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New mayor lays out goals for 2021

By Pippa Fisher



Mayor Susan Candell Photo provided

Lafayette's newly elected mayor laid out her goals for the coming year during the final meeting of 2020, highlighting public safety, housing, wildfire safety, term limits, and equity and inclusion.

Amid the challenges that continue to face the city during the pandemic, Mayor Susan Candell expressed confidence in the new city council at the Dec. 14 meeting.

Candell's first priority is public safety. "I would like to take this year to examine inexpensive and fast solutions addressing public safety and take action," she said, noting that she thinks the city has not been keeping up with public safety improvements around schools.

Next on her list of priorities was the upcoming housing element update, due in two years. Candell said the city must work out where to put 1,660 new housing units, increasing the current housing stock of 10,000 total units by almost 17% over the next eight years.

"But it's worse than that," said Candell, "because we only get about 15% affordable units per market rate unit, so in order to add the mandated 1,000 affordable units, we would need to add possibly 5,000 market rate units, which is 50% of our current housing stock."

Candell said she hopes the public and the new council members will weigh in on the direction of growth in the city, and while on the subject of housing, she included what she describes as "the issue of state housing mandates and the incessant attempt by Sacramento to remove local control for our cities," adding that as a city official, she expects that if the city is given a state mandate it should be accurate. "And all of us as taxpayers must demand that when a non-elected state agency interprets a mandate, we have every right to ensure that they have done their job correctly. Currently there is a coalition of city officials from both Northern California and Southern California looking into this issue," she said.

Noting that about half of the city falls into a Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zone, Candell said that wildfire safety was another priority for her, and she said, referring to a bill vetoed by the governor last year, that she would like to adopt parts of SB 182 to protect the city. Additionally she would like to see "Firewise," a certification program that neighborhoods can achieve to harden homes against fire, as they have done in Moraga and Orinda.

Candell, noting that she was a big fan of term limits, said she would like to explore whether there is any interest in pursuing this. "It can be a vote of council, or we bring it to the residents as a ballot measure in the election."

Finally Candell said she hopes to continue making progress with the work on the Equity and Inclusion Task Force addressing both inclusion and systemic racism and said she hopes to make this an all Lamorinda effort, reaching out to all of the community groups who promote diversity, equity and inclusion locally, and possibly creating a coalition to empower these groups.

"I'm going to take a moment to acknowledge that we are a deeply divided country based on our political parties," said Candell. "I include political intolerance from both sides as breaking down our quest to be a more inclusive city."

"So often what divides us is much smaller than what unifies us," said Candell, suggesting that both sides should bring the temperature down and simply allow each other to agree to disagree and to do so with tolerance, kindness and inclusion.

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