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Lafayette leaders request temporary relaxation of planning, development deadlines during SIP

By Pippa Fisher

The Lafayette city council at its April 13 city council meeting threw its support behind a letter from the mayor to California State Gov. Gavin Newsom requesting "relief from statutory deadlines governing land use applications."

Mayor Mike Anderson is requesting suspension of certain state-required processing deadlines during the COVID-19 pandemic while the city remains under a shelter-in-place order prohibiting public meetings in their usual format.

The letter explains, "to meet the current project processing deadlines, while grappling with the realities of the extended shelter-in-place order, we have had to use teleconferencing to hold our public hearings which severely limits the ability of our residents to fully participate."

"This action," says Anderson of a potential suspension, "would reconfirm the State's interest in the full participation of its residents in those local community issues so important to the well-being of their communities."

The letter follows a similar request by the League of California Cities dated March 22.

Anderson commented, "It's a very broad shot, but it is trying to get the governor to pay attention to the fact that public participation is suffering in a big way and it's not good for us or for the public."

Currently public comment on any subject must be sent in by email ahead of the meeting. Comments can be provided during the meeting by sending an email to cityhall@lovelafayette.org for city staff to read into the record (the usual three-minute time limit still applies). However many members of the public and the city staff agree this method is a far cry from full face-to-face public participation.

While this would affect all projects in the city, many residents are keeping their eyes specifically on the controversial Terraces project, which is due to come before the Planning Commission on May 18, rescheduled from April 27 "to allow the city's consultant and staff to complete the addendum and staff report," according to the city. The addendum to the certified environmental impact report will be published on the city's website on May 4.

The council supported the mayor's letter unanimously, with one city council member absent for the vote.

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