

## Tax Feasibility Study Gets Green Light

By Cathy Tyson

**B**ecause of the need for additional funding for road repairs and police services, the City Council has been contemplating a general tax measure and asked Lafayette's City Manager, Steve Falk to "return to Council with a proposal to explore the feasibility of such a measure," according to a recent Staff Report. That proposal was presented at last month's City Council meeting.

The reasons for the funding measure are clear. Of Lafayette's 99 miles of roads, 17% are in poor and failed condition, despite \$50 million dollars that has been spent over the last ten years. Approximately 4,000 residents live on failed roads.

In addition, Lafayette has the lowest per-capita police staffing in Contra Costa County. To come up to industry standards, Lafayette needs an additional five to eight officers, it's estimated this will cost between \$1 and 1.6 million dollars per year. Two homicides, countless car break ins and drug deals add to the perception of residents that more officers are needed.

"There is a desire to have more officers and repair the roads; we have an obligation to the majority of residents. How are we going to determine what people really

want regarding roads and police? I think we definitely need to do the feasibility study," said Council Member Carl Anduri.

"If we do a survey, if it's not well over 50%, we shouldn't assume we can campaign our way to victory. Let the citizens choose. I would support doing phase one and keeping our eyes wide open about the process," said Don Tatzin referring to a two phased survey to determine citizen support of a tax.

There was a significant amount of concern about the cost of the feasibility study, especially if the initial surveying did not show support for the measure, that they could "pull the plug" on phase II. The Council was assured that they would only be liable for phase I fees and expenses in that case.

A general tax measure, which needs only 51% to pass rather than a specific tax, requiring 66.7% approval, was the focus of discussion, because of the wide-ranging needs this tax would fund. General taxes can't be property based, and also have a requirement that the tax be voted on when members of the governing body, in this case the City Council, will be up for reelection. Mayor Anderson noted that "this might be a good opportunity because we will have many more

potential voters," due to the buzz of the presidential campaign.

Falk outlined a number of tax options and their respective proceeds. Approximately \$4.5 million dollars needs to be raised: \$1.5 million each for additional police and road repair, plus \$1.5 million for other municipal services including senior transportation, maintenance, landscaping. The proceeds of a sales tax, a utility users tax, a business license tax and the revenues they would generate were outlined.

A proposal was solicited from Oakland based Tramutola/Godbe Research. In business for 22 years, Tramutola has a long list of clients that are public agencies and was successful helping the Lafayette School District pass a parcel tax last November.

A few residents in the relatively sparse crowd at the meeting stepped up to offer input. Reaction to the feasibility study was mixed. "I appreciate what you're doing. I realize you have a fiduciary responsibility, I don't think anything you're asking for is frivolous - I'm willing to make that investment" said George Burtt. On the other hand Tim Kean pleaded, "Please don't waste our money - don't have another election on the same old humbug."