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Lafayette Mayor updates community on State of the City

By Sharon K. Sobotta

Some 117 people packed into a Lafayette Park Hotel conference room on Feb. 1 to honor the Lafayette Chamber's Business Person of the Year and to hear the State of the City address presented by Lafayette Mayor Gina Dawson.

In her State of the City address, Mayor Dawson congratulated Hollie Lucas-Alcalay - the owner of Hollie's Homegrown, the Lafayette Chamber's Business Person of the Year, and went on to discuss Lafayette's triumphs and milestones as well as spell out some of the challenges that are on the horizon.

Dawson reported that the state of the city is strong but that there are many fiscal challenges for the city to address on the horizon. "We made extensive traffic safety improvements. We completed a housing element required by the state as well as a safety element. We adopted ordinances for safe firearm storage and a ban on gas-powered leaf blowers to reduce carbon and noise pollution," Dawson explained. Dawson also mentioned a rain garden, the launching of a website and an impressive number of over 8,000 enrollments at Lafayette Recreation programs and more than 11,000 service calls from the Lafayette Police Department.

"This is just a sample of Lafayette's list of accomplishments - all while celebrating 175 years of history, which requires many hours of staff and volunteer efforts," Dawson said.

She reiterated that none of this would happen without the involvement of the community who engage with the public process. Dawson also shared that the city is in the midst of updating its general plan for 2024 to create the framework for re-envisioning Lafayette in the future. This was last done in 2002, at which time Dawson said the vision for current day Lafayette was created.

"Right now, we're at a pivotal time for change," Dawson said. "Our new challenges we need to address are fiscal sustainability and the planning to accommodate the growth ahead."

Dawson shared that the five-year budget to sustain and enhance the community while sustaining the target reserves at a level that allows for quick response to potential incidents forecast shows a 10% budget deficit, which translates to an annual \$2 million shortage. Dawson said this is in part because of increased costs for doing business and an increased level of unfunded state mandates.

"It is crucial that we address this \$2 million annual deficit in a way that allows us to continue providing services and programs to our community, while also maintaining healthy reserves to address future challenges. We're launching a public outreach campaign and are actively seeking your insights into budget priorities."

The second challenge that Dawson described is the implementation of the housing element, for which Lafayette needs to develop 2,114 housing units by 2031, where she said the efforts are being focused along the downtown Mt. Diablo corridor. "Our job now is to implement the housing element. To do so, means tremendous change - change that will come with many challenges." Dawson posed some of the questions the city is addressing: How do we do this in a way that respects the very characteristics that we love about Lafayette so that this community continues to thrive? How do we guide this growth around this development - not only in the housing cycle but also in creating a way for those who will be living in Lafayette by 2040 to thrive?

In 2024, the city of Lafayette is focusing on two elements - the land use element of the general plan and updating the framework for a safety downtown corridor - both of which Dawson promised will come along with ample opportunities for public input.

"I'm confident that we can turn the challenges (we face) into opportunities for this growing community. We can shape this future and embrace change with a shared vision for a thriving, sustainable, vibrant downtown for generations to come. I look forward to your active engagement with us. Thank you and Love Lafayette."

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