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## Cancer Support Community shares plans at public information meeting

By Pippa Fisher



Rendering provided

A 5.75-acre plot of hillside opposite the Community Gardens, nestled near the Lafayette Reservoir, is soon to be home to the Cancer Support Community. Or at least that is the hope of CEO Jim Bouquin, who has worked hard over the past five years to get the project to this point. It is still in early days - plans were submitted to the city in early September.

Now, a month into staff review, the center is moving into a public review phase. At a Nov. 5 public meeting, held at the Lafayette-Orinda Presbyterian Church, Bouquin explained the concept and philosophy of the proposed center. The meeting was well attended and many stayed afterward to examine the renderings and diagrams on display, and to talk to representatives from Branagh Developers, Left Coast Architecture and Gates and Associates, Landscape Architects.

The CSC has operated for the past 30 years out of a building located behind a Walnut Creek shopping complex that it has outgrown. The nonprofit provides psychosocial care - a holistic approach promoting health and healing in mind, body and soul alongside medical treatment. All services are provided free to cancer patients, and survivors as well as caregivers and families.

The proposal is for a two-story building of roughly 12,000 square feet to sit lower on the hill, offering among its facilities classrooms and counseling rooms, children's and teens' activity rooms, a large teaching kitchen, a movement center, and a demonstration kitchen.

Less than 30% of the parcel will be developed. Behind the center, which is designed to be a gateway to the site and to reflect and connect with nature in its appearance, will be a retreat-like natural space with vegetable gardens, meditation spaces, an outdoor movement area for yoga classes, a natural children's playground and walking trails. Bouquin explained the company is treating the land with reverence. He said that there are currently 144 trees on site and although 14 small trees will have to be removed, the company will be planting around 40 new ones, mostly in the front for screening. All plantings will be native.

Bouquin says the CSC experts who offer counseling, education and support are some of the best in the country but equally important to the members is the value of being connected in a community for those touched by cancer.

He sees the importance, too, of the CSC fitting into the Lafayette community. "We are here to create a sanctuary for this community," he says, noting that CSC wants to engage and welcome others into its space to enjoy the trails and gardens.

Meetings such as the one held Nov. 5 are as much about listening to the community as presenting the plans. Bouquin listened to questions. "Your concerns are our concerns also," he pointed out, when asked about the potential for traffic increase.

Bouquin said that traffic studies would be done but noted that CSC has the flexibility to stagger classes to avoid rush-hour times, and that it would be looking into creating a left-turn pocket. He also said the company would be providing a shuttle from BART.

It is the issue of traffic that the Acalanes Valley Homeowners Association objects to, along with the precedent it claims this project would set, leading, it says, to overdevelopment of the neighboring, larger 62-acre DeSilva parcel opposite Oakwood Athletic Club which shares the same zoning.

A post on the AVHA website concludes, "It would despoil the existing greensward south of Mt. Diablo Blvd all the way to downtown. It would aggravate traffic congestion on Mt Diablo Blvd near the Reservoir and hasten the demise of the semi-rural character of western Lafayette."

The project is still at least three years away, during which time the CSC will move into a more open fundraising phase. The center has received several generous lead donations - the land was gifted to the company from Ray and Angelina Leal late last year during purchase negotiations - and CSC has received a \$2 million donation from local philanthropists Myrna and Dennis Cheney. This, coupled with the proceeds from the eventual sale of its current center, puts the CSC almost halfway toward its goal of roughly \$12 million. Bouquin says he is grateful and touched by the community's generosity.

The meeting was the first of several public outreach meetings planned. Bouquin encourages anyone with questions or interest to contact the center. He drew attention to the monthly site tours. The next tour is scheduled from 10 to 11:30 a.m. Dec. 14.

More information on the Lafayette project can be found at <https://www.csclafayette.org/>



CSC CEO Jim Bouquin holds public meeting Nov. 5 to present and answer questions on the proposed new healing center near the Reservoir. Photo Pippa Fisher

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