

No to Assessment = No Twinkle Lights?

By Cathy Tyson

Recently Lafayette business owners voted on an assessment to increase the fees payable to the City for upkeep of medians, tree trimming, sidewalk repair, colorful downtown banners and twinkle lights at Christmastime. Sadly the assessment, officially the, "Core area landscape and lighting assessment district" only garnered a 30% yes vote. This assessment was last increased in 1984; costs for the City have significantly increased since then. In the intervening years the fees for property owners have remained the same with the City of Lafayette picking up the increasingly large difference.

Right now the budget for Core Area Landscape and Lighting is \$500,000; business owners pay \$158,000.

The City proposed a 50/50 split of the costs, including up to a 3% annual increase for inflation, if necessary. While the assessment covers specific costs, what residents and businesses gain is overall ambiance, which helps keep Lafayette a vibrant upscale place; which in turn, helps bring in shoppers and restaurant patrons.

Going forward the City of Lafayette will start discussions with the City Council at its scheduled meeting in September. The plan is to start with a budget of zero and start adding from there. Its Economics 101 – allocating resources in an environment of scarcity. Residents recently voted 60% in favor of re-paving roads. The question becomes, what is more important to residents, roads or twinkle lights?

The formula that determines what each property owner pays is a bit convoluted, but mostly based on the street front footage. For example the Oakwood Athletic Club pays the most, because it has a large street front footprint. Oakwood was in favor of the proposal; the 50/50 split would still be a bargain, certainly less than the expense of paying out of pocket for median maintenance. Locally owned businesses were generally supportive, they understand the overall look of the City has a positive impact on their business. Owners who voted no were for the most part out of town franchise operations.



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