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Letters to the Editor

Editor:

Thank you to Cathy Tyson for her September 28 article Zoning Issue Heading to Home Stretch. In pursuit of a few clarifications, I contacted Lafayette City Manager Steve Falk by e-mail shortly after reading Cathy's article. Mr. Falk was gracious enough to respond to my questions promptly.

First, I asked why city staff failed to downgrade the Christmas Tree Lot from APO to LR-5 as directed by city council in April 2010. The application for the Terraces of Lafayette was not submitted until March 2011 - city staff had 11 months to complete the downgrade. Mr. Falk shared the process was not completed due to staff restraints resulting from the workload of the Downtown Plan as well as staff reductions. Given the consistent and unwavering pressure to rezone from numerous Lafayette citizens, I am left to wonder why city staff did not manage to fit this important work in during those 11 months.

Lafayette belongs to the Association of Bay Area Governments. One of ABAG's many functions is to allocate the low-income housing needs distribution among Bay Area Cities. Lafayette's 2007-2014 ABAG low-income housing allocation is: 133 - Very Low Income, 77 - Low Income, 80 - Moderate Income and 91 Above Moderate Income = 361 total units. Mr. Falk shared that the developer, O'Brien Land Company, plans to build the 315-unit rental apartment complex, Terraces of Lafayette, as affordable housing for moderate-income residents. If that happens, the Christmas Tree Lot project would more than fill the allocation of 80 moderate-income units. This project is completely out of character for the area. There are currently no apartments or high-density housing in Lafayette on the north side of highway 24 in the Pleasant Hill/Reliez corridor.

It's important to note the City of Lafayette is currently reviewing applications for 677 units in 8 different projects throughout Lafayette. Mr. Falk told me, if built, these total units would satisfy 142% of Lafayette's ABAG low-income allocation. Why is our city council so hell-bent on changing the character of our city? These ABAG allocations are strongly encouraged but NOT required.

Jean Follmer
Lafayette

Editor:

Proper Use of MOFD Fund

On September 27th, the Moraga-Orinda Fire Board decided, 3 to 2, against purchasing a $2 million commercial building to use 55% as their district headquarters and 45% as a speculative real estate investment. It was a good decision for a number of reasons; not the least being it prevented an inappropriate use of funds.

The building was going to be purchased with money in their "Special Use Fund" which is funded by the Orinda and Moraga Fire Flow Parcel Taxes. Fire Flow Tax money, at least from Orinda taxpayers, was never intended for this purpose. It was not what the voters were told it would be used for when they agreed to the almost $100 per household tax back in 1997. (A full description of what was promised can be found on www.FairForOrinda.org.)

However, the Moraga Building was just one of six options. Three of the five remaining options also utilize Fire Flow Tax money, just less of it, which is just as inappropriate.

The best option for the district to consolidate its administration and save on that consolidation would be the "zero cost" option of moving its administration into excess space in the Orinda City Hall. While Orinda would charge MOFD rent, that rent just goes around in a circle back to the taxpayers who ultimately end up paying the bills.

And if the district has any extra funds at all, and this includes the $3 million it plans on using for rebuilding the District's least utilized station off of St. Stephens drive in Orinda, it should use them to pay down some of the over $50 million in unfunded employee benefit liabilities it has accrued.

Steve Cohn
Orinda

Lafayette Measure G

Editor:

People have asked me why doesn't the City of Lafayette have enough money to pay for their roads? The answer is fairly simple. Lafayette residents pay the same amount in property taxes as residents in other cities under Proposition 13, which was passed in 1978. However, our City does not receive the same amount back as other cities. We only receive back about half the property tax amount as other cities.

Why you ask? This unfair situation was created by State legislation ruling that property tax receipts would be allocated back to cities on the same basis as prior to Prop 13. Since Lafayette incorporated as a no property tax city in 1968, and thus received nothing, they received nothing after Prop 13, even though the residents now paid the same amount as other cities. Unfair? Yes.

