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## Cyber attacks and evacuation routes part of broader Safety Element discussion

By Lou Fancher



The Lafayette City Council at its July 24 meeting heard and discussed the General Plan Safety Element which addresses the city's preparedness and the community's resilience related to hazards such as drought, wildfire, hazardous materials transport, flooding, earthquakes, cyber attacks, landslides, the wide-ranging impacts on safety of climate change, and other matters.

Presented primarily by staff members Senior Planner Arly Cassidy and Safety Element consultant Eli Krispi, the plan, prepared with information from the California Environmental Quality Act and by state law, is required to be updated whenever the Housing Element is updated, but does not have a definite deadline for completion. The current Safety Element was adopted in 2002 and was last updated in 2009.

Image courtesy PlaceWorks

At the meeting, Cassidy and Krispi emphasized that the majority of the updates resulted from an effort to comply with current state, regional, and local requirements, address community concerns, suggest mitigation actions, and refine language allowing the city on an ongoing basis to consider new regulations or changing hazardous situations and communicate fluid but clear policies effectively. The importance of technology in city communications and infrastructure systems received secondary, but vital emphasis, as did the planning commission's work to be specific, but not "fixed" or restrictive in the language used and topics covered.

Krispi outlined updates to maps, new language related to evacuation routes, the results of a Vulnerability Assessment that analyzed people and assets most at risk and less able to "bounce back" after an emergency, the broad impact of climate change on things like wildfires that extend from property loss to chronic health conditions experienced by people who are unhoused or work outside to destruction of infrastructure systems resulting from downed power lines. He said two community workshops, seven meetings held with General Plan Advisory Committee (GPAC), and two Planning Commission hearings (one more is scheduled for Aug. 7) will likely have the commission forwarding the final updated draft to council for adoption at the Aug. 28 council meeting.

Importantly, staff's update process included the draft being circulated for review and comments to relevant agencies such as Cal Fire, ConFire, the California Geological Survey, the Lafayette Police Department, and the Lafayette Emergency Preparedness Commission. Because Lafayette contains zones with Very High Fire Hazard Severity designations, the California Board of Forestry also provided input. Throughout, the GPAC consulted with PlaceWorks, a firm that has worked with nearby cities such as Orinda and Walnut Creek.

Following the presentation, Mayor Carl Anduri's questions focused on cyber security and the planning commission's focus. Krispi highlighted two areas of concern addressed in the Safety Element: the potential disruption of city communication systems if they close down or are attacked during a public emergency; and the risks and impacts to public safety if any infrastructure systems such as traffic control or sewer systems are attacked and result in a loss of services during an emergency event. Later in the meeting, Council Member Gina Dawson and a member of the public asked if staff had consulted with other cities such as Oakland that have been the victims of cyber security attacks and if they might provide valuable information.

Council Member Wei-Tai Kwok focused on recommendations in the draft that appeared to apply largely, if not exclusively, to new developments. Existing structures have also been incorporated, according to Krispi, with language about policies pertaining especially to wildfire: maintaining defensive space and ensuring water supplies are working around existing homes and buildings. He said the overall emphasis on new developments noticed by Kwok was because the city is able to demand new requirements for all new development projects due to the state issuing more directives and policies that must be implemented.

Kwok also asked about camera systems and wildfire alert networks the city has begun to invest in and the lack of robust language in the draft related to those efforts. Also missing were mention of plans to work with other cities and agencies to highlight technology and to participate in the across-the-board movement to use satellite-based systems for wildfire detection. He and other council members asked staff to amend the draft accordingly. Krispi said those types of efforts could fit into the framework of Lafayette staying on top of wildfire issues, but staff advised not using detailed language about specific technology, which would allow for flexibility as new approaches and technologies develop.

Several questions pertained to maps and the specificity of earthquake fault lines and high fire hazard zones. Krispi and Cassidy said the maps are based on the best information available as of 2007 and people should always look for updates. Maps, zoning areas and regulations are often revised, as are policies for everything from ingress and egress evacuation routes to trees such as the Bay Laurel reclassified from "protected series" to "fire hazard" to the vulnerability of soft story or "up story" dwelling units located above parking spaces. Inspection schedules required of PG&E to ensure the safety of electrical and biohazard transport systems, Dawson suggested, also need to remain current and should be added to make sure the company is accountable and follows timelines.

Public comment had one resident encouraging council to consult with other cities about the ways in which they have enhanced their cyber systems to prevent future attacks. Another speaker stressed the dangers of elevated carbon emissions and the importance of acknowledging the impact on public health and safety.

Council's discussion following public input included several amendments: adding mention of high wind and its importance when it comes to emergency situations in Lafayette, enacting various map modifications discussed, and making a clear statement about investing in early warning systems and partnering with other agencies to detect wildfire or similar risks. Clarification of the language related to ingress and egress evacuation routes, the vulnerability of groups in addition to aging (senior) populations, tree maintenance and defensible space enforcement, and cyber and other infrastructure and technology issues were requested by council.

The council (with Kwok participating remotely) voted unanimously to continue the matter as recommended to the Aug. 28 meeting.

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