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Measuring Interest for Possible Road Repair Fix

By Cathy Tyson

So, how bad is your road? That was the question of the evening asked of a standing-room-only crowd of residents, along with a query as to whether or not residents would consider paying a tax to repair them.

"Everybody knows how bad they are," said Mayor Carl Anduri. "The question is what can we do to fix them?" He and the Residential Road Repair Task Force presented an overview of the current state of road repair and the background of how it got that way.

Approximately 5,000 Lafayette residents live on failed roads. "The older roads get, the faster they deteriorate - with a precipitous drop in quality after the first fifteen years," said Anduri. A PowerPoint presentation outlined the situation: Failed roads cost six times more to fix. Basic maintenance of a surface seal is \$14 square yard, but when a road is in really poor shape - it costs \$60 - \$85 a square yard for complete reconstruction.

Most of the city's roads were built during the sixties as the population nearly tripled - from 7,100 in 1960 to 20,500 in 1970. It's no wonder that forty-year-old asphalt is looking less than fresh.

Historically, it's been a challenge to get the two-thirds "yes" votes required for a tax measure to pass. A road and drain tax measure passed in 1995 that raised \$13 million with 68% of the vote, barely over the 67% threshold. That bond money has been spent, mostly on major thoroughfares - arterials and collector roads that serve the greatest number of residents - leaving 97 failed streets, almost exclusively in residential neighborhoods. Two other measures came close, Measure N in 2004 had 58% approval and Measure C in 2007 garnered 63.6%, just shy of passing. Proponents explained that without additional money, neighborhood roads will fail faster than the City can fix them, and cost more to repair due to their horrible condition. The current \$15.5 million dollar road repair backlog will escalate over time.

To solve the problem Anduri proposed a two-prong approach - have the City Council release \$3 million of the \$9.5 million from reserves as matching funds, and put a parcel tax of \$97 per year for a maximum of 10 years on the November ballot. Funds generated would be used on a pay as you go system, keeping it simple. If the tax is approved, all of the roads and associated drains will be brought up to good condition by 2022; at that point only regular maintenance will be needed.

When Mayor Anduri asked, "Should we go to the voters?" Everyone in the room raised their hands. One fellow described the proposal as a "reasonable compromise to get things done." An older woman chimed in, "I'm not going to be here in 10 years, the faster the better."

Lafayette's administrative budget has already been cut over \$500,000 per year and with only \$.08 of every property tax dollar goes to city coffers, there's no secret slush fund to address the repair issue.

Guy Atwood, along with John Hall, is spearheading the Task Force, "I'm encouraged by the enthusiasm and commitment of those that attended," said Atwood. "Having said that - with all the competing tax measures and in this economic environment, any tax measure requiring a 2/3 vote will have its challenges."

Atwood and Hall plan to gather signatures for a petition, with the help of supporters, and present the measure to the City Council to put on the November ballot.

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