What did the City do about this unfair situation? The City, together with the other no property tax cities in the State, and led by the efforts of former Lafayette Mayor Richard Holmes, lobbied for a number of years to change this inequity. These efforts finally resulted in Lafayette receiving about half of what other cities receive, or about 6.5% of the amount residents pay. Cities rely upon their property tax receipts to maintain their infrastructure and pay for

services. Also, in 1995 a group of Lafayette residents helped pass a bond measure to fix as many roads as possible, but 25% of Lafayette's public roads remain in failed condition, and the 1995 bond monies have been spent. Measure G, to fix our failed roads, will resolve this inequity for all residents living on failed roads and allow the City to maintain its remaining roads in good condition. Vote Yes on Measure G.
Guy Atwood
Lafayette

Editor:
Finally, a ballot measure that will return tangible benefits to everyone in Lafayette - Measure G, the "Fix Our Roads" proposal. Unlike many ballot measures that serve special interests or seem to send our tax dollars into the ether, leaving us with little more than hope and a clear conscience, Measure G will improve the quality of life for all people in Lafayette by upgrading our streets. The potholes and chunks of asphalt that are abundant in our streets are not only disgraceful, but they pose real safety hazards, especially for bicyclists. Deteriorating streets increase the City's liability for accidents caused wholly or in part by defective road surfaces. On the other hand, re-paved streets enhance vehicular, bicycle and pedestrian safety and mobility, increase property values by beautifying our community and reduce traffic noise. Twenty-five cents a day is a small price to pay for such a valuable and tangible benefit that, in addition, will provide jobs that are also badly needed. The "Fix-Our-Roads" measure is a win-win for everyone in Lafayette. I am FOR it.
Alton M. Lacy
Lafayette

Editor:
Measure G on the November ballot will ask Lafayette voters if they should collect a parcel tax of $89 per residential unit for ten years. This money is supposed to be used to reconstruct failed Lafayette roads and streets.
At a recent City Council meeting, the council approved a request from Moraga for $67,500 to help Moraga pave a parking lot at the Moraga skate park.
Although the money to pave a parking lot in Moraga could be taken from the excess funds in the Lafayette Park Department, the council decided to use money from the general fund, in other words, money that could be used to repair Lafayette streets and give it to Moraga.
If you take $67,500 and divide that by $89 you get 758.
This means that 758 homes will be asked to vote for a bond that will take $89 of their money and pave a parking lot in Moraga.
The city of Orinda has also been asked to help pay for the paving of the parking lot in Moraga. Orinda plans to take money from their park department and use it for this purpose. They will not use their road money to pave a parking lot in Moraga.
If Orinda can use park department money to pave a parking lot in Moraga, why is the city of Lafayette asking its citizens to tax themselves $89 a year for road maintenance and then giving this money to Moraga?
This $67,500 is available at the Lafayette Community Center and can be sent to Moraga by changing the wording in an ordinance.
I would suggest that before the City Council asks us to tax ourselves to repair our roads, they first fix the ordinance so that our road tax money is not spent on Moraga parking lots.
John Briggs
Lafayette

Editor:
Great Schools, and good roads, enhance property values. Measure G fixes Lafayette's failed public roads and drains in 10 years or less. Residents will no longer endure the potholes and local flooding that have frustrated them for decades. The problem, if not fixed now, will only get worse and become more expensive.
Once the roads are fixed, ongoing revenues can fund needed maintenance.
In 2008, an independent committee of Lafayette citizens who are financial professionals reviewed City expenditures and concluded that the City effectively and prudently manages its resources.
The City continues to act prudently. To maintain a balanced budget in a worsening economy, the City reduced staff and cut annual expenses by over $500,000 in late 2010.
The committee also stated that while Lafayette can commit $20 million over the next 10 years for road repair, additional revenue is needed to complete the $30 million amount required. Measure G completes the funding gap and is a fair and effective plan.
Passing Measure G will enhance property values, fix our failed roads and drains, and treat all residents who have not had their roads and drains fixed equally with those who have. Voting Yes on Measure G is the right thing to do for our community.
Sincerely,
David Van Etten
Lafayette

Reach the reporter at: info@lamorindaweekly.com

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