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City plans response to HCD regarding Housing Element questions

By Lou Fancher

Lafayette housing consultant Diana Elrod on April 10 presented the city council with an informational update to the Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD) comment letter. The communication came in response to the city's 6th Cycle Housing Element (HE) that was submitted to the state on Jan. 31 for a statutory 60-day review. The most recent correspondence came March 29, with 28 comments from HCD that Elrod referred to as "a matrix of issues."

Seeking questions and direction from the council that will determine the content of discussions city staff will have with HCD consultants regarding their reply, Elrod said the council's input would also

guide research the staff conducts as the HE process continues to move forward.

Among the recent spate of 28 comments, two elements rose to a level requiring council direction before staff moves forward to research and address the issues. The first is the number of Accessory Dwelling Units (ADU) Lafayette has projected. The state has indicated it believes the number is too high, despite the evidence presented by the city establishing a foundation for the projections. The second issue came with some surprise, when HCD for the first time stated that the city must consider a "suite of programs" to address housing mobility in low-density neighborhoods.

HCD's comment said any revised ADU projection numbers should come with addi-

tional data and an analysis of the ADUs in 2022. The re-scaled assumptions should also reflect recent annual trends. Lafayette permitted 37 ADUs in 2022 (the average since 2018 is 17 per year) and, based on an uptick of interest in ADUs, Lafayette in the HE draft had projected an average of 35 units per year throughout the 6th cycle planning period. Even so, HCD recommended setting the number at closer to 20-25 units.

The second HCD comment referred to the city's "concentrated area of affluence" and proportion of households with high median income; both of which present mobility barriers to accessible housing choices and affordability. HCD stated for the first time that Lafayette's HE should include "a significant and robust suite

of actions (not limited to the RHNA) to promote housing mobility and increasing housing choices and affordability throughout the city but especially in lower-density neighborhoods." Elrod said the comment means that even if they meet RHNA requirements, HCD is requiring jurisdictions – not just in Lafayette but in other areas with similar demographics – to provide more housing opportunities in single-family home neighborhoods.

HCD suggested the HE should include more "missing middle" type housing with unit footprints scaled to the size of single family homes, but coming with densities around 20-25 units per acre. Examples are of such housing are duplexes, townhouses, and fourplexes. Staff is researching this

option while exploring how other jurisdictions plan to respond to similar or same comments received from HCD. They are also collecting HE's in areas that have been certified, such as Orinda, to discover and learn what those cities did to receive approval from HCD.

In both matters, staff sought comments and direction from the council and plan to return at a future meeting with a "bevy of options" for more concrete decisions about responding to HCD. Elrod said staff wanted to make sure the response they eventually present to HCD is one in which everyone is confident will be accepted. "We don't want to go around and around again without them saying, 'Yes, this is what we want.'"

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Earth Day Festival organizers and local naturalist focus on ways to affect change

By Jennifer Wake

Hundreds gathered at Lafayette Plaza Park during the April 23 Lafayette Earth Day Festival, hosted by Sustainable Lafayette, to learn how to live sustainably and take part in protecting our planet, while having fun in the process. Attendees listened to live music, participated in arts and crafts, and learned about bee keeping and other environmental issues.

Orinda Nature Area naturalist Toris Jaeger believes Earth Day should be a time of reflection, "putting our minds,

hearts and skills together to heal the Earth and ourselves.

"Our Indigenous People celebrate Earth Day each day and give thanks to the Earth for all the gifts that it gives us. Perhaps it is a custom we should adopt," she says. "We all know we are challenged with the issues of Climate Change. But it is not too late!"

Jaeger recommends the book, "Not Too Late," edited by Rebecca Solnit and Thelma Young Lulunatabua that features a series of writers that give solutions to consider.

"Give thanks to the Earth by walking more and driving

less, saving all our precious water, allowing no food to go into the landfill to create methane gas, change your diet from meat eating to a more plant-based diet," Jaeger says. "Create a compost system at home or make sure your food waste is placed in your green bin. Our major challenges are the use of fossil fuels for transportation and energy, the methane gas issue and the plastics that end up in our water ways and oceans. There are solutions!"

Everyone can recycle, reuse and consume less, she says. "Learn to live with less,



Photo J. Wake

not more. Help save all our remaining open spaces. We need them and so do all the flora and fauna. Stop using pesticides, herbicides and poi-

sons. There are sustainable methods for controlling 'weeds' and 'pests.' We must give our youth hope for the present and future."

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