

Letters to the editor

Lafayette Council contradicts itself on tree preservation

Is anyone else confused by the Lafayette City Council's double standard when it comes to preserving trees in the city? In November, the City sued and received a temporary restraining order to stop PG&E from removing 17 trees. A few months earlier, the City Council approved Richard Holt's building application and the removal of a grove of 13 mature redwood trees and a beautiful, large oak tree. Only Council Member Susan Candell recognized that Lot 66 is not suitable for development.

The 17 trees that PG&E wants to cut down are on a regional trail.

The 13 trees that the City is allowing Mr. Holt to cut down are on the Briones Trail easement.

The City claims PG&E is not following contractual procedures. However, the only difference between the trees that the current City Council members chose to protect and the trees that they are allowing to be cut down is Mr. Holt's personal influence. Mr. Holt is a former planning commissioner with deep political ties in Lafayette. He publicly supported Council Member Teresa Gerringer's election campaign, personally knows all of the City Council members, and has worked with staffers in the Planning Department for many years. Council members say they are not extending "special privilege" to Mr. Holt; if not, what constitutes "special privilege?" The City has granted Mr. Holt permission not only to cut down more than a dozen majestic trees, but also to build on a swale, ignore easements on the lot, reduce required setbacks, and invade neighbors' privacy.

It all comes down to legal bluff poker. The City knows Mr. Holt will sue (again) if they denied his permit like it did in 2009. At the same time, the City is willing to spend taxpayer money to delay PG&E even though the trees will eventually come down. We need to question this double standard.

Jeff and Pam Swarts
Lafayette

Continued response to Letter to Editor

On Nov. 25, a letter to the editor written by Jared L was published. We are a group of young women growing up in Lamorinda and have several concerns regarding their statement. As emerging leaders, we are constantly advised to be open minded. In the AUHSD, we attend cohort academy where we are edu-

cated on topics such as racism and implicit bias; not only to learn, but to also reflect upon our biases. Our initial reaction when reading Jared L.'s piece was confusion and anger at the ignorance displayed. On second review, we realized that this is our reality, and the reason we started our group, The UMBRELLA Committee, to provide near-peer diversity education.

Recent events have shown the true colors of our hometown. We believe Jared L. is not one individual; rather a group. This group's freedom to say and bring negativity to conversations is their hidden advantage, and that they can do so without taking full responsibility is privilege in itself. Every student is required to put first and last name on every assignment. This opinion piece has harmed various communities, bringing negativity into the homes of many Lamorinda residents. Jared knows that the article is inflammatory because they were afraid to put their last name and stand by what they said. Everyone knows we are women when they look at us, all shades of color, and we are proud of our identities. Go ahead; judge us by how we look, because we are the future. Take it from the young people in our community: change is coming. We agree with your call for unity, but we do not believe that change is dividing us. More than ever, we see people from all backgrounds coming together to fight for race education, re-examination of biases, and most importantly, truth. We hope you'll join us, Jared L. and all those with similar viewpoints, in building a more equitable and accepting community for all.

The UMBRELLA Committee (Understanding, Mentoring, Belonging, and Racial Equity through Listening, Learning, and Advocacy): Zoya Acuña, Siena Billings, Elsa Braunstein, Cassidy Keely, Melina Nath, Taryn Veronda

Charity, Tolerance, Understanding

I too read Jared L's editorial and the subsequent remarks in the Dec. 9 printing. My impression of Jared's editorial was far more charitable than the rebuttals. I discerned his intentions to be addressing that we judge people on their character and nothing else. My interpretation was that Jared was suggesting that no matter the identity people choose, the common factor that binds us all is our individual character. His message to my understanding was not condemning anyone but suggesting we have more in common than specific, narrow identi-

ties. Contrary to the respondents on the editorial page, I did not find his words inflammatory or disparaging.

What bothers me is that everyone calls for a conversation on the racial and social issues but would deny any voice to those with whom they disagree as was suggested by the respondents. To deny another a voice does not make a conversation but a discourse at best or a diatribe at the worst. Whereas conversation is an informal interchange of thoughts, a dialogue has a meaningful purpose and is a cooperative interchange between people. It is not a debate to convince the other participant they are wrong and yourself right on an issue. Rather, a dialogue is to gain understanding of the other person's ideas and does not mean I have to agree with their ideas but at least I understand their position.

