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City council candidates share their views on Lafayette hot topics

By Pippa Fisher



Four candidates, Carl Anduri, Cam Burks (incumbent), Gina Dawson and Farschad Farzan, contest three seats on the Lafayette city council in the upcoming election. Lamorinda Weekly asked for their comments on three questions.

Lamorinda Weekly: With the General Plan update that will influence the city for the next 20 years now getting underway, which of the following issues concerning land use, housing, downtown vibrancy, open space, and safety are most important to you and why?

Candidates: "All the issues are important and interrelated," says Dawson, a statement echoed by all candidates.

"Together they define a community," says Anduri, noting that safety from both crime and natural disaster, especially wildfire, must be a factor in every decision. He says that downtown vibrancy is essential to the city's financial health and to the sense of community, together with protecting open space that he says will be under greater pressure over the next 20 years.

Anduri notes that land use and housing present potential for conflict within the community and are issues that will require the most leadership and a thoughtful, collaborative approach.

Farzan and Burks draw attention to housing laws being imposed from the state capitol. Simply put, says Farzan, "There are local issues we have to consider when we are updating our General Plan." While recognizing the need for housing, he says, "We also have to protect our small community with local control because housing issues in San Francisco, Los Angeles, and Lafayette are not the same."

Burks points to his record as a council member of fighting the legislature through lobbying and coalition-building, on what he refers to as "the overzealous, 75-mile screwdriver of a state legislature . intent on assuming absolute power over our planning process and department, with no regard for a jobs/housing balance."

Burks notes too that the selection process for the GP update is important. "It's critical that we first select a diverse community team to lead our effort."

Dawson considers safety a priority. "Utility and infrastructure maintenance, traffic impacts on emergency response times, and an increase of fires and other natural disasters from climate change are all issues that our community should tackle to preserve our homes, protect our downtown vibrancy, and safeguard our community," says Dawson.

Lamorinda Weekly: Traffic has long been a concern in Lafayette - especially for the northeast quadrant residents. What steps should the city be taking to address the issue and, especially, what steps can the city take to improve evacuation scenarios, for example in a wildfire?

Candidates: Farzan, Dawson and Burks all stress the importance of signing up for the Community Warning System and frequent evacuation drills to help prepare for a wildfire evacuation. Dawson would like to see the city increase the number of annual drills and reissue the Wildfire Preparedness and Evacuation Guide on a regular basis.

Farzan notes the worsening traffic in Lafayette, with the worst of it in the northeast quadrant. "In Lafayette, not only do we have Pleasant Hill Road as a route of regional significance, but we also have four inter-jurisdictional routes in Moraga Way, Moraga Road, Mt. Diablo Boulevard, and the Lafayette-Moraga Regional Trail. We cannot fix our traffic issues on our own because it's clearly a regional issue."

Minimally, says Farzan, "I would propose pushing the CCTA to contract with StreetLight Data to get real-time traffic data analysis on which to guide our decision-making including working with local, sister, and county officials on improving our evacuation scenarios."

Dawson says the city must identify transportation safety as a priority then implement and enforce measures for traffic reduction and safe routes for residents to travel. "I recommend the city construct additional safe

walkways and bike routes and expand reliable public transportation options," she says as a way to address congestion.

Anduri says that traffic is a problem everywhere. "With respect to traffic in the northeast quadrant, there is benefit each time the city focuses on the area," he says. "The problem comes from topography, regional traffic flows and systems like WAZE. The city should make the northeast quadrant a priority focus once more with an emphasis on regional collaboration." But, he notes, "Other areas also need to be the subject of focused attention."

Regarding downtown traffic Anduri says the city should improve its infrastructure with measured implementation of the Downtown Congestion Plan, which he says was the result of at least four years of citizen, staff and consultant effort.

Citing safety as his first priority and complete confidence in Lafayette's police and fire departments, Burks says, "This is why I have decided not to `campaign' for this re-election but to instead commit the thousands of dollars I would have spent . to the Contra Costa County Deputy Sherriff's Association; the Contra Costa County Fire Protection Benevolent Fund; and the The National Institutes of Health, National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases," adding, "We do not need any political distractions during a time of a pandemic, catastrophic wildfires and a major local and national movement to advance social justice."

Burks says County Supervisors have done little to benefit Lafayette, regarding the traffic in the northeast quadrant. "We must engage these local jurisdictions ourselves, build coalitions and do everything that is legal to compel commuters to use main freeway routes such as the 680/24 interchange," and he wants to see police enforcement "to discourage commuters taking shortcuts."

Lamorinda Weekly: How would you propose to maintain Lafayette's "semi-rural character" while addressing concerns of a growing body of residents calling for inclusivity and diversity? Can semi-rural character be compatible with inclusivity and diversity?

Candidates: All four candidates want to promote the city's semi-rural character.

Anduri says while he would like the city to maintain a semi-rural atmosphere, particularly in its neighborhoods, he would also like to see it become more inclusive and more diverse. "I do not think these goals are incompatible," says Anduri. "However, I think we will need to reimagine what this means for our downtown corridor, where we should proactively guide the development of housing so that it is more inclusive. Also, we need to remain mindful that diverse citizens are drawn to a community where they feel welcome and included."

Farzan says, "Inclusivity and diversity should have no bearing on our `semi-rural character,' which we can and should maintain. We should be an open and warm community for everyone," and he goes on to point out, "Inclusivity and diversity help us live up to our values and create a stronger community, which just happens to have a `semi-rural character.'"

Dawson says, "The General Plan update provides an opportunity to reinforce policies which balance a focus on multi-family development and affordable housing in our downtown core close to public transportation and public services, while preserving our scenic hillsides and ridgelines, and protecting and enhancing our open space."

Noting that he created a new task force on racial equity, diversity and inclusion, Burks says, "I am passionate about advancing equality in our community and our Task Force is but one example of a start to a movement that has been needed for quite some time; we need to embed qualities and elements of greater inclusivity and diversity in absolutely every policy and decision we make as a city government." He adds that he is grateful Lafayette's two school districts and residents are passionate in this area, "which I believe will be a force-multiplier in sustaining our community values and semi-rural character," adding, "This is . why I have decided to redirect campaign funds to the charities above plus a donation, instead of campaigning, to the Others and Belonging Institute of Cal Berkeley."

To learn more: Inclusive Lafayette together with Sustainable Lafayette will hold a candidates forum at 7 p.m. on Sept. 25. To register for the webinar visit https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_Wf1FeqlsSjKK27u4Fe0c7w

Lafayette Homeowners Council will hold a candidates forum on Oct. 1. Visit <https://lafayettehomeownerscouncil.org/> for details on how to join the meeting. Zoom webinar link:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85049934441?pwd=em1nbGxWbU5nbHlicVY2a2k2Ym5iUT09>

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