

Published November 24, 2010

Dreaming About Golden Gate Way

By Cathy Tyson



A group of residents point out their suggestions for future development on large maps of the Golden Gate Way and Plaza Park area. Photo Cathy Tyson

character and have potential for redevelopment that retains and enhances the spirit of Lafayette.

Four very large tables were set up in the Community Hall for business owners, property owners and concerned residents to add their two cents to often rambling conversations about the future plans for the area. Expanding the existing small Plaza Park at the corner of Mt. Diablo and Moraga Road to include what is now the 76 gas station, a recreation center and live-work lofts toward the gazebo were just some of the ideas discussed.

Lack of parking was a recurring theme of the evening that loomed large over most everyone's "vision." Complaints about parking in the area are real and justified. Srivatsa spelled it out: 1009 spaces should be available for parking, yet only 681 actual spaces exist.

While there was lots of neighborly brainstorming, not everyone agreed on a preferred plan. One person commented that there was not a lot of character on Golden Gate Way right now; a tablemate said, "I totally disagree." There was agreement however, regarding diversity of retail types and staying away from chain stores.

Greg Woehrle, one of a group of owners of the Park Theater, addressed the group, "Here we are again - parking, parking, parking. If the Theater reopened we would need 88 spaces - we have 10." He has asked neighboring business if their parking lots were for sale - all said no. Inquiring at the 76-station, he learned that they just signed a 25-year lease. "We can't do it alone," he said.

According to Woehrle, "Until we solve the parking problem - there can be no development." He urged the City to address the issue now. Looking for a way to make the Park Theater a vibrant hub of activity, Woehrle is open to suggestions; contact him at wirly3@aol.com.

Of the many suggestions bandied about only one table came up with something concrete. Table spokesperson Larry Blodgett reiterated that it's all about parking, "Because this is a special district - it could have its own parking regulations. He described it as a carrot versus a stick approach that would include a multi-level parking structure between Mt. Diablo and Golden Gate Way.

For those interested in participating in the civic process, On December 1 there will be a workshop for the City's Feasibility and Options Study of a Bicycle and Pedestrian Pathway along the EBMUD Aqueduct right-of way, 7:00 p.m. - 9:00 p.m. at the Community Hall at the Lafayette Library and Learning Center.

Reach the reporter at: cathy@lamorindaweekly.com

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A standing-room-only crowd of residents came together to chime in with their visions for the look and feel of the Golden Gate Way neighborhood twenty years in the future.

"Golden Gate Way could be like Rockridge or the Peal District of Portland, Oregon - it's an amazing opportunity" opined one resident at the last workshop for the Revised Draft Downtown Specific Plan.

"This is your chance to dream about the future," instructed Niroop Srivatsa, Planning and Building Manager. She encouraged attendees to define the character of the area and make suggestions for improvement, giving attention to Lafayette Plaza and Plaza Way, The Park Theater, parking and natural features like the creek corridor. The area doesn't seem like the thriving, pedestrian friendly, cultural and civic area on most residents wish lists at the moment. Containing a mish mash of apartments, the Library, auto body shop and convenience store and the usually empty Gazebo - a strategy to guide future growth could be a good thing.

Planning Commissioner Chair Tom Chastain defined the Golden Gate Way area and the Shield block as real assets to the community. Both the Shield Block, named for its shape, bordered by Mt. Diablo Boulevard and Lafayette Circle and Golden Gate Way share a unique