Experts discuss state of retail in Lafayette

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By Pippa Fisher



From left, John Cumbelich, Basil Christopoulos, Craig Semmelmeyer, and Steve Cortese discuss the state of retail in Lafayette in front of the city council and planning commission at a packed meeting July 23.

Photo Jeff Heyman/City of Lafayette

Of those stores that remain

meyer said many were problem-

atic, either because of ADA ac-

cessibility or parking issues or

because they may only be quali-

fied to be what they were before,

ed out that the narrow definition

of what can go into a retail space

in Lafayette precludes quasi-

retail operations, such as title

companies, real estate companies and dentists, which means that,

for example, a vape shop goes in

erty is better than a bad tenant.

downtown area has to be some-

pedestrian experience. And all agreed that Lafayette is ideally

Not surprisingly the panel

city codes to relax parking re-

parking. Cortese got a round of

Christopoulos, however, re-

tiate between uses when it comes

the people who move here most

highest priority. "If we allow the

future. Meanwhile residents are

heard on the subject at www.la-

The city plans to continue

In summing up, Mayor Don

All four experts concurred

Cumbelich agreed. He point-

flexible with usage.

That is the state of retail in must be experiential. To do that Lafayette and in the larger the city must bring in high qualregion? What is the cause of all ity tenants. "Tennant mix is evthe vacant stores in Lafayette? erything," Cortese said. And how can Lafayette attract quality businesses to fill them? vacant in Lafayette, Semmel-These were the questions posed to a panel of four commercial real estate experts at the July 23 city council meeting. Their answers touched on several considerations from high quality tenant and he suggested the need to be mix to convenient parking.

The council members joined members of the planning commission to listen to the discussion of these questions moderated by City Planning and Building Services Director Niroop Srivatsa. It was standing room only at the meeting, which brought in residents and business owners from next to a toy store. Christopoulos Lafayette and from farther afield pointed out that an empty propin the Lamorinda area.

The panel included Steve Cortese of Cortese Real Prop- that in order to attract people, the erty, whose notable local projects include the development and where people want to go and management of La Fiesta Square spend time and to that end they and Lafayette Mercantile, Basil recommended creating a better Christopoulos, president of C&H Development Company, whose local properties include the La- poised to create a social environfayette Town Center, John Cum- ment – a village – in a way that belich, chief executive officer of the internet cannot. John Cumbelich and Associates, and Craig Semmelmeyer, found- raised the parking issues in Laer and principal of Main Street fayette and the need to change Property Services.

Srivatsa pointed out that the quirements or to encourage four had a combined 120 years of people to open up their private retail experience.

The four experts agreed that, applause when he said that the overall, Lafayette was positioned city needs a public parking gawell for success based on its ex-rage. cellent demographics and high quality anchor tenants such as minded everyone that full parkgrocery stores, which draw peo- ing lots are actually great for ple back to the retail area several retail. The need is to not differentimes per week.

Semmelmeyer explained that to retail versus restaurant or serthe retail power centers of the vice. mall and the big box stores are the ones suffering today as a re- Tatzin noted that Lafayette's sult of the internet, much more great demographics are driven by than Lafayette, and said there is tremendous opportunity here. often for the great schools – peo-"Today is the time to realize the ple who place education as their wind is at your back," he said.

Cortese however, warned schools to slip, it has ramificaagainst the practice of some tions," he said. landlords who try to fill their spaces without consideration for the retail workshop series in the quality. He pointed out that in a time when anyone can purchase encouraged to make their voices anything online without leaving home, what they need to offer fayettelistens.com.

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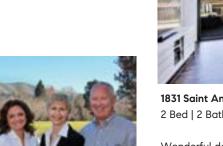
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