure.

Reach the reporter at: cathy@lamorindaweekly.com

Copyright © Lamorinda Weekly, Moraga CA