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Lafayette parents push to raise funds to pave safe path to Acalanes High School



Image courtesy www.saferouteto.org

By Sharon K. Sobotta

Lauren Herpich loves walking and biking to Lafayette Elementary School with her 5-year-old kindergarten son Connor. It's that accessibility that in part inspired Herpich and her husband to choose the downtown Lafayette trails area when looking for a place to put down roots in the Bay Area. If Herpich has her way, her son Connor will still be walking and biking to school in another eight years when he attends Acalanes High School.

Herpich is among a coalition of parents and community members doing their part to make a safer route to Acalanes High School a reality for pedestrians and bikers.

"Right now high school kids have to cross a highway entrance and exit in order to use the sidewalks," Herpich said. "There are so many kids in the downtown area and I want them all to have a safe and accessible way to get to school."

The safe path involves a secure, well-marked pathway down the center of Pleasant Hill Road. CalTrans is reportedly in support of the project because it utilizes medians already on Pleasant Hill Road. Herpich says the projected total cost is over \$3 million and the city has been awarded a grant for \$238,000.

While the funds have been allocated for this fiscal year, there's uncertainty about when they'll appear. Members of the Safe Route to Acalanes committee are in conversation with the city about a short-term loan, while also looking into possibilities such as using public art funds to install art on the pathway or seeking out additional grants. In the meantime the team is starting a yard sign sale. The signs, which are being offered for donations of at least \$25, have silhouettes of bikers and walkers and say "We support (a) Safe Route to Acalanes."

"This pathway will ultimately be the most cost effective and the most efficient option," Herpich said. "With community support, I believe we can absolutely get it done."

Why the rush given that Herpich's son is nearly a decade away from attending Acalanes?

"I realize how much time these kinds of projects take,"

Herpich said. "I want to be forward thinking." And as housing mandates go into effect, Herpich suspects the traffic in the already congested area around Acalanes High School will only get worse without a safe alternative to cars.

"This project is a win-win for everyone. I'm thinking about the kids in downtown Lafayette who need a safe way to school. People living around Acalanes would see a decrease in cars coming into their neighborhood," Herpich said. "This will take cars off the streets and reduce carbon emissions."

Nancy Hu is the mother of a kindergartener and a second-grader who attend Lafayette Elementary School. Hu's husband bypasses the busy Brooke Street area. Hu says that while she has every intention of supporting the efforts to build a safe route to Acalanes, she hopes the city will simultaneously consider how to create safe paths to the other schools in the district as well.

"My husband has seen a few close calls already," Hu said. "It's a good day when the kids get to school and make it back home safely. I get scared when I think about what the alternative is. Every day should be a good day."

Hu says the death of crossing guard Ashley Dias in front of Stanley Middle School is both disturbing and calls attention to the need for safety measures to be put in place so that children of all ages can safely travel to and from school.

"Let's have a safe way to Acalanes and let's also have a safe way to Stanley (and LES)," Hu said.

Although Hu doesn't have a yard to display a sign, she says she'll pledge her support to the Safe Route to Acalanes efforts any way she can.

"I think it's a really good idea," Hu said. "I'm just in awe of the parents who are spearheading the campaign as many of them have children as young as mine."

To learn more about the Safe Route to Acalanes fundraising efforts, visit www.saferouteto.org

More information about the Safe Route to Acalanes project can be found in the May 26 Lamorinda Weekly article: www.lamorindaweekly.com/archive/issue1507/Council-supports-proposed-Safe-Route-to-Acalanes-High-School-project.html



Lafayette Public Meetings

City Council

Regular Meeting
Tuesday, Oct. 12, 7 p.m.
Teleconference via City of Lafayette's YouTube Channel:
<http://bit.ly/LoveLafayetteYouTube>

Planning Commission Meeting

Monday, Oct. 4, 7 p.m.
Teleconference Meeting via Love Lafayette YouTube
<http://bit.ly/LoveLafayetteYouTube>

Design Review

Wednesday, Sept. 29, 7 p.m. Zoom
Teleconference Meeting via Love Lafayette YouTube
<http://bit.ly/LoveLafayetteYouTube>

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