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Five Contenders Vie for Three Seats on the Lafayette City Council

By Cathy Tyson

Three of Lafayette's five City Council seats are up for grabs this November 6. One incumbent and four challengers have their hats in the ring for these four-year volunteer positions. Perks of the job include long hours and occasional snacks, no salary, no bonus, no health insurance. Two would-be incumbents, Carl Anduri and Carol Federighi, have stepped down after serving for many years on the City Council and other civic commissions. Newcomers to the potential position include a real cross-section of Lafayette residents.

With several large housing projects in the pipeline, the Woodbury, Merrill Gardens, Hungry Hunter townhouses, KB Home proposed condominiums and the recent ground breaking of Eden Housing's project for seniors, grappling with growth is the talk of the town. All five contenders were asked to respond to a question about how to deal with growth-related issues and associated challenges like traffic and parking. They came back with a range of responses and are presented here in alphabetical order.

A resident of Lafayette for more than twenty years, Mike Anderson has been serving on the City Council since winning a seat in 2004. He's married and when not working at the East Bay Regional Park District, as Assistant General Manager for Planning/Stewardship and Development, he enjoys making beer and working in the garden. The relaxed, unflappable Anderson has served on numerous subcommittees and has clearly embraced the never ending Monday night meeting schedule. In his spare time, Anderson is a Raiders and A's fan.

"As the popularity of our wonderful City continues to grow, we will need to focus on tempering the impact that proposals for development within both Lafayette and the Town of Moraga have on our traffic. It is essential that we maintain safe ingress/egress through adequate circulation and improve movement within our City by building a network of safe, unobtrusive walkways linking neighborhoods to schools and the downtown, as well as, a system of bike lanes to promote a viable alternative to driving. The creation of strong linkages to our regional trails should also be a high priority. However, no matter what we do to advance the use of these alternative methods of transportation, people are going to drive into the downtown to shop, eat, and socialize.

To address the growing need for parking, it is essential that we find ways to promote the consolidation of existing private parking areas to allow people to park their cars in one lot and to walk from there to the various shops and restaurants that surround it.

Overall, it is my opinion that our best opportunity to manage traffic and provide adequate parking in the City is through better control over the development that occurs in the downtown. With State and regional planning agencies requiring us to provide the opportunity for a specific number of additional housing units within our City, managing our future development must be achieved through a method that is acceptable to these entities. Our Downtown Specific Plan conforms to these requirements and will assure that development in this part of the City is thoroughly analyzed for traffic impacts, both direct and cumulative, on a case-by-case basis. With the establishment and implementation of the development guidelines required by the plan, I truly believe that we can address these growth related pressures while maintaining the small-town character of our downtown and supporting the desirable businesses which continue to play an essential role in the future economic sustainability of Lafayette."

Robert Lobron has lived in Lafayette with his family for the past seven years. His goals include finding the best ways to help make Lafayette a vibrant and safe community with beautiful parks and trails that serve the needs of all residents. He sees several challenges facing the community during the next four years - especially the state budget presenting risks to schools and the ability to maintain basic infrastructure.

In his free time, he's volunteered for the Parks, Trails and Recreation Commission. With twenty years of experience in financial management, Lobron is the Executive Director, Financial Planning for National Facilities Services; he feels his experience is an asset in helping to maintain a stable fiscal environment. He has a Masters in Business Administration from University of San Francisco and a B.A. degree from Temple University. He's responsible for planning and managing billion dollar annual budgets for a large health care company including facilities development and maintenance.

"Dealing with growth is an important part of the future of our city. We need to ensure that all proposed projects meet the requirements of the building codes but also meet the spirit of maintaining the semi-rural environment we seek to maintain. The Planning Commission and the City Council must evaluate projects with not only the incremental impact of one project, but the cumulative effect of all projects approved over a period of time. Perhaps the city should set goals for limiting the total traffic impacts of new facilities for some period of time, perhaps each decade. Parking requirements for new facilities should also be carefully managed.

Lafayette may want to expand the use of public transportation to reduce traffic. There may be opportunities for the establishment of small bus systems, like the successful senior bus program. Perhaps this concept could be expanded. School busing could also be improved to reduce driving kids to school.

Lastly, opportunities to improve biking and walking access will reduce traffic. Small projects to improve pathways and trails will further reduce traffic while providing the opportunity for people to exercise. It may seem impractical, but making it easier to access BART and shopping will reduce traffic and parking issues.

We need to balance development of new housing and business while ensuring we maintain the environment for the city we love. As a member of the Council, I will never forget that I represent you. I will work tirelessly to ensure that Lafayette is a wonderful place to live." Find him on Twitter at Rlobron or on Facebook at Committee to Elect Robert

Lobron.

Mark Mitchell has spent a lifetime in Lafayette. He's served on the Planning Commission for the last decade, reviewing projects in and around the city, and sat through literally years worth of meetings combing through the as yet undecided Downtown Specific Plan. Married, with two teenagers, he's been active in his kids' schools, Scouts' organizations and coached eleven different sports teams from t-ball to basketball to floor hockey and beyond. In his spare time, he's served on the executive board as treasurer and currently as Foundation President for Our Savior Lutheran Church.

"Growing up in Lafayette and living here for 50 years, I share the values of our residents. We savor our small town feel; want responsible growth that is sensitive to our concerns about traffic, parking, and protection of our views. We love our schools and volunteer or donate to help out. We require a prudent fiscal plan for our City government. We love Lafayette's semi-rural beauty and want to protect our ridgelines.

Serving on Lafayette's Planning Commission for the last 10 years (Chair, 2008), I have listened carefully to our residents and have consistently voted to protect neighborhoods, support senior housing, protect our hillsides and ridgelines and to maintain the small town feel of our downtown."

