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New Rules on Smoking

By Cathy Tyson

Taking a stand for public health, the Lafayette City Council strengthened and clarified existing smoking restrictions for the city. Lafayette joins several other cities in Contra Costa County and beyond that have expanded regulations governing smoking. The city is responding to evidence that shows there is no safe level of second-hand smoke.

A chart of 10 restriction options was presented to the City Council outlining distinct choices. Some items on the menu, like banning smoking at outdoor dining establishments, were an easy "yes" vote. Ditto the new rule that creates a buffer zone for smokers of 20 feet away from doors, window and vents. Overall the council showed some restraint, voting no on a ban throughout downtown Lafayette and not restricting smoking on public sidewalks. Existing rules already ban smoking inside of downtown businesses and on city-owned property. Public outdoor spaces, like the Plaza and for events like the Farmers' Market now ban smoking.

Acknowledging that smoking is a legal activity, but it may be a nuisance, Councilmember Brandt Andersson noted, "If it's too restrictive, this might encourage people to quit."

The more challenging issues related to multi-family housing, specifically new and existing buildings. As some apartment dwellers know, smoke can travel through electrical outlets, ventilation systems, and from the balcony of one unit to another in a complex. The new rules, when adopted, will ban smoking in common areas like hallways, doorways, balconies and car ports in existing buildings. In addition all newly constructed multi-family buildings, including buildings currently under construction, will be smoke free once the new regulations are adopted. When a new tenant moves into existing multi-family housing, the unit will become smoke free.

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