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Letters to the editor

Want a less divisive community? Create better communications.

Anyone else feel like practically every public issue lately has divided us? Whether it be a global pandemic, national and state issues, or local projects such as The Terraces of Deer Hill or even building a play structure at Leigh Creekside Park, we are all collectively up in arms on social media and at public meetings, often at the 11th hour.

Why is this? Frankly, from my view as a concerned resident, taxpayer and parent it's because of the lack of "customer"-centric communications by our government and the public agencies that serve us.

I finally say this now because of the highly disappointing experience with the Lafayette School District and its communications regarding reopening schools for the upcoming school year.

From new incoming families not being added to the school district email list until the actual start of the school year due to what was conveyed as "budgetary constraints" to governing board meeting information and the actual PDF document outlining the reopening options being hidden on a third-party website that you need to click EIGHT TIMES in order to get to (and that's if you know exactly how to get there), it's no wonder why parents feel frustrated and left out of the conversation.

These learnings also apply to our city government as well. I love Communications Analyst Jeff Heyman's Almost Daily Brief and Weekly Roundup, but these stories are usually after the fact. How many local residents know that they can sign up for email notifications for city council and commission agendas? Do you even know where to sign up to receive them? And if you do get them, can you actually decipher what half of those agenda items are actually about?

Do our public agencies really want community involvement? Many times I really think not and I say that as a member of the Parks, Trails and Recreation Commission. We all need to do better.

If we make communication efforts more front and center and share information where our "customers" are, perhaps we'll have less infighting and less threat of litigation that could have been more easily prevented.

To be helpful, here are links where you can sign up for email notifications:

- City of Lafayette: www.lovelafayette.org/city-hall/e-notification
- Lafayette School District: email scarman@lafsd.org
- Acalanes Union High School District: <https://bit.ly/3h3pA2Y>

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Council should vote yes on Terraces of Lafayette proposal

The Lafayette City Council's upcoming appeal vote on the Terraces of Lafayette proposal gives our town a chance to move past a decade of debate and commit to building a more inclusive community. The Council should seize the opportunity and vote to approve the project.

Lafayette's Planning Commission approved the project on July 1st after reviewing exhaustive research into the project's impacts on air quality, fire safety, traffic and emergency evacuations. California's Housing Accountability Act (HAA) requires that the city identify a "specific, adverse impact upon the public health and safety" to deny the Terraces, and the Planning Commission found no such risk. Not only has the project been deemed safe by our local government, but its 63 affordable units will help address the affordable housing shortage and promote diversity in Lafayette.

We live in the midst of a glaring housing crisis. Between 2010 and 2015, the Bay Area added just one housing unit for every six new jobs, far below the recommended rate of one unit for every 1.5 new jobs. Median housing prices have nearly doubled over the past decade, while high construction costs and regulatory burdens encourage developers to build expensive luxury units. The HAA, which was strengthened through amendments in 2017, aims to counteract these trends by offering legal protections for proposals like the Terraces that allocate at least 20% of their units for low-income residents.

State-level lawmakers strengthened the HAA in part because the housing crisis perpetuates inequality in California. Housing policies during the mid-20th century powered suburban growth in the Bay Area that almost exclusively benefitted white families. Racist laws and lending practices prevented people of color from buying homes and building intergenerational wealth through home appreciation.

Even though the Fair Housing Act of 1968 outlawed explicitly racist housing policies, racial wealth and homeownership gaps persist. Nationally, the average black family's net worth is just over one tenth of the average white family's. Across the Bay Area, communities are more segregated now than in 1970; Lafayette is over 80% white. While building more affordable housing won't suddenly make Lafayette diverse, it will improve accessibility for those who have been historically excluded.

The affordable housing segment planned for the Terraces project-63 units designated for low-income residents-doesn't seem like much, but only 8 low-income units have been built in Lafayette since 2014. Approving the project would significantly increase our affordable housing stock. At the same time, rejecting the proposal would be fiscally risky: If the city council denies the project, Lafayette will probably lose millions of dollars to lawsuits. Judges have sided overwhelmingly with developers in cases related to the HAA.

Instead of fighting court battles Lafayette is unlikely to win, let's approve the Terraces and focus on making

the project the best it can be for our community during design review. After approving this proposal, we can shift our attention towards encouraging future affordable developments that best fit our town's needs while demonstrating our commitment to equity.

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Inclusive Lafayette

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