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Lafayette Public Meetings City Council

Regular Meeting: Tuesday, June 24, 7 p.m. Lafayette Library & Learning Center-Don Tatzin Community Hall Planning Commission Meeting Monday, July 1, 7 p.m. Lafayette Library & Learning Center-Don Tatzin Community Hall Design Review Monday, June 24, 7 p.m. Lafayette Library & Learning Center-Arts & Science Discovery Room

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COMPASS

Council solidifies next fiscal year's priorities

By Lou Fancher

City Manager Nirop Srivatsa, provided council at the June 10 meeting with an introductory review of the council's and the city staff's work-to-date on the plans for fiscal year 24-25, which begins in July.

In March 2024, the Council had held a special workshop to review the status of current work plans priorities, hear a presentation on the city's finances and staff capacity, and set three priorities for the

next fiscal year. The priorities were identified to be: developing a fiscal sustainability plan for short- and long-term needs; defining wildfire prevention, preparedness, and responsiveness and utility safety; and completing the downtown/Mt. Diablo Corridor enhancement plan.

Staff in March 2024 then clarified the necessary tasks and considered the priorities of the council. They reviewed the work plans in light of current staffing shortages and projected budget deficits to identify delays that might be necessary due to the considerable obstacles and established timelines.

In the council's discussion at the meeting, most of the focus was on issues related to the Mount Diablo corridor

and the concerns about staffing, funding, and timing that might be challenged by actually meeting the current deadlines.

Council Member John McCormick highlighted the schedule for completing the downtown design standards in particular, suggesting the September deadline was surprising and seemed too soon. Planning and Building Director Greg Wolff responded, saying, "You're right, it is a short overall time frame. The initial, Phase One objective standards took 10 months, but that was at a slower cadence." He said that because the housing element is critical and approval of the design standards is a required step towards completing it, the process is being streamlined. Council will

have the option to accept any changes made to the design plan draft or to further the discussion before formal adoption. Joint sessions held with referral bodies involved in the process would help to expedite the process, Wolff added.

Asked by council member Susan Candell about criticism that the city's point system design standards were not robust enough, Wolff said the objective standards could be revised to require development projects to achieve more stringent, clear standards. Wolff suggested that including examples, such as listing specific lighting or material requirements on a property, would be possible. The council agreed specificity would be better or could be added to supplement and improve upon the current points

system. Wolff said more information is readily available than when the first drafts were written, and it would be possible to implement more detail in the standards.

Council member Carl Anduri asked about the reality of completing this and other work plans under the city's three priorities, especially the plans related to downtown development along the Mount Diablo Corridor. He emphasized the importance of the multi-modality planning aimed at reducing the number of vehicles in the downtown core and the traffic impact it introduces. Projections show current housing development in Lafayette—if all the potential units are built—will double the number of people living in the downtown.

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It's Village. Of Course.

Ban on gas leaf blowers

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"I want to thank Sustainable Lafayette for making the blowers available to the community," she said.

While noting little likelihood of a purchase, especially if she can just keep checking out a hand-held device from the city, Walker acknowledged the clear benefits it affords to make easy work of blowing leaves for her composting.

But, considering the small size of her lot, that factor outweighs such an acquisition. What a person wants to use an e-leaf

blower for and the size of their property are factors Walker said make each purchase very unique.

The general feedback received by Warshaw's staff about the e-leaf blowers has been favorable. While some residents have voiced concerns over battery life to adequately do the job compared to gas-powered, and that the handheld is a little too small for a big property, others who share a landscape crew for their residences have been proactive and have already begun adapting, including having batteries kept on chargers. Crews themselves are also bringing more chargers to job sites in anticipation of the need.

Right now, Warshaw does not foresee the loaner program sunseting any time soon; there will

continue to be an opportunity for residents like Walker to continue checking out the devices.

Community outcry was the impetus for moving forward with the ban in the first place a few years back.

"Many Lafayette residents during the Covid years were working from home and they were complaining that the leaf blowers (they were hearing) were extremely noisy," said Lafayette Vice Mayor Wei-Tai Kwok.

So the matter was handed to the city's Environmental Task Force to pursue. The panel did extensive research into the transition from gas-powered leaf blowers and what have been the best practices, including going to nearby Piedmont to check out its equipment.

Kwok noted this is not a new issue in some regions of California, including Los Angeles in Southern California, to transition away from gas-powered leaf blowers. But Lafayette does represent the first city in Contra Costa County to move forward with a ban.

Because it is the residents who will be subject to fines, the vice mayor said it will behoove them to educate their landscapers and gardeners that the gas-powered equipment will not be permitted effective July one.

"Like any code enforcement, we are leading with education, and we hope the community will come along," said Kwok. "Most people will."

But after a couple of times being warned, Kwok acknowledged there will come a point when a ticket will be issued for repeated transgressions. The city will enforce this regulation on a complaint-driven basis. To report a violation, visit www.lovelafayette.org/city-hall/city-departments/code-enforcement/code-enforcement-request-form. Scofflaws are subject to standard administrative citations that start at \$100 for the first violation and will increase to \$200 for a second violation. Each additional violation within a year can see the individual fines go to \$500, and potentially climb as high as \$1,000 for each subsequent offense.

The municipal code includes some discretion for the code enforcement officer to impose an administrative penalty in some lesser amounts. Those factors include: frequency, reoccurrence and number of violations; the duration of and seriousness of the violation; good faith efforts of the violator to come in compliance; financial impact on the individual; and the impact of the violation on the community.

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