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Back to the drawing board on Deer Hill Road, as voters reject Measure L

By Pippa Fisher

Although uncertainty due to uncounted last-minute absentee ballots swirled in the air in the day or two following the June 5 vote on measure L to determine the fate of the development of Deer Hill Road, by the following Friday evening it seemed certain that the "No's" had won.

As of June 8 those in favor of Measure L - the proposition which would rezone the area on Deer Hill Road to allow the development of 44 homes, a dog park, a sports field and parking, along with walkways - had received 45.5 percent of the vote compared to those opposing the rezoning and the proposed development, who had 54.4 percent of the vote. The result of this vote keeps the zoning to APO (administrative and professional offices).

The county has 30 days to certify the results, and the city council will not adopt a new zoning designation for the property until the election is certified; however, the topic was added to the June 11 council meeting (after this edition of the Lamorinda Weekly went to print) for discussion and public input.

Lafayette resident and No supporter Scott Sommer likened the campaign to a David and Goliath situation, noting that the Yes campaign received ten times the monetary and nonmonetary contributions as the No campaign.

"It was a real team effort involving people with different expertizes," said Sommer. "The Yes campaign was organized by slick professionals who disregarded traffic and air quality issues."

No supporter, Lafayette resident Susan Candell, explained that the No campaign spent all its time reacting to comments from the Yes supporters, saying that they had to get people over the "fear factor" of the 315 apartments that had been proposed under the APO zoning.

However, Dave Baker, contractor and spokesperson for the developer O'Brien Homes said in an email after the vote, that the Yes on L campaign was clear with the voters. "The results are not yet final, but if Measure L fails, we will resume the affordable apartments project immediately."

Save Lafayette President Michael Griffith would not discuss further steps at this point until the results were certified although he did say that Save Lafayette was happy with the outcome.

Lafayette Mayor Don Tatzin said he thought that the result was a combination of voters who didn't like the project, thought they could get a better project, or weren't worried about negative consequences.

Vice Mayor Cam Burks, making it clear that he was speaking as a resident and not in his roll as council member, commented, "We know that Lafayette residents were dropping off ballots on election day all the way until the polls closed at 8 p.m. I think it is respectful for those voters and fellow community members to allow all of the ballots to be counted," adding, "We are proud of the campaign we ran and we were honored to have so much community support."

In his roll as vice mayor, Burks commented that he respects and values that the community has spoken and made a decision on this important matter. "This represents a civically engaged community and we are profoundly fortunate to have this.

"Most importantly, though," he added "I would like to stress the critical importance that I personally place on moving forward as one community and that we focus on being positive, civil and respectful to one another. Civility and a sense of community is what makes Lafayette so great. The intense community division that evolved during the campaign was significant and frankly discouraging to me - and to some degree just not healthy for our city. It is my goal to work on bringing our community back together."

Sommer noted as a positive that the measure engaged the public in a robust discussion, particularly on social media forums.

"The voters got their decision," said Tatzin. "This is democracy in action."

Stay tuned for continued discussion of Deer Hill.

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