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This huge Acacia tree on Moraga Way has been trimmed, but still interferes with wires above it. The trunk is split and the tree is in poor health. Photo Sora O'Doherty

Winter storms lead residents to wonder about tree safety

By Sora O'Doherty

After Lamorinda was battered by unusually wet and windy winter storms, Lamorinda residents, as well as governments and utilities, are wondering about the safety of the many trees that grace, and sometimes threaten, Lamorinda neighborhoods. High winds and saturated ground have already claimed many large trees in the area. Assessing trees for potential problems has become paramount. The Lamorinda Weekly spent some time with the president of East Bay Tree Service, Victor Ghavamzadeh, learning about tree assessment.

Many times a homeowner will notice changes in their tree that make them

afraid that the tree has become a danger. Changes might affect the trunk of the tree, there might be discoloration on the bark, or mushrooms growing near the roots. Soil conditions around the tree may have deteriorated, and the tree might be leaning where before it was straight, or leaning more than it did previously.

Ghavamzadeh explained that there are four classifications of tree danger: imminent, probable, possible and un-possible. A tree is an imminent danger if it has failed or is about to fail. This is indicated by the tree being uprooted or if the roots are not holding, or if the tree is suffering bark inclusions, cracks, or splitting.

Probable danger is indicated if the tree has a good chance of falling, because, for example, ... continued on Page A7

Advertising



Summer Camps	B2-B4
Not to be missed	B8
How to contact us	B7
Obituary	B6
Classified	C2
Community Service	B6
Shop Orinda	B4

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The heart of Lafayette loses some of its rhythm



Empty storefront in La Fiesta Square

Photo J. Wake

By Sharon K. Sobotta

On a given day, Jennifer McCarthy-Redman might have dropped off her children at Lafayette Elementary School, grabbed a morning coffee from Tutu's, a snack from Papillon,

dinner from Urban Remedy and then meandered over to the Kinkos Fed Ex store to renew her passport. Now, both Urban Remedy and Kinkos Fed Ex have vacated, along with the gym and other storefronts in what McCarthy-Redman and

others refer to as the heart of Lafayette are sitting empty. And, many are worried that this may only be the beginning of the vacancy trend.

In May, 2022, SITE Centers, a real estate investment trust, purchased the La Fiesta Square for \$60.7 million and the Lafayette Mercantile for \$42.6 million in what was called a "once in a generation" opportunity by the brokering real estate firm. However, the deal is much less sweet for many of Lafayette's small business owners and loyal patrons.

"That is the heart of Lafayette. It's what makes the place special," McCarthy-Redman says. "I think if things are just sort of thoughtlessly turned over to the highest paying tenants, it's going to diminish the desirability of the town that's known for green hills and great schools. There's

something unique about this place that distinguishes us from Orinda or Moraga and Walnut Creek and our small businesses are a part of that."

Sam and Betty Sukh are proud to be the third set of owners of Papillon, a coffee shop that opened its doors well over four decades ago, in 1978. "Many of our customers have been coming here for decades and they enjoy meeting their friends here over a cup of coffee. It's like part of their daily life routine and rituals," Betty Sukh says. "It's a community space and a Lafayette icon."

The Sukhs recall being notified late last year about the monthly fee increase for all the tenants in the plaza of 20-30%, depending on square footage of the respective business. "Most of the fees are related to the property tax increase. They bought this place

(above market rate) and the tenants have to pay the property tax increase. We can deal with an annual 3 or 5% increase but 20-30% is an unhealthy increase. It's unfair."

Betty and Sam Sukh say they're determined not to let their massive monthly fee increase be transferred onto their customers, because they want to stay accessible. "Our customers have already started worrying about us and some are saying that they'll understand if we need to raise our prices, but we really don't want to do that," Betty Sukh says. "The buyer is a big corporation that owns properties across the country so they don't necessarily care about our community of Lafayette (nor do they necessarily know anything about us)."

... continued on Page A2

Civic News A1-A10

Rheem Park Area design standards discussed - Page A4

Public Safety

Remembering the Rules of the Road - Page A8

Life in Lamorinda B1-B8

Lafayette mom pens delightful children's book - Page B1

Sports C1-C2

Lamorinda softball teams overcome rainouts and wet fields - Page C2

Summer Camps Guide Family & Half Day B2-B4

Lamorinda Weekly's 17th annual Family and Half Day Camps Guide

- Page B2-B4

Our Homes D1-D12

Looking for signs of Sudden Oak Death in local trees - Page D4

