

City increases support for school crossing guard program

By Pippa Fisher

The city council voted unanimously, minus Council Member Susan Candell who was absent, at its Jan. 14 meeting to increase participation in funding for the school district's crossing guards to a rate of 50 percent.

The city historically split the costs 50/50 until fiscal year 2015-16 when the contract was turned over to the district to manage. The city continued to pay a flat amount of \$50,000, roughly half the cost at the time. However, with inflation and the addition of four extra guards, costs have ballooned over the past four years to \$179,453.

Even accounting for the increase of personnel, the average annual rate of increase per year is 3.8 percent. The

four extra guards were added in 2015-16 as a response to a couple of incidents involving students hit by cars.

Lafayette School District Superintendent of Education Richard Whitmore made the point that while dwindling state funding challenges the district, the crossing guards are on the front line for safety of children and he highlighted this as a priority.

Mayor Cam Burks says that the council's decision to increase funding to support the crossing guard program signals the first of many collaborative steps it will take this year in partnering with schools to ensure the "Green Hills, Great Schools" city motto – and community imperative – is sustainable and strong.

"I was fully supportive of this unanimous decision by the

council as it reflects the commitment that the city – and the Lafayette School Board – places on public safety on our city's streets and most importantly, keeping our kids safe," says Burks. "In December, I stated the importance of developing a deeper relationship between the city and our school districts, and I'm eager to see us come together this year to realize achievements at an entirely new level."

To maintain some control on costs going forward in line with staff recommendations, Vice Mayor Mike Anderson suggested splitting the expense at 50 percent starting this year, but with a cap in place of \$100,000, at which point the council would reassess the matter. The money will come from the general fund.



Crossing guards at the busy Springhill Road intersection last year.

Photo Pippa Fisher

And then again there were five – Steven Bliss appointed to city council

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Samson pointed to his experience on council – he has served as mayor in addition to serving on the planning commission and has been Lafayette Citizen of the Year. He was appointed to the council most recently in 2016 following former council member Brandt Andersson's resignation at a time when the city was faced with multiple lawsuits. For many, his work on the revised conflict of interest policy was pivotal with many favoring his determined approach to transparency. The new COI policy prompted five planning commissioners to resign at the time. For Samson's supporters who saw this as a breath of fresh air, this was a critical issue. Others felt the strict policy to be overreaching.

"A diversity of views on the council is important," said Samson "And I bring that," he said, adding that he is an independent voice who can

bring the community together.

Bliss, an almost eight-year Lafayette resident, stressed his professional experience with the California Budget and Policy Center in Sacramento and his work on the Housing Commission for the city of Menlo Park and as a member of the Allentown Redevelopment Authority in Pennsylvania.

Bliss told the council it is critical for the city to align its vision for Lafayette within the law of the state's legal requirements, referring to Senate Bill 2923 which will allow BART to build on its parking lots and he pointed to his commitment to open space preservation and to serious public discourse.

As the council discussed the candidates it became apparent that Gerringer, Candell and Anderson were standing by their original opinions. Anderson said that two years ago they needed Samson's legal mind. "Now we face new issues," he said, stressing that his decision was not personal.

It was Burks who broke the deadlock, backing Bliss stating the need for someone who can help with the "No. 1 threat coming out of Sacramento." With Candell voting against, it was 3:1 to appoint Bliss. As the vote was taken, several Samson supporters left the room, visibly angry.

Following the meeting Burks explained, "I decided that I would be that council member, as the mayor, to come to the middle, and, for the substantive reasons I stated involving Council Member Bliss's skills vis-à-vis what I consider the most serious threat to the core values of our city, I shifted from my initial position and broke the deadlock."

Burks says he is thrilled to welcome Bliss to the council. "Council Member Bliss's expertise will be critical as we continue to fully realize the impacts of the Bay Area housing crisis and work hard to do our part to enable development in a smart way, using

our public processes and commissions, that will sustain the character of our city."

Burks says that moving the city forward was absolutely essential. "It is my hope that the entire community will now move forward in a civil and respectful way. I'm grateful for the many members of the community who attended both meetings and provided valuable input regarding our appointment process and candidates. I'm also sincerely thankful to all of our applicants for their willingness to step up and commit themselves 100 percent to our city."

Bliss, a Midwesterner by birth, has lived in the Bay Area since 1990. He lives with his wife Malaika Stolle. Their three children, Leila, Theo and Ruthie attend Lafayette public schools.

