

Lafayette

City Gears Up for Free Car Charging Stations

By Cathy Tyson



The charging stations will be like these at Whole Foods. Photo Cathy Tyson

Electric vehicle drivers in Lafayette will soon be able to plug in and charge their cars on Golden Gate Way, between the Lafayette Library and Learning Center and the Park Theater, at no cost to the city.

Although motorists will have to pay for the cost of a “tank” full of electric fuel, which is considerably cheaper and some say cleaner than gasoline, they will also have to feed the meter: \$2 for the maximum two-hour parking.

Energy company NRG is paying to provide, install and maintain what they call an EVGo “Freedom Station” made up of the two DC fast charging stations, along with one Level II charger. The funding is made possible as part of a fine stemming from claims reaching back to Dynegey and the California energy crisis in 2000 and 2001. NRG is installing a minimum of 200 DC fast charging stations statewide at no cost to municipalities to encourage and support zero emission vehicles as part of the \$120 million dollar penalty for gouging California energy users.

Golden Gate Way was chosen for its downtown location, availability of parking spaces and nearby electrical infrastructure that could support fueling needs. Originally spaces in front of the Mercantile building were suggested, but that concept was scrapped in response to feedback and overall demand for those sought-after parking spots.

The only other NRG charging

stations between Walnut Creek and Oakland are the two chargers located at Whole Foods; the addition of these three charging stations more than doubles availability.

NRG will be paying to upgrade the power capacity as well as the actual energy used directly to PG&E.

Four dedicated parking spaces will be striped for electric vehicles only and will be wide enough to accommodate disabled parkers.

The mayor and city council members were unanimously in favor of the proposal. City Attorney Mala Subramanian will review the eight-year renewable contract to make sure everything is in order and that the city is indemnified for potential tripping hazards.

City Manager Steven Falk did point out that the charging hose isn’t released from the pump until a barcode is scanned, at which point it is plugged into car, making for a relatively short amount of time the hose is accessible.

The wheels of city government spun quickly on this project, which accelerated with the official submission of a cleverly named Charge! grant application in late December 2015. NRG energy is one of the nation’s largest competitive power producers with over two million retail customers in 16 states; it’s also the nation’s first comprehensive electric vehicle charging station provider.

City Council Supports School Bond Measure

... continued from page A2

Both commercial and residential property owners would be subject to the assessment and all the funds would stay local, with independent citizen oversight and mandatory audits to ensure that funds are spent properly on school facilities and infrastructure, Zinn said.

“It’s a pleasure to have an opportunity to compliment a public agency that is well led, well managed and we would urge the council to support this school bond,” said Jack Weir, president of the non-profit, non-partisan Contra Costa Taxpayers Association at the April 25 city council meeting. He explained how the group carefully reviewed all of the tax measures on the June ballot using a list of critical criteria, and this school district “met every single one of our key crite-

ria” including project scope, labor agreements, and whether the agency seems to do a good job in fulfilling its mission, specifically educational outcomes.

“This district does an excellent job,” he said, adding that the bond is completely reasonable. “There’re no frills, no funny stuff.”

Grace Dixon, a parent of local school children, added her voice to urge the council’s support, as she said she feels that home values in Lafayette rise and fall on the quality of the school system here.

After clarifying with the city attorney that it was appropriate to take a position on the matter, which is possible as long as no public funds are spent, the council unanimously voted to support the bond measure.

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