

Customers Enjoy La Boulange: Délicieux

By Cathy Tyson



From left, Ester Schafer and Page Range with lunch at La Boulange.

Photo C. Tyson

On a busy Thursday afternoon, customers oogled the very attractive croissants, brioche and tarts that looked almost too pretty to eat as they queued up for lunch at Lafayette's newest café, La

Boulange. Coffee, iced tea, pastries, salads and the very popular "La Combo" – any open face sandwich with a cup of soup or side of greens – seemed to be flying out the door; it's fair to say that business is brisk.

Page Range and Ester Schafer came in to pick up lunch to go. Range was especially impressed with how "clean and fresh" the food looked; she also liked the clever menu items and welcoming decor. The ladies were looking forward to enjoying a caesar salad and hummus sandwich with avocado, cucumber, tomato and sprouts.

Groups of happy diners were enjoying the fall sunshine at the outdoor tables. From the looks of it, many of the female patrons had come directly from tennis. Many of the gals were diving into warm goat cheese salads with candied pecans.

"The food is wrapped like a gift," noted Jennifer Russell. Her daughter had been to a Boulange in San Francisco and encouraged her to give it a try. Russell had Prosciutto and fig on a walnut baguette; pal Marilyn Smith nibbled a Turkey and cranberry sandwich.

"Fantastic," said Katie Rambaud, "I really like the balsamic vinaigrette on the greens and my Portobello veggie burger with mushroom and melty brie. I wish there was a place this yummy in Moraga. It's like a little slice of France in Lamorinda."

Lafayette Housing Element Still Not in Compliance

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Fair housing proponents have concerns that a portion of the twenty-two sites the City submitted to HCD are composed of a number of smaller parcels that would require all the property owners to decide to sell within the next five years - most have existing businesses. For example, at the corner of First Street and Mount Diablo the Taco Bell, the office building next door; the Great Wall restaurant and Hamlin Cleaners on Golden Gate way are together considered site twelve. While it's possible this may happen, many consider it highly unlikely.

"Lafayette's sham strategy of pretending that commercially zoned and used and unconsolidated sites will magically become affordable housing was not found acceptable," said Mike Henn, former Planning Services Manager. "I suspect that the most convincing final argument was the receipt of letters from property owners say-

ing: We're Not Interested. It is also revealing that the City was trying to fly the inventory under the radar, by not properly notifying property owners that their properties were being listed by the City as available for low income housing."

Attorney Allan Moore, representing The Dettmer Family Trust which owns approximately 80 acres near Pleasant Hill Road and Deer Hill Road, including the area known as the Christmas tree lot, is skeptical. "The city's response of July 2010 is wholly inadequate, unresponsive to the HCD letter and legally insufficient under the state housing laws," he said in a letter to HCD and the City of Lafayette.

Noting great respect for staff and City Council, Moore said, "Property owners have rights as well - this parcel was originally zoned APO (Administrative Professional Office) 35/units per acre - that's what the City decided. Then the City

changed its mind to downzone to open space use - it seems unfair. We really hope the City Council will listen to us, but we are exploring all options," said Moore.

He explained that the City has offered potential sites within existing commercial zones that are already developed with significant structures and ongoing businesses to satisfy Housing Element requirements. Concurrently the city is recommending downzoning the Christmas tree lot to an open space designation of Rural Residential on the 22-acre parcel. If developed, Moore suggests that the vacant, undeveloped parcel that was originally zoned for multi-family housing would address a significant portion of the affordable housing requirement.

"The City's actions would constitute a 'taking' of all reasonable economic use of the Dettmer property and violate the Dettmer family's constitutional rights for due process and equal protection," said Moore.

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