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Future of Bike Park and Manzanita Building Still Uncertain Spoiler alert: more discussion before decisions

By Cathy Tyson

A standing room only crowd filled with bicycle enthusiasts, along with bike park opponents, commented on the proposed 1.8 acre park tentatively planned for a hillside near the baseball fields of the Lafayette Community Park. With a history of emotional input at past bike park meetings and recent lobbying by both sides-including a nolafayettebikepark.com website, coupled with a flurry of pro and con email-Mayor Mike Anderson cautioned the audience up front that, "this is an important democratic process, not a rally," and asked attendees to refrain from clapping and outbursts.

After hours of passionate public testimony, the city council was slated to make a decision April 8 on a proposed re-building of the 60-year-old Manzanita building and controversial bike park. The full house at the Community Hall had dwindled substantially prior to the final word on both projects that came close to midnight.

If these topics sound familiar, it's because they were both up for discussion at a meeting in March, but since the Parks, Trails and Recreation department was scheduled to present its annual Capital Improvement Plan in April, a vote was postponed until the CIP could be reviewed. The CIP is a long range planning tool to help manage projected revenue and prioritizes projects; the current construction boom in Lafayette has boosted funding paid by developers in park facility fees.

Along with the bike park, the Manzanita building at the Lafayette Community Center was listed as a priority project in the CIP due to its rapidly deteriorating structure. The Parks Trails and Recreation Commission looked at a number of options and recommended a complete tear down of the building and in its place a more functional, flexible structure that would cost \$1.8 million.

Prior to making a decision on either item, city council members focused on the controversial bike park, questioning the increased costs - due to unexpected pricey environmental reviews, now up to \$342,000, and annual maintenance costs that could range from \$5,000 per year to more than 10 times that amount. Additional concerns ranged from the red-legged frog, allegedly sighted in 1994, to safety, city liability, insurance coverage and emergency response times.

Public comments were all over the map. The first of many public speakers stated, "A fear campaign is alive and well in Lafayette." Geoff Bellinger, a resident since 1971, described a flyer making the rounds filled with "considerable dis-information" that was "misleading folks." Jorge Torres called it a "BMX park to nowhere," other opponents suggested a soils study, questioned the overall expense, and worried about a lack of parking among other things.

Each council member had a unique perspective on the situation. Longtime civic servant and city council member Don Tatzin recalled that back in the early 1980s he was chair of the recreation commission when the land that was to become the Community Park was first purchased- everyone celebrated and the new park built a sense of community; but the proposed bike park has been divisive. "I'm not sure that there's an obvious way out of this conundrum," he said. "I don't think we can resolve all of those issues tonight."

New city council member Traci Reilly has three active boys, aged 11 to 17 - so she's familiar with driving them to various activities. She'd like to look at other options, preferably sports fields; and to see if it is possible to partner with other organizations, such as schools, to leverage city funds.

Offering a long-term point of view, council member Brandt Andersson opined that while it is true costs have gone up, the bike park's cost is less than what the city paid for the Community Park bridge, and a fraction of the cost of Buckeye Fields. While some residents are concerned about the proposed amount of earth moved to make the bike park, roughly 2,000-3,000 cubic feet, Anderson pointed out that is substantially less than the 63,000 cubic feet that was moved for the soccer fields. However, he agreed that there are "still some questions to answer."

The council's other new member, Mark Mitchell, is concerned about safety and soils, and is in favor of a continuance. Anderson commented that while he liked the proposed location, the "cost is a little crazy."

Ultimately city council members decided there were too many outstanding issues at this point to make a firm decision one way or the other, so they opted to continue the matter- giving city staff and council liaisons more time to analyze scope and firm up expense estimates for another presentation to the council at a later date.

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