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Planning Commission holds second public hearing on Housing Opportunity Sites

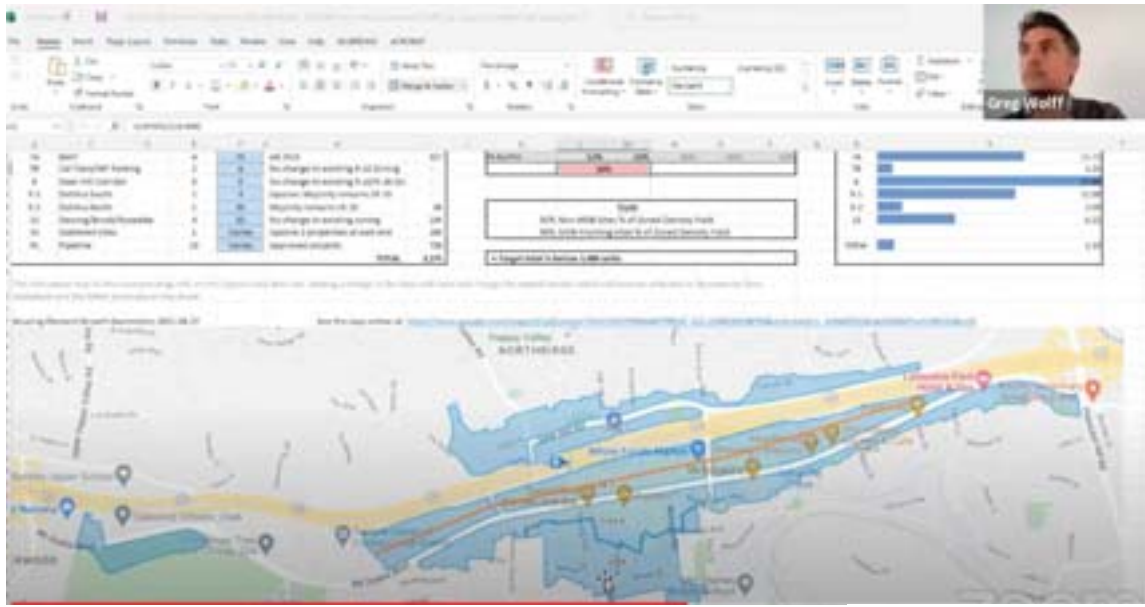


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Planning and Building Services Director Greg Wolff discusses RHNA numbers if northern portion of area parcels 1, 3, and 5 are upzoned to 50 dwelling units per acre.

By Jennifer Wake

At a second public hearing of the Planning Commission April 4 regarding potential opportunity sites identified in Lafayette that would meet the Regional

Housing Needs Allocation (RHNA) of 2,114 housing units plus a buffer, commissioners ended with a recommendation to staff that included property on the BART parking lots, but left out land on the Deer Hill

Road corridor and the DeSilva property across from the Oakwood Athletic Club (DeSilva South).

According to the staff report presented by Planning Director Greg Wolff, Senior Planner Renata Robles, and Housing Consultant Diana Elrod, the RHNA process is a requirement for all jurisdictions to plan for future housing needs, ensuring development can occur, should an owner or developer wish to. However, it is not a mandate for jurisdictions to actually construct the units. "State law requires that the Housing Element contain a site-by-site inventory of land suitable for development of all housing types, which are referred to as 'opportunity sites.'"

There are 10 areas where environmental impacts have been assessed as part of the Environmental Impact Report

and the Commission needed to identify enough area at appropriate densities to accommodate 2,114 housing units, plus a buffer. Senior Planner Renata Robles explained during the initial March 21 Planning Commission meeting that there are limitations on parcel size that are important toward meeting the city's RHNA allocation and that call for specific income categories, and proximity to transit access and to goods and services.

The Planning Commission reviewed five scenarios developed by staff following recommendations made by the General Plan Advisory Committee. The GPAC, chaired by Jim Cervantes and vice chair Matt Pease, has spent the past year and a half working exhaustively with the community to identify opportunity sites to meet the requirements of the 6th Cycle Housing Element, which begins Jan. 1, 2023 and ends in 2031.

Planning Commission Chair Anna Radonich began the April 4 discussion by focusing on the three areas that would have the largest impact on accommodating the city's RHNA allocation – the Deer Hill Corridor, BART, and DeSilva South – and asked whether each commissioner supported including those locations in their recommendation. Radonich, Commissioners Farschad Farzan, Gary Huisingh, Karen Maggio, Gregory Mason and Kristina Sturm all supported including the BART properties, and all agreed with GPAC's recommendation to exclude the area along the Deer Hill Road corridor, due to the fact that it butts up to single family homes and

would still require upzoning in other areas to reach the desired housing numbers. Huisingh and Mason said they were on the fence about supporting development on the DeSilva property, while the others did not support it, citing the fact that the property is not in close proximity to transit or goods and services, and would reduce open space. Vice Chair Stephen LaBonge was absent.

During the discussion, Sturm asked Wolff about whether the northern portion of the downtown parcels (Area 1, 3 and 5) that abut Highway 24 could be carved out and zoned at a higher density. Sturm suggested that increasing the density to 45 or 50 dwelling units per acre versus the existing 35 du/ac would offer a way for the city to meet its increased housing requirement without impacting the look of the downtown corridor, or needing to include changes to the Deer Hill Road corridor or the DeSilva properties.

Wolff agreed that this could be an option.

The commissioners also discussed the potential of increasing the BART parking lot area density from 75 du/ac to 80 du/ac, with the potential for mixed-use construction.

Housing Consultant Diana Elrod, who has worked with the State Department of Housing and Community Development on prior Housing Element cycles, expressed concern that the buffer for very-low and low-income housing wasn't high enough. "I don't want the city to have to rezone or go out of compliance in eight years."

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Pickleball popularity on the rise at the 'Rink' in Lafayette



Photo Budd MacKenzie

Beginner and advanced beginner Pickleball players gathered on April 9 at the Rink in Lafayette.

By Lou Fancher

Some of the swiftest movement in Lafayette doesn't seem to come from speeding vehicles but from the pace of Pickleball drop-in reservations and class enrollments.

Offered by the city's Parks, Trails and Recreation Department, the Pickleball pilot program at the multi-sport rink adjacent to the Lafayette Community Center currently allows for drop-in play seven days a week from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m. On two weekdays, paid lessons for the general public are available through the city's Recreation Department on two of the courts. The site also serves the sport's aficionados, intermediate players and

newcomers to the activity with a rapidly filling roster of classes for people age 12 and up.

Parks, Trails and Recreation Director Jonathan "ACE" Katayanagi, when asked about the court's completion and the next stages in the Pickleball program's history, said staff worked with the PTR Commission and City Council to approve the new surface, which happened in August 2019, that would allow for the new age friendly activity. "At that time there was not an organized big group of Lafayette Pickleball players," Katayanagi said. "It wasn't until the pandemic, when everyone was looking for more outdoor activities, that (the situation) caused a lot of players to find the rink."

Katayanagi says the sport's popularity has brought new life to the rink, but also unique hurdles to climb. With high demand, competition for rentals, and a continued shortage of fields for group sports comes an increased need for planning, rules, and regulations – especially during the program's largely self-policed drop-in times. Another challenge? The city's recreation program is not subsidized by the General Fund and is considered an enterprise fund in which the programs must pay for themselves through collected fees. As Pickleball became more popular, the need for staff or a contractor to set up and take down the court equipment was increasing.

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