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Surprise, Positive Budget Adjustment

By Cathy Tyson

As any local realtor will attest, prices in Lafayette for homes have been going up, to the tune of 5.8 percent more than was anticipated on property tax rolls. According to the County Assessor's office, cities throughout Contra Costa County showed an increase in assessed value, from a low of 1.85 percent in Hercules to a whopping 14.61 percent in Richmond. Lafayette's portion of that revenue, which trickles down to city coffers, translates to an extra \$150,000 that wasn't anticipated.

"We estimate expenses aggressively and revenues conservatively," explained city manager Steven Falk at a recent city council meeting. "Property tax revenue came in much higher than anticipated." Staff had some items on the city's wish list for this pleasant surprise, and suggested the City Council take a look at: increasing the rate of sign replacement, slide repair and alternative staffing for the Public Art Committee.

Accelerating the street sign replacement project could potentially garner better pricing from contractors. Discussed during May budget talks in response to new regulations by the Federal Highway Administration that require easier to read, more reflective signage be installed, volunteers came together to decide color and type font to be used on improved uniform signs throughout the city. Originally the plan was to replace the signs one zone at a time to spread the cost out.

Staff also suggested funding a landslide repair, with the cost being shared 50/50 with Moraga, that the downhill homeowner would like to complete before the rainy season.

Wear and tear, along with roughly 30 years of rain on the hilly terrain above Moraga Road, have taken a toll on a Lafayette-owned drainage easement across a Moraga Road property created in the 1970s that connects with a similar easement across the city limit in Moraga. There's been substantial erosion and failure of a drainage channel; in addition, the canal impacts a trail that crosses the easement. Estimates from contractors are being formulated, but the approximate share for each municipality is expected to be less than \$75,000.

Finally, shuffling the staffing of the Public Art Committee liaison was discussed, moving responsibility from a Senior Planner to the manager of the Lamorinda Bus Program. With minimal dialogue, all three recommendations were approved.

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