Mitchell is interested in moving up to the City Council for two reasons: the shift in focus to broader issues like the budget and regional concerns, expanding from the mostly land-use issues that are the responsibility of the Planning Commission, and the people side - he admires City Council members and enjoys hearing public testimony. "In general the public is very well informed and makes interesting and valid points," he said.

Mitchell would bring experience to the City Council via work on several important civic documents. He's assisted in critiquing and revising the General Plan 2002, the Hillside and Ridgeline Ordinance 2003, and the Downtown Specific Plan. He has served on the Wireless Communications Facility Ordinance (cell phone towers) Committee to create new rules to protect public health, safety, and preserve the beauty of Lafayette. He founded the Sweet Drive Homeowners Association and co-founded burtonvalley.com in 2001.

He graduated from UC Berkeley with a BS in Business Administration in Finance and Real Estate. He's been employed as a real estate broker since 1982, specializing in investment properties and property management.

"If elected to the Lafayette City Council I promise to be responsive to the concerns of the people of Lafayette." For more information, visit his website at www.mitchell4citycouncil2012.com.

Traci Reilly is the busy mom of three school-age boys and a dedicated volunteer. She and husband Kevin have lived in Lafayette for almost 20 years, initially becoming active with the Lafayette Juniors for a decade, then volunteering for a range of positions in the boys' schools from Lafayette Elementary to Acalanes. She has served on the Crime Prevention Commission since 2006, and has been its chair since 2008. Residents have Reilly to thank for her tireless efforts on the passage of City Ordinance 579, curbing door to door solicitation. She has a B.S. degree in Business Administration from Cal State Sacramento.

"Growth and change are inevitable, and if done right, both will ensure the economic vitality of our City. At the same time, we're challenged with preserving Lafayette's small town charm and appeal.

How do we achieve the former without sacrificing the latter? There has been a passionate debate about this for years. I believe we must find a balanced approach to growth that takes into account traffic, downtown congestion, parking, and protection of our beautiful views.

The Lafayette General Plan, which was adopted in October 2002, has four guiding principles that I believe are still relevant today.

1. Preserve and enhance the character of Lafayette as a semi-rural community.
2. Create and maintain a strong sense of community in Lafayette.
3. Protect the natural and scenic quality of our surrounding hillsides and ridgelines, creek area, trees and other vegetation.
4. Encourage the involvement and citizen volunteers in land use and policy planning.

We should encourage developers looking to build in, or near, the downtown, to have a plan in place to offset the additional traffic and parking that their project(s) will create. An example of this could be a free transit bus or van that runs along Mt. Diablo Blvd to shuttle residents to and from the downtown. This is one idea that could help alleviate the impact on limited parking and reduce the amount of vehicles in the downtown.

I also believe we should work to ensure that Lafayette isn't required to accommodate more than its fair share of housing allotments from State agencies, and that we are given flexibility on how we can reach our mandated housing goals.

"The Summer 2012 issue of Lafayette Vistas did a good job of summarizing the current situation as it relates to the development of a Downtown Specific Plan and what's at stake." Back issues of Lafayette Vistas can be found online. For more information on the candidate, visit her website at www.tracireilly.com or try her facebook page: Traci Reilly for Lafayette City Council.

Yolanda "Jolie" Vega wanted to be involved in politics since she was a little girl in Puerto Rico. She earned a B.A. from City College of New York, and a Masters from the Executive MBA program at St. Mary's College. This Gold Star Mom will be busy this coming weekend volunteering at the annual East Bay Stand Down event that brings together a range of service providers including medical and dental care for veterans and their families at the Alameda County Fairgrounds. She's currently employed as a BART Transit System Development Partnering Facilitator in Oakland and has served in leadership roles for various local organizations for the last 20 years including former Chair, Youth Council; Two-time President, Graduate School of Business Alumni Board, St. Mary's; Co-Chair; City of Lafayette Communications Committee; Chair, Circulation (Transportation) Commission Citizen Advisory Committee. She's raised two boys, both Eagle Scouts who later served in the Air Force; one was killed in Afghanistan in 2008.

"Our community enjoys a wonderful reputation because we care about our schools, our quality of life, and our environment. We are committed to protecting all of it. Because of this, our community continues to attract families

that also want to enjoy this environment.

Growth will bring vibrancy to the community. This is exciting; and, it needs to be managed carefully with input from the various stakeholders. It is a balance between growth and absolutely maintaining our sense of place. Several Lafayette businesses have come forward with plans to maintain and expand their property. To match what governs development in the area, we review the Downtown Specific Plan and identify what impact it will have in the overall feel of the city. We must weigh what benefit a construction project has for the overall good of Lafayette. Working with property owners and surrounding areas provides a venue for collaboration. The community has voice.

Therefore, different perspectives are heard and rather than one and only way of addressing growth, multiple views and concerns are aired. With any approved growth, the issue of traffic and parking is front and center. What alternative type of transportation can be offered to those who work, shop, and live in the area? Free Shuttle bus service from the Lafayette BART Station similar to what is offered in Walnut Creek? City Parking? Metered Parking? Timed Parking? Encourage people to walk or bike our beautiful city with open areas and park areas in and around town that offers seclusion. Connect downtown through our Parks and Trails.

It doesn't make sense to construct additional businesses or housing if people can't park or walk or bike. And, if the traffic is choking we lose the customer to another area. It doesn't make sense to construct them if our schools can't handle the additional enrollment. It doesn't make sense to construct if we don't have the police to ensure our safety on the roads and for our property.

So, slowly, very slowly, review the requests and take into account how growth affects the entire picture of our community. There is a reason why people move here - the schools, the openness, the family community, and our sense of safety. This cannot be ignored as we move forward. I commit myself to not ignoring any of it."

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