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Letters to the editor

Meeting the need for affordable housing

Like many communities across the Bay Area, Lafayette is struggling to get its housing plan approved by the state. After its second submission was rejected on March 29th, the City now risks losing state funding and local control unless it submits a compliant plan on an expedited timeline.

Every 7 years, California cities are required to submit "housing element" plans to the state for approval. Until now, this has been a paper exercise. Since 2017 however, California legislators have passed a raft of housing bills requiring municipalities to actually demonstrate how they will build enough housing to meet their share of each region's need. Lafayette needs to show capacity for 2,114 units. Our community and city council have created plans for approximately 2,900 homes-on paper. In reality, Lafayette's earlier drafts have concentrated new housing along Mt. Diablo Blvd, with few substantial policy changes to facilitate actual housing development.

The state rejected these drafts for many reasons-first and foremost because the city lacks adequate incentives for new homes and because of concerns that putting all new housing downtown would exacerbate segregation. To their credit, Lafayette city staff and council members are considering major improvements in the next Housing Element draft. For example, the city is considering allowing missing middle housing (think fourplexes and cottage courts) in single-family zoned neighborhoods near downtown. These smaller units are more "affordable by design" and more appropriate for young people and seniors who lack affordable housing options.

Inclusive Lafayette also supports efforts to expedite the city's timeline for developing affordable housing on city owned land, and to limit the types of projects which require discretionary review. Meeting our housing obligations need not be a burden, but instead an opportunity to create the kind of community that most people in Lafayette want to live in: a community where families with kids can afford to live, supporting our school enrollment; one where seniors can find options to downsize while remaining in the community and retail workers can find an affordable home instead of the two-hour plus commute or severe rent burden that many endure now.

We must seize this moment and embrace the pro-housing future our community desperately needs.

The Board of Inclusive Lafayette

Jeremy Levine, Max Heninger, Chris Mickas and Allison Hill

Orinda needs an Inclusionary Zoning Ordinance

Thanks to Lamorinda Weekly and its reporter Sora O'Doherty, for the May 24, 2023 story about the Orinda City Council's overdue consideration of an Inclusionary Zoning Ordinance ("IO"). An IO would require that any new housing project include a specified percentage of affordable housing. A four person household qualifies for lower income affordable housing with an annual income up to \$100,000; for moderate income the limit is \$171,000. I am pleased that the council is considering such an ordinance.

But I am troubled by the quoted comments of many of the council members, who appear to believe that bringing affordable housing to Orinda is optional. It is not.

Only a few months ago, as required by state law (RHNA), Orinda adopted, and the state approved, a Housing Element that contains a plan to rezone Orinda. The state mandated that, of the total of 1,359 new units, 43% be designated for lower income and 16% for moderate income. But the City's designations are not binding on developers. For example, the city has upzoned the Country Club Plaza area from 10 (current zoning) to 55 units per acre and designated 43% of units on the site for lower income and 16% for moderate income. Housing Element Table 5-5A. <https://cityoforinda.app.box.com/v/6thCycleHEAdoptedCertified>

Yet a developer can take advantage of the 55 units per acre new density and build exclusively market rate or luxury housing without any affordable units.

Thus, the only way to actually get affordable housing is by enacting an IO.

Not mentioned in the story is that if by January 2027 actual building permits have not been issued at each income level equal to half of Orinda's RHNA at each income level, the mid-cycle consequences of SB 35 would come into play, which would dramatically limit the city's approval powers over new projects. At that point, zoning is insufficient.

Another reason for compelling developers to include affordable housing in new projects is that it is one of the only ways to increase diversity in Orinda, a goal presumably shared by the Council.

Nick Waranoff

Orinda

Anti-trans demonstrations

We have anti-trans bigots in Lafayette. They are demonstrating outside the elementary school on Fridays to indoctrinate kids to hate on LGBTQ communities. Bigots hate blacks and said interracial marriage would lead to the breakdown of society, but we legalized inter-racial marriage in 1967 and they were wrong. Bigots hate gays and tried to stop them from marrying saying it would destroy the "sanctity of marriage," we legalized it

in 2008 and they were wrong, Now they are hating on trans people saying they are pedophiles. Look bigots, you are wrong again. If you want to find proven pedophiles in dresses, please demonstrate in front of the Catholic Church as this is where the abusers are. Indeed, the diocese of Oakland just declared bankruptcy to defend itself from 330 cases of child abuse. But you won't do that, as you are not really about child abuse but about bigotry.

Matthew Fogarty
Orinda

The dismissal of head coach Bill Fraser

On May 31 Lafayette citizen Bill Fraser was dismissed from his position as Head Coach of the Acalanes Girls' Lacrosse team. The reason given by Associate Superintendent Amy McNamara and Principal Eric Shawn was essentially "sometimes a change is needed". No specifics.

Bill is an exemplary, upstanding and engaged member of the Lamorinda community. He's made lasting impacts on families through his coaching contributions at Acalanes, MOL, Lafayette Little League and his work with Boy Scout Troop 204.

In 2022, just last year, Bill was named the Lafayette Citizen of the Year and US Lacrosse NorCal Coach of the Year. On April 1, 2022, the Acalanes Boosters published an article titled "Acalanes Salutes Coach Bill Fraser, Lafayette's Citizen of the Year!." "The Acalanes athletic community is fortunate to have Bill Fraser coaching and mentoring so many of our student-athletes." "Bill's players consistently mention their appreciation for both his coaching on the field as well as his mentoring for life off the field." The City of Lafayette proclaimed, "Bill Fraser, through his coaching, creates community on and off the field and builds self-esteem and confidence of the young men and women in our community by encouraging them to be the best they can be."

What has changed since last spring? Was it because Bill publicly supported school board candidates who ran against current incumbents last November? Was it First Amendment protected opinions that Bill may have rightly and publicly shared? Was his dismissal retaliatory in nature?

Lamorinda, it's well past time to speak up against cancel culture in our communities. We have parents, students, community members, teachers and business owners who all fear sharing their thoughts and questions out of fear of being canceled. It's time to get off our collective knees and stand up. Speak up. Don't be a bystander. All voices deserve to be heard - whether or not you agree with them. There is no pride in being a passive coward and hoping that someone else will combat this insidious cancel culture. The person you're waiting for is yourself. People like Bill Fraser deserve our respect and support.

Jean Follmer
Lafayette

Reach the reporter at: info@lamorindaweekly.com

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