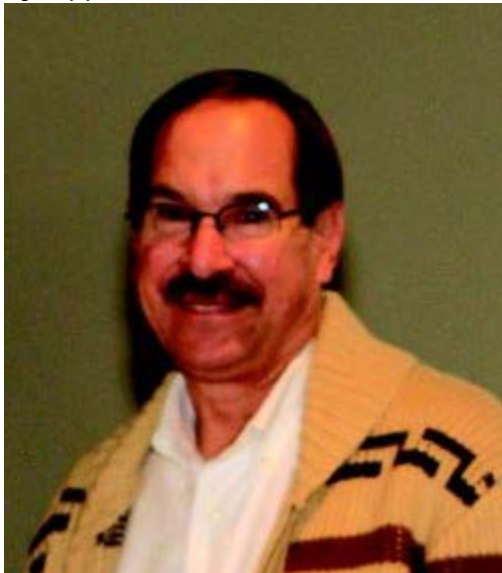


Published January 10th, 2018

A transparent and ethical local government is of utmost importance to Lafayette's 'new' mayor

By Pippa Fisher



Don Tatzin Lamo archive

As Don Tatzin starts his eighth term as mayor and his 33rd year on the Lafayette City Council, he discussed goals for the upcoming year (and years beyond), reflecting on the changes he has seen and lessons he has learned since he joined the council in 1985. This clearly isn't his first rodeo.

Originally from Melbourne, Florida, Tatzin has lived in Lafayette since 1976. He earned a bachelor's degree in urban studies and planning as well as a bachelor's in economics and a master's in city planning from MIT, before earning a second master's in economics in Australia, where he worked for a time following his studies.

Now retired, he and his wife, Ellen, like to spend time at their cabin in the mountains whenever possible along with their border collies, Cloud and Greylock.

Tatzin appears to have boundless energy, rising early most days and finishing his (mostly daily) swimming workout by 7 a.m. "I was a mediocre high school competitive swimmer and have kept at it when I can find a pool," he says. The mayor also plays the euphonium

with eighth graders in the Stanley Middle School Band, which he really enjoys, and Tatzin and his wife are talented truffle makers, too. The couple will once again share their talents during two upcoming classes put on by the Lafayette Library on Jan. 24 and Feb. 6. Signups are on the library website, although these free popular classes fill fast.

Tatzin's first goal for 2018 involves transparency. He says there is always room for improvement, and he wants to see the commissioner code of conduct completed and in place by the end of the first quarter. He also wants to foster communication with residents, would like to resolve outstanding lawsuits, continue the high performing police activities and the new police station, and fix roads and drains while maintaining infrastructure.

He wants to see continued prudent and transparent fiscal management as well as a working environment that attracts and retains valued city staff, and wants to address major traffic and parking concerns. He also says Lafayette should provide input on new state and regional agencies' actions. "We have a bipartisan combination of state senator and assembly member who seek and respond to constituent input and we should provide ours."

Finally, in honor of the city's 50th anniversary of incorporation and its upcoming celebration, Tatzin hopes to get as many residents and businesses as possible to switch up to 100 percent renewable sources through Marin Clean Energy.

Tatzin says what creates improvement in a suburban community are excellent public education, a healthy economy, a safe environment, a pleasant and appealing environment, a transparent government, and tapping the skills and time of residents. "Even a small number of people can make a difference," he says.

Looking ahead to the next 30 years or so, Tatzin says he would like to see Lafayette remain a place where people want to live and where they want to contribute to making their community better. He says he would like it to be a community where the public sector is held in high regard because of what it accomplishes and how it behaves. "And that we survived the earthquake well," he adds.

Tatzin points to the improved physical condition of the city over the past 33 years due to investments in roads, drains and public places. He says that the city is in a strong financial position for which he largely credits the efforts of former Mayor Dick Holmes, who helped convince the state legislator to grant the city a portion of the property tax, which led to more investment in the downtown area, but contributed to an unfortunate loss of moderately priced housing, due to Lafayette's appeal. "People who work in Lafayette and who we know find it increasingly difficult to afford to live here," he says.

"Traffic is still the big problem," he adds, "and has been for over 30 years."

How it is possible to come to issues afresh each time after 33 years? Tatzin says that when you like what you do, the effort is fun, not work. "I now bring more wisdom and experience to issues than I had at the beginning. That helps me understand the critical aspects to each topic," he says, adding, "Also I don't get as 'worked up' about things as I once probably did."

Tatzin says his council position led to appointments to 10 other government boards that serve multiple cities, our county of more than one million residents, and a state joint powers authority. "I have the perspective of a council member in the middle of our federal system ... serving residents on one hand and trying to comply with new regional, state, and federal missives on the other."

He observes, "Almost regardless of the level of government you serve, there are occasions when governments that are higher in the federal system seem out of touch with local needs (for example, why did the state take redevelopment away) and those at levels of government below you and the public may fail to see the bigger picture and perhaps are NIMBYs (for example, if you are at the Metropolitan Transportation Commission you may wonder why a community won't upzone to allow denser housing close to transit stations.)"

This experience, he says, has taught him the importance of not becoming the layer of government that others deride and to instead prove your worth, listening and staying in touch with the public as well as those at other levels of government to learn their thoughts and concerns and to influence them before they make policies.

As for the current city council, Tatzin compliments voters, saying they have consistently elected qualified individuals who have a desire to serve rather than to use the office for personal aggrandizement.

"Council members put in a lot of time, are well prepared, have good discussions and get along well even when we have differences," he says. "Having seen a lot of councils in other cities since 1985, our condition, unfortunately, is not a given."

Reach the reporter at: pippa@lamorindaweekly.com

[back](#)

Copyright © Lamorinda Weekly, Moraga CA