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Proposed Citizen Gas Safety Task Force moves one step forward

By Nick Marnell

The principals of Save Lafayette Trees formally requested Jan. 28 that the Lafayette City Council form a Gas Safety Task Force, and though the city has been sued by the grassroots organization, the council members agreed to agendaize the item for its last meeting in February.

SLT claims that PG&E has ignored public safety by refusing to begin important gas pipeline improvements and instead plans to remove trees that the utility says pose a safety hazard and cause problems around gas pipelines. The group sued the city and the utility for entering into a tree-removal agreement.

Despite the acrimony of an ongoing lawsuit, the group and the city continued pipeline safety discussions throughout 2018. According to SLT co-founder Gina Dawson, at a Nov. 13 meeting that included representatives of both parties, the utility, the California Public Utilities Commission and members of the public, Council Member Mike Anderson supported the formation of a citizen task force "for the optimization of pipeline safety in Lafayette."

Gina and Michael Dawson presented a draft proposal and a request for the formation of the task force at the January council meeting. The three-page proposal opens with the rationale for the creation of the task force. "Of primary importance is the lack of confidence in the current utility operator, PG&E, in that it has historically been found negligent of pipeline safety law."

The document outlines the work plan and guiding principles for the task force, concluding with a message likely directed at both the utility and the city: "Regain trust and attain verification of safe pipeline operation in Lafayette."

"Putting together a task force is just us deciding we want to do it," said Anderson, now vice mayor, and the positive follow-up comments of the council members indicated that they indeed want to do it.

Anderson and the Dawsons will collaborate on a final task force proposal and the item has been scheduled to head to the full city council on Feb. 25.

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