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Planning Commission vote on Terraces pushed back again

By Pippa Fisher

The continuation of a very long May 18 Lafayette Planning Commission meeting to decide the fate of the 315-unit Terraces project has once again been pushed back. The meeting that had been scheduled for June 15 was postponed to June 29, the city announced in a statement issued on June 10. The statement said that staff and the city's consultants are working diligently to prepare information requested by commissioners regarding traffic impact analysis and potential

impacts on emergency evacuations, and needed more time to complete that task. The staff report and additional information will be made available June 22. Unlike at the previous meeting, the planning commission will be allowing live public comment during the June 29 meeting. The highly controversial project proposed for Deer Hill Road has been in the works in one form or another since 2011. Attorney for the developer Bryan Wenter warned the city in a letter dated June 13 that under the housing accountability act and permit

streamlining act, the city is in danger of running out of time to make a decision within the 90-day period. However city officials say that in the case of a land use decision relying on an addendum to the original environmental impact report, it is not clear that the same time constraints apply. Nonetheless they say the city intends to move forward with reasonable expediency. Save Lafayette Founder Michael Griffiths says that staff would not need these postponements if they had done a subsequent EIR in the first place. "An addendum EIR

is insufficient and inappropriate, given the long time since the last EIR, all the environmental changes that have taken place and the new information that has come to light," says Griffiths. Griffiths says the project proposal has changed little since the original EIR, while environmental circumstances – traffic, air pollution, wildfire – have worsened significantly. "Consequently, a denial of the project would be the most appropriate course of action by the city council," says Griffiths. In his letter to the city, Wenter says, "Rather than

continuing to placate Save Lafayette and other project opponents who will raise any issue they can imagine regardless of how implausible under California land use law, the city ought to be prepared to take all actions necessary to schedule any remaining SB 330 hearings expeditiously." Following the June 29 planning commission meeting, it is expected that there will be an appeal brought before the city council whichever way the decision goes. The council will then hear the matter de novo and must make its decision within two meetings.

Embracing European-style street dining in COVID era

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Although indoor dining is to be allowed by the county from July 1, Lifson points out that as yet there are no actual guidelines for reopening. Given social distancing requirements, says Lifson, numbers of indoor tables will be restricted. "No restaurant can survive operating at 50%," says Lifson. He says closing an area of Mt. Diablo Boulevard would be a great way to welcome back the community. The council had questions, particularly about the cost involved, with Mayor Mike Anderson saying the costs of barricades, kits (suggested to include sanitizers, and signage), set up and take down, along with the city's assistance program, was raising a caution flag for him. To address that, the direction to staff was to move forward with a cost not to exceed \$10,000. But overall all council members were enthusiastic. "Let's get to phase

two as fast as we can," said Vice Mayor Susan Candell. A further note of caution was raised by Council Member Cam Burks and echoed by Council Member Steven Bliss about any uptick in cases of the virus. Burks said that the city needs plans to pull back by themselves, even if the county is not suggesting it, if trends worsen. **How are the restaurants faring?** Immediately several restaurants took advantage of the opportunity, with the Coop expanding their tables around the side of their restaurant on Fiesta Lane. Millie's Kitchen owner Eva Clement says they are open for takeout service from their recently renovated windows and put tables under a canopy in their lower parking lot. She says they closed for two months initially and took advantage of the time to do some improvements, including painting, carpeting and flooring.

It has been a struggle for restaurants. Big O's Cheesesteaks was an early casualty of the pandemic, shutting down for good. "It was very depressing at first," says Locanda Positano owner Enzo Rosaro. But he notes in the early days they turned their focus and energy into doing something good for the community that he says is amazing. They started cooking for others, coordinating with the help of Lifson to bring food to essential workers at Safeway, senior centers, the police, and to Lamorinda Village members. Rosaro, who has now put extra tables in front of his restaurant on Brown Avenue in addition to his patio area, says he has 80% of his staff back. When they were operating with takeout only, they were doing 20% of their usual business. He says that with outside dining they are now up to 50% and when they can open indoor dining following social distancing guidelines,

they should be back to 70% of usual business. Most of the restaurant owners agree that takeout dining is here to stay for a while. Hideout Kitchen owner J.B. Balingit sees the opportunity to enjoy quality food at home with family as a good thing. Balingit says he took some time at the beginning of the crisis to look at the balance in his life and family. "One thing this time has taught us, is the importance of better balance," he says. But he has not been sitting idly by during this time. In addition to offering takeout, he has taken the time to do some painting and redecorating in his restaurant. He has built a large bench on his deck area, increasing the amount of outdoor seating. And he has been preparing the indoor areas too, focusing on health and safety, for the reopening. Balingit is constantly trying to adapt and says he is creating a sort of marketplace

in the second area of his restaurant known as the library, where they plan to sell wine, and gifts such as cookbooks and candles. He has made a series of videos released on social media to document the times. "It's a reminder we're here," he explains, saying his restaurant is hidden. He doesn't spend time feeling sorry for himself. He describes the situation as an "inconvenience," saying it's so much worse for some other small businesses such as those in the beauty industry who have had no business at all for the past three months. Although he had been anticipating a growth year, with much of his capital expenses of his first five years behind him, he says they are lucky to be in this supportive community. And, says Balingit, they are here to stay. *Editor's Note: Future articles on reopenings throughout Lamorinda will be featured in upcoming issues.*

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<p style="font-size: 2em; font-weight: bold;">8</p> <p>Support team members including qualified service providers</p>	<p style="font-size: 2em; font-weight: bold;">18</p> <p>2020 closed/pending/active/coming soon sales</p>	<p style="font-size: 2em; font-weight: bold;">50</p> <p>Combined years of residing in Lamorinda</p>
<p style="font-size: 2em; font-weight: bold;">28</p> <p>Years of combined residential real estate selling experience</p>	<p style="font-size: 2em; font-weight: bold;">40</p> <p>Million dollars in closed transactions in 2019</p>	<p style="font-size: 2em; font-weight: bold;">680</p> <p>Closed residential real estate transactions - career</p>

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