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Pathway Project Dead on Arrival at Council Meeting

By Cathy Tyson

No go at this time for the proposed Class 1 bicycle and pedestrian path along the EBMUD right of way property that meanders through downtown Lafayette. On November 14, the City Council considered the final feasibility study from a consultant team headed by Ian Moore of Alta Planning and Design. A CalTrans grant paid to examine the feasibility of a one and a half mile bike and pedestrian pathway just north of Mt. Diablo Boulevard from Risa Road to Brown Avenue that would connect with the BART station. Turns out that it is possible to build a path, but due to elevation changes, tricky intersections and retaining walls - it's surprisingly expensive.

It took more than a year to analyze technical, planning, logistical and regulatory issues that would impact the path, if built. A number of residents attended two workshops, offering comments and suggestions. Participants from EBMUD to Caltrans to the East Bay Regional Park District and BART gave input on engineering challenges and constraints regarding the pathway on the right of way over large buried water pipes in the heart of the city.

Consultants from Alta Planning segmented the proposed project into three phases to be completed over time and suggested most of the total \$6 million construction cost could be paid by grants. However, because grants generally do not pay for on-going maintenance, the City of Lafayette would have to find a way to come up with approximately \$1 million per year for upkeep. Potential options for funding maintenance of the path were outlined, but the City Council felt none were viable.

Discussion about the feasibility study was short and to the point. "It's a lot of money to get something that's not going to get a lot of use - I don't see a whole lot of benefit," said Council Member Mike Anderson, who also was concerned that the east-west trail wouldn't serve many Lafayette residents who are usually heading north and south from the BART station.

Council Member Brandt Anderson noted how valuable it is to have the study complete, "but it still comes down to cost/benefit analysis." To get an ADA accessible pathway, Council Member Don Tatzin pointed out, you only have to go a block down from the proposed path to the lovely wide, relatively flat sidewalks along Mt. Diablo Boulevard.

Reach the reporter at: cathy@lamorindaweekly.com

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