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Downtown housing development heats up in Lafayette



Photo J. Wake

Work continues on a new three-story mixed-use development that will include 12 residential units at 210 Lafayette Circle in Lafayette.

By Lou Fancher

With new proposed state guidelines signaling a big jump in Bay Area housing allocation requirements, Lafayette alongside other cities, towns and counties in the region are protesting. In the next eight-year allocation cycle that begins in 2023, a draft proposal coming from the Regional Housing Needs Allocation process adds to the demand to meet higher residential development targets. Residential development and a high number of new projects in progress or under review in down-

town Lafayette are likely to be hot topics this fall.

Three of the 10 approved major development projects in Lafayette are located on or near Lafayette Circle.

Four years after the existing complex that included businesses and residential property was destroyed in a devastating fire in 2017, a new two-story mixed use commercial building at 100 Lafayette Circle has been approved which will include ground floor retail and restaurant spaces with offices above. Lafayette Planning and Building Director Greg Wolff says, "The property owner wanted to rebuild with commercial and office,

with the hopes of bringing back some of the former tenants. The project is approved, but not yet under construction. The project was designed by a local Lafayette Architect, Clay Fry of Studio FCF. It is the first new commercial building since the Chase Bank was approved in 2015."

The development project earns support from Save Lafayette President Michael Griffiths based on unique differences from other developments: "First, it was a property that burned down, and secondly, it's not on a main street," he says. "Parking is already difficult in that area, so that's to be considered. But looking at consistency with the General Plan and then the safety considerations, people can decide for themselves if it's acceptable."

The project at 210 Lafayette Circle, which is currently under construction, includes 12 apartments, including two below-market-rate (affordable) units. The 25,450 square foot mixed-use building will include 700 square feet of ground floor commercial live/work space and 26 parking spaces. Another approved four-story multifamily building of 20 units is a stone's throw from Lafayette Circle at 950 Hough Ave. The development will include 20 condominium units, three of which are below market rate, and 22 parking spaces.

Griffiths supports some of the city's approximately 10 major downtown housing developments, but takes exception to others. He worries about the impact of commercial tear downs and more housing. One project Griffiths highlights as most urgent for people's attention is the Corporate Terraces development, known as Lafayette Lane, located on First Av-

enue across from Whole Foods Market, which he says will essential drive out the small businesses currently located on the site.

"Those small businesses are not accommodated in the new map because the major margin is residential. Even though the corporate park already there is useful, it's better for the developer if it's only some commercial and mainly residential. Is that what Lafayette should be?"

The Woodbury Highlands development currently under construction at 3700 Mt. Diablo Blvd. is a 99-unit condominium project that includes a 5,500 square foot clubhouse and over 20,000 square feet of outdoor usable areas. The project, according to the city of Lafayette's Major Development Projects website, demolished seven existing commercial buildings totaling over 90,000 square feet.

"We often get reactivity and people coming to us when a project is already approved and being challenged," Griffiths says in a phone interview. Overall, Save Lafayette finds it concerning that developers granted by the city favorable exceptions and waivers for issues such as height, setbacks, parking, landscaping, and meeting CEQA requirements, are able to tear down viable commercial or mixed-use properties and replace them with housing at a profit.

Wolff says the city generally sees a high degree of community awareness about proposed downtown projects. "There are active community organizations, the Chamber of Commerce and the Lafayette Homeowners Council that all monitor such things and are on our distribution list.

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Lafayette Art & Wine Festival canceled

The Lafayette Chamber of Commerce board of directors announced on Aug. 13 that the 2021 Lafayette Art & Wine Festival is canceled.

In an email to the greater community, Chamber Executive Director Jay Lifson explained how the recent surge in COVID-19 cases due to the Delta

variant made keeping the promise of high safety standards at the event impossible.

"Because vaccinated people can not only get the virus but can shed it as well, it is difficult to see how we could keep people safe," he wrote.

Because the event is held in the

middle of downtown Lafayette, and cannot be fenced in, there was no way to enforce stricter protocols. "We considered making this a masked event for everyone. Hard to enjoy eating, drinking, socializing and dancing with a mask on," he said, noting that they additionally could not figure out a way to

enforce the masking rule. "Our staff, volunteers, police, CERT, security can not monitor every person who chooses to simply not comply with the rules. It is confrontational, dangerous and does nothing to create the wonderful vibe we have been able to enjoy."

- J. Wake



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