"I'm really grateful to have this opportunity to serve as a member of the community on this council," he says, adding, "But it's with sadness

to have this opportunity in this way. As a city we're still in mourning for someone who offered so much. We would do well to bear in mind the love for Lafayette and civic engagement that Mark Mitchell represented."

Bliss hopes to support the mayor's call for public participation moving forward. He lists as his priorities strengthening the downtown, encouraging businesses as a partnership and making a downtown that's pedestrian and bike friendly.

He wants to ensure that development happens in a forward-thinking and vibrant way, using infill development to allow growth to be managed and to allow for preservation of open space. He's looking forward to the hiring of a city manager in the next few months and maintaining the city's healthy reserve.

"I'm looking forward to serving," says Bliss.

Lafayette's mayor takes it to the streets

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"I made it clear that it was our goal to do as much as we can, in partnership with the Chamber and property owners, as a city this year, to liven the downtown even more and encourage commerce. I emphasized the

council's commitment and the importance we place on local business."

On Saturday Burks visited all the stores in La Fiesta Square and the Mercantile, plus businesses along Lafayette Circle in addition to most businesses on both sides of Mt. Diablo Boulevard

from Trader Joe's all the way down to Whole Foods.

On Sunday Burks focused on the East End. He said he met fantastic folks who are committed to the community and had some great ideas about how to stimulate commerce in the East End.

"I've just been blown

away this weekend with our local business community and how dedicated they are to Lafayette," says Burks. "We are profoundly fortunate. It's crystal clear the important role these incredible people play in strengthening the special character of our city.

"It was one of the most rewarding and enjoyable few days I've had in Lafayette since I joined the council," adds Burks. "I'm incredibly proud of our local businesses and I am very eager to support them around every corner."

Terry Ring honored

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He is part of the Iron Man team – the group of volunteers who set up, take down and do whatever else is necessary behind the scenes at the Art and Wine festival each year. And he is this year's incoming president of the Lafayette Rotary Club.

"The number of hours he has donated is immeasurable," says Larry Blodgett, owner of Lafayette's Blodgett's Carpet and Flooring. "Ring has donated more than any check ever written in Lafayette in terms of hours spent volunteering. But he never takes credit."

Characteristically, Ring says he was humbled "and a bit mystified" at receiving the recognition. "It was an absolute surprise."

Blodgett, a fellow Rotarian,

worked with Ring and his crew on the design and installation of the stage at the reservoir.

"He is as honest a person as anyone I have ever met," he says, explaining that Ring is the type of guy who says what he means, and means what he says.

"He's always the guy schlepping stuff," says Blodgett.

Executive director of the Chamber of Commerce Jay Lifson agrees. "He is one of those residents in Lafayette that always gravitates to a place where he can roll up his sleeves and help," Lifson says. "From the Rotary Stage at the reservoir, and the Veterans Memorial to being a founding member of the Iron Man Team volunteering at the Art and Wine Festival, he is always the first one there and the last to leave."

Ring explains that he joined the Chamber of Commerce about 10 years ago. "As for the Art and Wine Festival, I enjoy it," he says, noting that it's a marathon – "40-50 hours over three days."

In fact, his reaction when asked about any of the contributions he has made to the community is to say, quite simply, that he enjoys it.

"Being raised in Lafayette, I like Lafayette. It's a good community. I like to contribute to the schools – that's important – and the chamber and rotary do that," he says.

"It doesn't all happen through government. Some of it has to happen through volunteerism."

Further information on the dinner in Ring's honor can be found on the chamber website. Reservations are required.

Info: <https://cca.lafayettechamber.org/EvtListing.aspx?dbid2=CALAF&evtid=8594&class=E>

Orinda Union School District Registration Information

Transitional Kindergarten and Kindergarten registration for children entering an Orinda public school in August 2019, will open on the following dates:

Monday, Feb. 4 Tuesday, Feb. 5 Wednesday, Feb. 6 Thursday, Feb. 7

Visit www.orindaschools.org to register online

Kindergarten students must be at least 5 years of age on or before Sept. 1, 2019, and if a child has their fifth birthday between Sept. 2, 2019 and Dec. 2, 2019 they are eligible for Transitional Kindergarten.

For additional information regarding registration instructions, please check the OUSD website: www.orindaschools.org

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