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Housing, jobs, transportation; critical balancing act, says mayor

By Pippa Fisher



Woodbury Highlands is in the preliminary stages of development. Photo Pippa Fisher

Sharp-eyed residents might have noticed a little more activity recently at the site of the long-silent, large hole in the ground on the corner of Mt. Diablo Boulevard and Dolores Drive. The Lennar Homes development is finally under way and will provide 66 condominiums plus 5,400 square feet of commercial uses including a full-service restaurant.

The three-story building will feature a 171-space underground parking lot. Ten of the units are to be offered at below market rate to income-qualified households. Completion is estimated for the end of 2021.

In fact the backhoes and diggers provide a constant humming through the length of Lafayette these days, with construction in progress also at Woodbury Highlands, at 3700 Mt. Diablo Blvd. above the Woodbury development, and at the other end of town, at the Tancready development on Brown Avenue.

At Woodbury Highlands the project will provide 99 units, 15 at BMR, with completion of the first 27 estimated for spring 2021. The Brown Avenue construction will provide 13 condominiums, two at BMR, with completion expected late next year. Since 2010 Lafayette has approved 247 units, some of which are now completed and occupied and some of which are under construction. Additionally there are another 603 units under review.

Certainly Lafayette has to abide by legislation coming down from the capital to address housing shortages. Recently the mayor and the city manager took a trip to Sacramento to meet with housing legislators in an attempt to discuss how Lafayette, with its unique set of challenges, including its designation as a Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zone, and lack of industry, can best comply with state goals including those of increased housing, and reduction in green house gases.

But although Lafayette has added more than 400 multifamily housing units in the last 10 years, 23 percent of which are BMR, it has taken a toll on jobs, with an estimated 615 potential jobs lost to development. And the loss of jobs at home is not helping get the 76% of Lafayette residents who work outside the city, out of their cars.

Mayor Mike Anderson says that the city acknowledges the necessity for additional housing in the Bay Area, as well as statewide to accommodate the needs of a flourishing tech-based economy.

"However, making that housing affordable and situated in a comfortable community that is proximate to employment opportunities is a complicated and yet critical balancing act," says Anderson. He says that bills proposed by state legislators that stipulate increased density without accommodating the role of local control over land use decisions, can upset this balance of factors that is essential for truly livable communities.

Anderson says that while working to meet housing obligations, Lafayette is encouraging a balanced approach that considers housing, transportation and jobs holistically.

Anderson points out that "building housing away from large employment centers without adequate transportation infrastructure seriously erodes the quality of life in our communities and works against achieving California's greenhouse gas reduction goals.

"We need to find common ground in the housing debate and do what is best for our community, the region, and all of the state to create more opportunities for living and not just housing," says Anderson.



Work has started on the Lennar project in earnest now. Photo Pippa Fisher



On Brown Street crews have started grading. Once site work is complete they will start the vertical construction. Photo Pippa Fisher

Reach the reporter at: pippa@lamorindaweekly.com

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