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New mayor lays out goals for 2021



Photo provided

Mayor Susan Candell

By Pippa Fisher

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 or-

der 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.

Lamorinda Village honors Lafayette resident Suzy Pak



Photo provided

Suzy Pak is this year's Ed Stokes Volunteer of the Year award recipient.

By Pippa Fisher

A global pandemic isn't going to deter one of Lamorinda's most proactive seniors organizations from celebrating the year and honoring all the volunteers on whom they rely. This year the Ed Stokes Volunteer of the Year award went to Suzy Pak at the meeting held over Zoom Jan. 14.

This was the sixth year for Lamorinda Village's event known as the Afternoon of Gratitude. The special award was inspired by and is given in memory of Diablo Foods founder Ed Stokes who was very involved with the community throughout his entire life. Diablo Foods remains very committed to its partnership with Lamorinda Village.

More than 200 shopping trips for seniors who are sheltering in place for groceries and prescription pickups, averaging at least six deliv-

eries a week, earned Pak the award along with a proclamation read out by Lafayette Mayor Susan Candell.

Pak, who also serves on the Lafayette School District Board of Governors, and volunteers for the Spirit Van program, was characteristically modest, saying it was her privilege and that it helps her to be able to give back during hard times, working hard in memory of her own parents.

The nonprofit organization also honored volunteers Andy Nguyen, and Andrea Appleton who volunteers with her teen daughter Avery, for their work.

Board President Larry Toy said that when the pandemic started LV stepped up and proved what they could do together. Serving a membership of 300 seniors, helping them to remain in their homes in various ways, LV started the year with 40 volunteers and now has around 200.

They started doing "check-in" phone calls to seniors and have started many friendships. Working with the National Charity League, they provided over 200 emergency go-bags, and now hold meetings over Zoom, including meditation classes and chair yoga classes. The village is currently partnering with several other organizations to bring COVID-19 vaccines to their members (see story, page A1).

LV Operations Manager Kathryn Ishizu says that facing the difficulties together has added a new level of genuine camaraderie amongst their members.

"Zoom has enabled us to be a close virtual village," says Board Member Andy Amstutz. "Lamorinda Village has matured into a real community, and the fundamental village concept has been demonstrated and proven."



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