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New mayor calls for respectful, civil collaboration as city changes guard

By Pippa Fisher



Newly elected Lafayette City Council members Susan Candell (left) and Teresa Geringer (right) join Mayor Cam Burks (center) at the Dec. 10 city council meeting. Vice Mayor Mike Anderson did not attend the meeting. Photo Jeff Heyman, City of Lafayette

It was all change at the packed Dec. 10 city council meeting - a meeting that recognized and celebrated the many years of service to the city by outgoing Mayor Don Tatzin and outgoing City Manager Steve Falk, along with Council Member Ivor Samson, and then installed newly elected council members Teresa Geringer and Susan Candell. Vice Mayor Cam Burks moved to the central chair on the dais to assume the role of mayor and Council Member Mike Anderson, although absent on the evening, took over as vice mayor.

First up was Tatzin to address Falk's many achievements during his 22-year tenure as city manager. Falk will be retiring at the end of the year. Noting amongst other accomplishments Falk's ability to "hire wisely," Tatzin remarked on the low turnover within city staff and also remarked on the healthy state of the city's finances, the fixed roads, the robust restaurant row, the pedestrian-friendly downtown, new sidewalks, public art, the new library and Veterans' building and described Falk as "visionary."

Samson, in his remarks before stepping away from the dais, paid tribute to Tatzin with whom, he acknowledged, he has had some vehement disagreements and to Falk, with whom he has not always agreed either, and he spent a while addressing the recent election. "Irrespective of how you voted," he said, "there is a common sadness that our city is divided and needs to be brought together again. I agree."

Referring to "absurd and irresponsible comments" on social media and "vile and disgusting personal accusations with no basis or accountability," Samson said that he hopes never to see such hatred and bigotry in the community again and said that he hopes that going forward people can recognize that ideas sometime clash and that it is healthy for democracy.

Tatzin then made his final remarks as mayor and noted that over his 33 years on the council, including seven stints as mayor, he has served with 17 different council members. He credited his wife, Ellen Reintjes, for her continued support. Tatzin talked about a theme that he has frequently referenced - the virtuous circle of Lafayette, saying that people move here for good schools and become involved for good in the community.

Burks paid tribute to Tatzin and noted that Tatzin always stressed the importance of civility, decency, respect and collaboration and expressed his hopes to support that legacy within the council.

As Tatzin and Samson left, Candell was sworn in by City Clerk Joanne Robbins and Geringer was sworn in by state Sen. Steve Glazer. Both made remarks expressing thanks to family and gratitude for being able to serve.

The new mayor's remarks focused heavily on the theme of transparency and collaboration, overcoming the "fracturing and divisiveness" that the community has experienced over the past several months. "The foundation of my vision for 2019 rests on taking action that will unify the city, stimulate respectful and civil collaboration and strengthen the community," Burks said.

"It's imperative that we, as a city council, foster an inclusive and transparent environment; one that prioritizes civility, respect, kindness and openness to everyone's opinion," Burks said. "Debate and alternative views are foundational elements of our democratic system. We need to affirm these elements in ways that do not alienate our fellow neighbor."

Burks reaffirmed that he is eager to focus on protecting local control on land use and development from a state legislature that he says appears eager to strip these fundamental rights.

He stressed the importance of reaffirming community values and committing to a dedicated plan to augment transparency in everything the council does.

Burks spoke too of an expanded emergency preparedness focus, particularly in the area of wildfire

preparation.

Additionally he said he wanted to address "development of robust senior community inclusion strategies, material relationship growth and the execution of holistic objectives in support of our exceptional schools, and adoption of innovative solutions to bolster our small business and commerce environment; (these) are all areas that I would like to see us pursue."

Burks expressed confidence in the two new council members and the vice mayor.

"These three individuals bring extraordinary skill and dedication to the city council," said Burks. "Along with a community eager to continue the Lafayette tradition of public engagement around every corner, I believe strongly that we are well positioned to have a positive and successful year ahead."

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