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## Lafayette to seek more information before STR ruling

By Pippa Fisher



The Lafayette Park Hotel and Spa is currently the city's only hotel. Photo Pippa Fisher

Lafayette city leaders voted unanimously to hold off and gather further information before making any decisions on the future of short-term rentals in the city. Although no action was taken, the discussion brought up several issues and was recognized as opening up important dialogue.

City staff recommended the introduction of an ordinance to modify language in the Lafayette Municipal Code to define a short-term rental. Planning Technician Melanie Erickson noted that the lack of explicit language in the LMC has caused confusion among residents with many unaware that STRs are not currently permitted in residential areas of the city.

STRs are generally defined as dwellings and/or accessory dwelling units that are rented out for less than 30 consecutive days, often through internet-based platforms such as Airbnb or VRBO. STRs can be hosted (when the owner remains on the property) or unhosted (usually the whole house is rented and the owner is not present). Erickson said there have been seven noise complaints recently around some of the properties in the city, although she noted those were only for a handful of

places. While it's hard to know the exact numbers of STRs, said Erickson, staff had found at least 10 units listed on Airbnb and five on VRBO on a date in April.

Erickson said that the impacts of STRs on neighbors such as noise, additional trash, and loss of parking together with loss of business for local hotels and the potential impact of reducing the number of lower-cost, long-term rental units with people choosing to use their ADUs for STR instead, would outweigh the benefits of convenience, increased revenue to local businesses as visitors spend in the city, and increased income to homeowners.

The council however, while all recognizing that the language needs clarification, did not agree that the time to do this was now. Neither did they accept that an outright ban would be the solution, especially after hearing from several members of the public who urged the council not to ban STRs. Many said they use their rentals mainly for out-of-town family members and rent them out for short periods at other times.

Council Member Cam Burks said that public safety has to be their number one concern and noted the tragedy in Orinda last year when several partygoers at an unhosted Airbnb lost their lives.

Vice Mayor Susan Candell questioned the timing, a sentiment echoed by Burks who asked why they would impact a source of income for an owner of a home at this time, in a depression. "Let's not put pressure or additional anxiety on the community," Burks said.

Mayor Mike Anderson suggested reaching out to those who had provided public comment to help the council understand, so they can make a better decision on how to regulate and make it work in a better way. "Hosted? Unhosted? Where? ... The first step is to gather information," said Anderson.

The item will come back before the council at a date not yet specified.

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