

\$2.4M Building, No Mortgage

By Cathy Tyson



From left, Anne Wondolowski, chair of the Lafayette Community Center Foundation, Jennifer Russell, director of Parks, Trails and Recreation, and Mayor Brandt Andersson at the grand opening of the Jennifer Russell Building. Photo courtesy of Steven Falk

Over 100 residents along with local dignitaries gathered Oct. 1 to celebrate the grand opening of the modern, energy-efficient Jennifer Russell Building at the Lafayette Community Center.

What is truly remarkable is that the building, which will serve residents for many years to come, is entirely paid for; there is no mortgage and no interest being charged. Park Facilities fees, which have been accruing for some time, paid for by developers or homeowners who apply to the city for a building permit, cover the vast majority of the \$2.4 million cost of the building. That bucket of money can only be used for park facilities, not pothole repair, or library books, or another police cruiser. In addition, the Lafayette Community Center Foundation contributed to the cost, along with some funding from voter approved Measure WW.

The former building on the site, the Manzanita Room, was built in 1954 with adjacent Burton Elementary School. It was purchased by the city in 1984, after it had been shuttered in 1978, and sat vacant for six years.

City Manager Steven Falk described the old building as the city's "first attempt at a civic space where the people would practice democracy and representational government." For decades, all of the City Council, Planning Commission and Circulation meetings were held in the drafty, aging room that was erected before air conditioning, good insulation, seismic safety

and handicap accessible bathrooms were the norm.

Speaking of building name-sake and devoted employee Jennifer Russell, Falk noted that for more than three decades she has tried to make Lafayette better through a huge variety of recreation and sports programs that expand residents' minds, improve their health, and open their hearts. "She is a mentor. She is a friend. And in this day and age of short-term employment and selfie photographs, she is an example of longevity, dedication, and selflessness."

"It is hard to imagine what Lafayette would be without its parks, its trails, and its numerous, diverse recreation programs," said Mayor Brandt Andersson, who helped cut the official red ribbon. "Likewise, it is hard to imagine what those critical aspects of Lafayette's identity would be without Jennifer Russell. Over the past three decades, she has dedicated her professional life to them. The shiny new letters on the Jennifer Russell Building only begin to acknowledge the debt the city owes to her."

The 5,300-square-foot building designed by architect Alan Cross and built by JUV Construction has to serve many purposes: not only for summer camp and sports activities, but as a rental for group functions and private events like weddings and large celebrations. Civic meetings have been moved to the Community Room of the Lafayette Library and Learning Center, another civic treasure that opened in 2009.

Study of Possible Sales Tax Moves Forward

All five of the City Council members agreed to greenlight a committee to explore the reasonableness of putting an increase in the sales tax on the November 2016 ballot. Deadline for a recommendation one way or the other, is due by the end of this year.

Discussion at their Sept. 28 meeting focused on clarifying the mission statement for the independent group to take a long hard look at current and projected city

finances, along with sinking funds.

Recent Community Conversations illuminated residents' long-term needs and priorities. Coupled with priorities for the Downtown Specific Plan, there was a wish list of projects with little or no funding.

To clarify the report in the Sept. 23 edition of Lamorinda Weekly, the Chamber of Commerce is supportive of an investigation into the feasibility of a possible tax. C. Tyson

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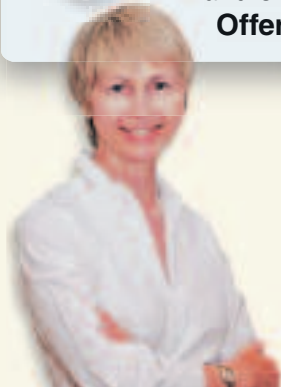
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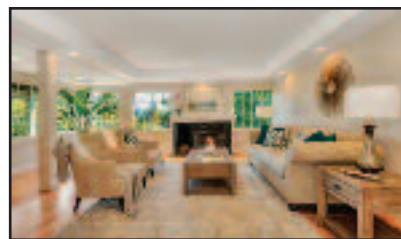
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