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Emotionally charged discussion over housing bill

By Pippa Fisher



Orinda Council Member Amy Worth, left, and Clayton Vice Mayor Julie Pierce address concerns about AB 1487 at the Lafayette City Council meeting Aug. 12. Photo Jeff Heyman, city of Lafayette

ensuring a fair "return to source" of funds - the city wants at least 75% returned to cities - and around a proposal for a separate legislative body in control.

Pierce explained that the bill as it was originally proposed has been "gutted." A second revision of its language was not available in time for the city council meeting, but she and Worth assured the council that all concerns had been addressed.

"Do you trust Assemblyman Chiu?" asked Burks, pointedly. "The same person who authored the BART bill last year?"

Pierce said she did trust Chiu, since he is aware that they will only support the bill if all the amendments are made. It was a point she made several times.

"This has been a rush job since day one," said Burks, echoing a sentiment shared by the other council members that the bill should be a two-year bill to give the public more of a chance to weigh in. Asking for a show of hands, Burks attempted to demonstrate that most residents are not familiar with this legislation. Indeed only a couple people in the well-attended meeting raised their hands.

"When is it going to stop?" asked Burks pointing out that for several years in a row such bills have been coming from Sacramento. "When are we going to be able to govern on our own in the face of this state legislature?"

Lafayette Vice Mayor Susan Candell's line of questioning took a similar path. "You are voting against what we elected you for - is that a conflict of interest?" she asked.

Pierce made the point that they chose to work with Chiu because it was clear that the bill would move forward "whether we like it or not." Instead she said that by working collaboratively they have made it more palatable.

Burks commented later, "Pierce's record on cheerleading on behalf of the state legislature regarding bills that would strip our local control on housing and development - thus changing the character of our towns and placing complete power in Sacramento's hands - is disturbing and poses a significant risk to Lafayette. While she might subscribe to this "75-mile screwdriver" from Sacramento, I certainly don't and will fight for our community until the very last second I'm on this council."

Burks added that he does not believe Pierce should remain the Contra Costa Mayor's representative to ABAG any longer. "She has made a conscious decision to truly misrepresent the policy positions of her county's constituents, thus leading me to believe that she is promoting her own ideological agenda. If this is the case, she has no place in public service."

Burks raised the possibility of pursuing a statewide referendum if the bill passes in an attempt to block it, which would require gathering over 600,000 signatures, an idea about which Council Member Teresa Gerringer said she had reservations. Gerringer said that it was important to explore all options including a

It's the season. Housing legislation bills are once again winding their way through various committees in Sacramento and Lafayette Council Member Cam Burks wants everyone to pay attention. In his view lawmakers in Sacramento are aiming to strip local land use control and he remains deeply mistrusting of their motives. At the Aug. 12 city council meeting Burks did not hold back in his sometimes hostile questioning of Orinda Council Member Amy Worth and Clayton Vice Mayor Julie Pierce as they gave a presentation on Assembly Bill 1487.

The council heard from Worth in her capacity as Contra Costa Mayor's Conference representative to the Metropolitan Transportation Commission and from Pierce, the Mayor's Conference representative to Association of Bay Area Governments.

AB 1487, a bill authored by Assembly Member David Chiu, is essentially one that would serve as a vehicle to raise revenue and allocate funds for affordable housing. While Lafayette has assumed a "watch" position on this bill, many concerns remain, among others around

referendum but that she also saw the importance of "working with the system."

The council also heard a brief update from their lobbyist, Alex Gibbs of Townsend Public Affairs, who explained that there had not yet been much movement in Sacramento since this was the first day back after summer recess.

Gibbs pointed out that Aug. 30 is the last day for fiscal bills (such as AB 1487) to pass through appropriations and, since Sept. 13 is the last day of the legislative session, it will be a tight turnaround to get it to the governor's desk for his signature or veto before Oct. 13.

Currently, according to a May 22 letter from the mayor to Chiu and Assembly Member Rebecca Bauer-Kahan, Lafayette currently has 190 multifamily units under construction, 70 multifamily units approved for construction, and over 500 multifamily units under review or soon to file applications, which he points out is over 750 units and nearly twice the Regional Housing Need Allocation of 400 units. Of that at least 15% will be affordable.

"We are doing our part more than our neighbors are," said Burks, adding, "We are fighting for local control, not to have that stripped away from us in Sacramento."

Information on legislation pertinent to Lafayette can be found on the city website at <https://www.lovelafayette.org/city-hall/legislative-agenda-2019>

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