As citizens we must be able to express evidence and argumentation on the issues. Equally, it means that those who espouse a position must be accountable for good reasoning. It is only by free expression with candid debate of our respective claims of injustice or social barriers will we refine our theories to gain nuance and understanding of the truths. When citizens cannot rebut or otherwise reconcile disconfirming evidence, then they must disavow their claims or risk being ignored by their fellow citizens. Conversely, when our own arguments fail, we cannot distract from the truth by shaming or making disrespectful insults to silence our opponents. No citizen should be afraid to speak

out and no citizen should be afraid to allow another citizen to speak.

No matter your thoughts about Jared L's editorial, we have started a dialogue of some sorts. I believe this is how the Federalist Papers started that was the platform to create our Constitution. Perhaps we can contribute to positive changes through this forum.

Chuck Boyer
Lafayette

A response from the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Committee

The Lafayette School District Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) Committee submits this response to Jared L's letter on November 25th, 2020. We urge our community to acknowledge that racism continues to deeply impact Lamorinda. Aggressions towards People of Color are perpetrated daily. Some are made public, while many go unseen and are experienced quietly. Some examples from our own community include the video that surfaced this past summer of students using racist slurs, a swastika painted on a Lafayette home, and the shooting and killing of a young Black man named Miles Hall, who was in crisis.

Lafayette Police Chief Alldritt has stated that the police receive many calls from the community reporting non-white people in the neighborhood as "suspicious." Is it any wonder that People of Color like Campolindo High School's new Associate Principal Vanessa Knight, may feel unsafe in

our community?

At the systemic level, the data shows that we have an opportunity to understand and reduce two disturbing trends: The academic achievement gap for LAFSD Black and Brown students, and the disproportionately high suspension rates for Students of Color in AUHSD. We are pleased that our schools are working on an anti-racism policy that states their commitment to examining existing curriculum for bias against marginalized communities, teaching anti-racism, and establishing a robust system which responds appropriately to acts of racism. We believe education is the most valuable tool to dismantle racism, and to help foster a sense of belonging for all. Student voices have shared the importance of integrating the history of all people into their curriculum.

A diverse, historical accurate education helps students to become empowered, knowledgeable and advocate for inclusion and equity. Our DEI Committee was established to ensure all of our students feel safe, thrive socio-emotionally and academically so that they may achieve their full potential. For those who want to learn more about racism in our community, please attend the school district workshops, read primary sources that speak from lived experiences or join the City Racial Equity Task Force. We invite you to learn with us.


Lafayette School District DEI Committee

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Mayor Mike Anderson

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Many spoke of Bliss' intelligence, good humor, compassion and noted appreciation for all the work he has accomplished on the legislative committee. He in turn and with characteristic modesty, likened himself to Bobby Hebb opening for the Beatles, as the conversation turned to Anderson's retirement.

"It's not easy," said Anderson. "But it's time."

He acknowledged that the council has been in the trenches on a number of tough issues, referring to challenges such as legislative issues and loss of local control, and he said that it's not over yet.

He expressed confidence in the current council and gave special praise to City Manager Niroop Srivatsa and her staff. "We have a very lean operation in Lafayette and yet we are able to get everything that we need to get done, done with a reserve

in our financial position."

Anderson's remarks focused largely on the community. He noted that this is an intimate community where people wave to you. "I think that going forward that will be a challenge to maintain that and that those of us here now are going to have to make sure we welcome new residents."

Members of the council thanked Anderson for his calm manner of leadership, for welcoming all, for his integrity, and for his ability to bring people together. As Lafayette resident Wei-Tai Kwok commented, for the example he sets in being able to disagree without being disagreeable and in the words of Lafayette resident Kathy Merchant, a most effective listener and facilitator.

Merchant perhaps summed up the general sentiment best when she referred to Anderson as "the ultimate diplomat."





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COMPASS

Wishing you all the best this holiday season and in the new year!

A special thank you to all of our first responders, essential workers and teachers for your dedication throughout this pandemic year!