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## Lafayette City Council candidates answer questions ahead of the November election

By Pippa Fisher



Susan Candell

Photo provided



Teresa Gerring



Karen Maggio



Ivor Samson



Dave Smith

Lamorinda Weekly reached out to the Lafayette City Council candidates and posed four questions on key topics pertaining to Lafayette. Responses were limited to 50 words due to space constraints. The issues are complex, however, and to learn more, residents can attend the Lafayette Homeowners Council Candidates Night, to hear what all city council candidates and school board members have to say at 7 p.m. Sept. 20 at the Lafayette Veterans Memorial Hall.

Running for city council this year are Susan Candell, Teresa Gerring, Karen Maggio, Ivor Samson and Dave Smith.

Responses are listed below each question and are presented in alphabetical order of the candidates' last name.

1. How should city government handle downtown development and what is your opinion about the recent Deer Hill Road development proposal or the passage of Assembly Bill 2923?

**Candell:** Lafayette can and should act now to enforce balance between growth, parking, traffic and infrastructure. AB2923 is flawed and sets minimum zoning standards that our infrastructure cannot manage. The 315 Apartments at Deer Hill will cause irreparable harm to the environment and gridlock. Lafayette urgently needs to be proactive.

**Gerring:** Development needs to adhere to the General and Downtown Specific plans, to safeguard school, traffic and safety impacts. AB2923 is new law that allows BART to step in to build housing and commercial space on its property; I worked hard against this measure because it bypasses local planning.

**Maggio:** Lafayette's General Plan, the Downtown Specific Plan, and the Hillside Ordinances guide our city's progress. The plans and rules were developed after years of community input. AB 2923 would undermine these and our community's authority to control planning decisions near BART stations. Cities should band together to vigorously oppose AB2923.

**Samson:** Downtown development must be consistent with the General and Downtown Specific plans and must be scrutinized for impacts, especially on traffic. Proposed development on Deer Hill should be carefully reviewed for impacts, especially on schools, traffic and public health. I fought for retention of legal counsel with land use expertise.

**Smith:** As I've knocked on doors, I've heard concern about development negatively impacting our quality of life and frustration that resident voices are often ignored. Deer Hill exposed divides and AB2923 will further test us. It's been 16 years since we last updated Lafayette's General Plan. Let's unite around a collective vision.

2. Traffic is a growing concern among Lafayette residents. What do you think is the best strategy for tackling traffic, especially in the Pleasant Hill Road corridor?

**Candell:** As a Circulation Commissioner, I'm helping roll out the Downtown Congestion improvements. I advocated for residents on Reliez Valley Road to increase safety and reduce delays for their bus routes, and will continue this new regional cooperation and find real traffic solutions for Pleasant Hill Road without an enormous price tag.

**Gerring:** Pleasant Hill Corridor traffic is a regional issue requiring collaboration with other jurisdictions to implement solutions, like efforts to reduce Reliez Valley Road traffic. Continued collaboration with schools to implement recommendations of the Downtown Congestion Reduction Study, particularly pedestrian/bike pathways to schools, downtown and BART is also required.

**Maggio:** Planning tools such as Streetlight Insight access data from smart devices, determine root causes of congestion, and forecast future conditions. Unlike surveys and traffic counts, the tools determine trip origins (residents vs. non residents) and best ways to mitigate traffic at its source. I would deploy such tools to inform strategies.

Samson: Traffic congestion is a reality which, given geography and infrastructure, can only be tweaked. I advocated for traffic calming along Reliez Valley Road, which has helped somewhat. Because the ability to control traffic stops at the city limits, meaningful change along the Pleasant Hill Road corridor requires regional solutions.

Smith: With kids at Springhill and Diablo Valley Middle School, I've experienced painful commutes and difficulty of BART parking. We must rethink our traffic patterns, public transportation, and parking options. I propose a Lamorinda Jitney (regional transit option) that leverages technology, takes cars off our roads, and meets the needs of our working families.

3. Do you think transparency in the current city council is an issue? If so, how would you suggest improving it? If not, please feel free to take a moment to explain your position.

Candell: City council should not approve significant deals with utilities, developers or others without public communication and discussion. Conflicts of interest have been addressed for commissioners, which I supported. Lafayette residents are knowledgeable, involved, and well-informed, and I will advocate for more resident input and transparency, not less.

Gerringer: As a 19-year member of the Lafayette School Board, I believe in engaging the community in transparent, open and meaningful ways, and complying with open meeting laws that define what business is conducted in open or closed session. Given these rules the current council operates in a transparent manner.

Maggio: The Brown Act requires full disclosure in documentation of city matters and council activities. While the city may comply with Brown, the issue is in a lack of detail and content in its documents. I would ensure that all documentation is complete, clear, and fully covers the matters disclosed.

Samson: Yes. I fought for a stringent conflict of interest ordinance over strenuous opposition and have advocated other measures to improve accountability and transparency. I have a different, legal-based perspective, but more needs to be done to ensure that we have responsive municipal government that listens to its citizens.

Smith: The seminal issue is a lack of trust with many residents feeling outside and unheard. We must reimagine our community engagement strategies to better listen to residents. I have 15 years of experience putting the public back in public engagement and providing venues for dialogue that build empathy and trust.

4. Many residents have expressed anger about plans by PG&E to cut down hundreds of trees in Lafayette and have many safety concerns they want the utility company to address. How do you believe the city should proceed with PG&E regarding these issues?

Candell: As an engineer, I know gas pipeline integrity projects should include pipeline inspections, remote shut-off valve installation, old pipeline replacements, but not necessarily tree removal. The city should help residents protect their trees, listen to the CPUC regarding PG&E actions, and compensation spent on replacing trees in place.

Gerringer: The city (hosted) a forum with residents, PG&E, and the California Public Utilities Commission to address resident concerns and find common ground. Facilitating an open dialogue will result in better outcomes. Letting PG&E know our concerns and working with them is necessary to keeping Lafayette beautiful and safe.

Maggio: Our community cares about trees. The Tree Protection Ordinance protects them. Utilities should be required to follow the same ordinances that our citizens are required to follow. At the Special City Council Meeting on September 10th the city and PG&E (explained) how they are complying with the ordinance.

Samson: I represent clients in litigation against PG&E and receive benefits from PG&E due to past employment. Accordingly, I am recused from all matters related to PG&E and cannot comment. I do, however, encourage everyone to actively join in the on-going city/PG&E debate.

Smith: Our city needs to set the table for community conversations where PG&E, California Public Utilities Commission, East Bay Regional Parks, and our concerned residents can work together on jointly owned solutions that prioritize safety, our natural environment, and builds trust. I specialize in structuring cross-sector partnerships to find collaborative solutions.

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