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Mayor focuses on accomplishments during State of City address

By Lou Fancher

Relegated to an online delivery of the Feb. 10 State of the City Address, Lafayette Mayor Teresa Geringer spoke of school safety, wildfire prevention, PG&E PSPS events, emergency response capabilities, new inclusive and diversity initiatives, and funding from regional, state and federal sources the city is pursuing to support businesses, nonprofits and individuals as the city emerges from the pandemic. She also talked about General Plan updates and acknowledged city staff and her fellow council members for continuing to provide high quality services to residents. Geringer made note of the long hours logged by city staff and their contributions to what makes Lafayette great.

During a Q&A with leaders of several departments, City Manager Niroop Srivatsa, who assumed her position as city manager in 2019, said she has the privilege of leading the 44 full- and part-time staff members who often go above and beyond to fulfill their roles serving residents.

Administrative Services Director Tracy Robinson, Greg Wolff, Lafayette's Planning and Building Director, and Director of Engineering and Public Works Mike Moran all spoke about challenges they have faced during the pandemic, with Robinson noting that there are currently four engineering jobs alone to fill at the city.

Parks Trails and Recreation Director Jonathan Katayanagi, who has been with the city for 24 years, talked about the Lafayette Spirit Van for seniors, in-person and Zoom classes available for seniors, adults and children, after-school childcare and summer camps, and room and picnic area rentals at the community center. Events returning to the department include a Father-Daughter Dance (now called a Family Dance) on March 11 and a Youth Commission outdoor movie night (date TBD).

Katayanagi said the Lafayette Senior Services Commission is working on a new action plan and residents are welcome to email advice at lovelafayette.org. "They are working the AARP's eight domains of livability to improve the age friendliness of the city." Also on tap, a project with the Senior Services Commission and the Youth Commission called "Lafayette Rocks." Older adults and youth in the community will be joining forces to paint rocks and spend time talking to one another.

Katayanagi also brought up the three Lafayette pickleball courts located at the community center hockey rink and the free program that includes instruction from volunteers. Katayanagi said he sees people of all ages on the courts.

Moran said keeping the roads, drains, streetlights, traffic signals, Lafayette Library and Learning Center and other physical structures means Public Works has "a lot going on." Recent projects completed or in progress include paving a large portion of Moraga Road coming down from Moraga, reconstructing and paving a large portion of Reliez Valley Road, implementing traffic calming and safety measures around schools and more.

Police Chief Ben Alldritt said partnerships with the Chamber of Commerce such as the Rez Run continue and indicated a close collaboration between the department and the city. When asked about wildfire safety, Alldritt noted the collaborative effort between the Moraga-Orinda Fire District, the Contra Costa County Fire Protection District and the Police Department, and highlighted the Alert Wildfire camera system that now has over 30 cameras in and around the Lafayette area for early detection of wildfires. He invited people to visit alertwildfire.org to learn more about the program. The AM 1670 radio station he said is "alive and well," and he mentioned that the Board of Supervisors, acting on behalf of ConFire, approved a plan to apply for up to \$5 million in state grants to extend the MOFD shaded fuel break into Lafayette and Walnut Creek. Increased levels of attention have been implemented to improve safety and traffic awareness around schools in the area, and Alldritt noted that cameras have helped minimize criminal activity. "If you come to Lafayette to commit a crime, we will come find you," he said.

Other questions from the public involved Vision Zero, which focuses on street safety, and the desire for sidewalks, which Moran says the Local Roadway Safety Plan will address, but "we need a funding structure."

When asked about how the city is working to reduce its carbon footprint, Geringer spoke about the push to reduce reliance on fossil fuels and mentioned the work being done by the Environmental Task Force, which is looking into ways the city can convert from using gas-powered leaf blowers and other gas-powered equipment to electric. The ETF plans to bring a draft ordinance to the council and is also researching EV charging standards in new developments.

After questions from the public were answered, Stanley Middle School Music Director Bob Athayde introduced a video recording of the Stanley Symphonic Band to close the event.

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