



Published March 29th, 2023

Adjustments to city's Lamorinda Village partnership to benefit local seniors

By Lou Fancher

Parks, Trails and Recreation Director Jonathan Katayanagi, during a brief presentation at the council meeting March 13, said the city's partnership with senior services nonprofit Lamorinda Village was a cause for celebration. "We find ourselves in a wonderful position where we have a nonprofit, volunteer-based organization in town that's really helping look out for older adults in the community," he said.

At its June 13, 2022 meeting, the city council approved the budget expenditure of \$142,000 to partner with Lamorinda Village to provide senior services and develop a volunteer hub that would benefit older adults. Katayanagi and members of the city staff have been working with city council liaisons and the Village to determine the best application of funds that has resulted in a revised Membership Proposal. After a review and unanimous approval Feb. 23 from the Lafayette Senior Services Commission, the council was asked for similar consideration and approval.

Parks and Rec had already launched a few programs at the Lafayette Community Center, but needed approval from council for a suggested reallocation of \$142,000 in previously approved funding. The new plan takes that \$142,000 budget and allocates \$60,000 for city-supported memberships for Lafayette residents, and \$82,000 to hire a recreation director to support the Senior Services program.

The recreation director's responsibilities would include overseeing city programs and activities for seniors, counseling for members and their families, vetting senior service resources, and providing referrals to those resources and other services available to seniors.

The city-supported memberships would provide qualifying Village members whose finances and service needs pass a means test with full membership benefits at a reduced per month amount (proposed \$5 per month for single members and \$10 per month for couples to match current Village supported benefactors). When asked by Mayor Carl Anduri and Council Member Susan Candell how much the initiative could increase Village membership, which currently stands at about 260, Katayanagi said depending on how many new seniors join as single or as couples, the Village could see an increase of up to 170 people, doubling the number of current participants. In his report, he noted that the city views this program as a two-year pilot collaboration to evaluate the effectiveness of subsidizing Lafayette residents.

Lamorinda Village is a community-based network of people over age 55 living in Lafayette, Moraga, and Orinda. Its purpose is to connect seniors and provide meaningful and practical services that support and help seniors to maintain independence and remain in their homes as they age. Services provided include information about cultural, social, and educational events, activities related to health, wellness, and fitness, home-based help such as transportation, grocery shopping, meal preparation, minor household repairs, assistance with computer issues, or volunteer visitors for conversations and simple non-medical check-ins.

Referrals to a curated, screened list of other supportive services - gardeners, painters, attorneys, accountants, house and pet sitters, personal care providers, and more - are a valuable membership component, especially for seniors remaining in their homes.

As part of the collaboration with the Village, the city will actively assist in building community awareness of the Village, improve and deepen existing programming and activities for seniors as they share program and activity ideas and resources, expand the volunteer opportunities for Lafayette residents and thereby improve the referrals available to members, and work with the Village to determine if there are services they are able and willing to provide to non-members as part of their service to the community.

Anticipating the partnership indicates a need to "scale up the level of volunteer support." Katayanagi said now is a good time for new people to sign up and join the team. Village volunteers include Village members, college students, retirees, and other people from the community who commit to 1-3 volunteer hours, once or twice a month, if not more. Services provided range from driving a Village member to an appointment or shopping in the Lamorinda Spirit Van or in an individual vehicle, to visiting members, to changing light bulbs or helping with household repairs, watering plants, prepare a meal, helping with computers and mobile devices or assisting to complete office tasks.

During public comment Suzy Pak thanked Katayanagi and council members as well as the senior council commission for furthering the partnership and supporting connection for Lafayette residents. The council unanimously approved the reallocation of funds and directed staff to complete the city's agreement with Lamorinda Village.

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