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## Maintaining local control for land use high on new mayor's list

By Pippa Fisher



Lafayette's new mayor, Cam Burks Photo Pippa Fisher

This year sees Lafayette coming off a divisive election with two brand new city council members and, as of press time, one yet to be appointed. Without a permanent city manager, it will fall to the experience of the city's new mayor and vice mayor to provide leadership over the coming weeks.

First-time Mayor Cam Burks is optimistic. "For me, 2019 is about coming together and uniting as a community, encouraging even stronger public participation to enable how we govern the city, and to do so in a civil and respectful manner around every turn."

Burks says that debate and the expression of alternative views are absolutely critical and often result in better decisions. "It's important, however, to do so in ways that do not alienate any element of our community. This is something that I will encourage at city council meetings. My hope is that our entire community provides their views on everything that comes before us."

Burks has defined several goals for the upcoming year, although he is quick to point out that he would like to see any goals be strategic - longer term than just one year. "The foundation of my vision for 2019 rests on taking action that will unify the city, stimulate respectful and civil collaboration and strengthen the community," he says.

Perhaps his number one priority concerns protection of local control on land use and development from what he describes as "Sacramento's overreach." He says the city must be proactive, being prepared to lobby and work with local representatives and the league of cities as well as defensively.

Noting that several General Plan elements are in need of revision, Burks says that work on this will be critical. "Now more than ever, as Sacramento continues to express a strong legislative desire to strip our local control in the land use and development space, we need robust strategies and tools to protect our city and its special character. While the General Plan won't mitigate all risks in this regard from our state legislature, it's critical that our community, council, staff and in particular, our terrific planning and design review commissions come together and focus on this effort. It's all hands on deck," he says.

Burks says the city is financially stable and well managed and that roads and infrastructure are in superb shape. "Our police department is the best in the Bay Area. They continue to do outstanding work to keep our community safe and plan for emergencies," he says, noting that he would like to see an expanded emergency preparedness focus, particularly in the area of wildfire preparation.

"Our senior services commission continues to do great work for the community," he says, adding that he would like to see development of robust senior community inclusion strategies as the senior population grows, including strategies around emergency evacuation planning such as coupling households with less mobile neighbors.

Additionally Burks wants to foster a strong relationship with both the Lafayette School District and the Acalanes Union High School District, holding public meetings and socials. "While we have a very good relationship at present, a lot of our collaboration is piecemeal and at times, reactive, so perhaps it's time to look holistically at what we can do together," he says.

Burks might be picking up the mayoral gavel for the first time but he is no stranger to public service, serving from 2011 on the Crime Prevention Commission (and elected chair in 2013) prior to being elected to the city council in 2016. He served as vice mayor on the council last year.

Burks is a Bay Area native who worked for many years as a diplomat and special agent in Washington, D.C. and at U.S. embassies around the world. He led U.S. government counterterrorism strategy in multiple foreign countries; managed multimillion dollar budgets; oversaw complex public programs; and negotiated policies in the best interests of U.S. diplomacy and the national security of the United States. He is now the

deputy chief security officer at Chevron Corporation.

He settled back in the Bay Area eight years ago and lives with his wife and two school-age daughters in Lafayette. He has been involved coaching youth soccer and is passionate about the trails, which he walks with his dog. He enjoys fly-fishing with his girls and skiing and backcountry hiking.

Burks says that he is honored to be mayor and sincerely thanks the community and council for their faith in him. "My family and I love Lafayette deeply and I'm committed to helping our community achieve a positive and productive 2019. I feel very fortunate to be on a city council with three other outstanding public servants - colleagues that are profoundly dedicated to our city and have already made a tangible impact," he says.

Among the first challenges for Burks and the new council will be hiring a fifth council member and a permanent city manager.

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[back](#)

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