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## Downtown Plan Keeps Moving Forward

*By Cathy Tyson*

Lafayette's draft Downtown Strategic Plan (DSP) continues on its journey, and is now in the competent hands of the Planning Commission which is painstakingly deliberating district by district preparing comments that will ultimately go to the City Council. In addition, an environmental impact report (EIR) of the draft Plan is being prepared by an independent consultant; both are meant to keep the process moving forward toward the adoption of a final plan. Preparing a framework for long term future development doesn't happen overnight. As they clarify and listen to public input, the Planning Commission is well aware that nothing will be decided upon until the EIR and Economic Analysis are available and reviewed. The task at hand is to dig into the nitty gritty details of the draft Plan and prepare a list of recommendations for the City Council.

Perhaps that's why the last meeting had a much friendlier tone and was decidedly less argumentative than DSP meetings of just a few months ago.

To expedite the task at hand, staff has clarified each district of the DSP by dividing it into two sections: the existing General Plan and the draft DSP to identify key differences. Oddly enough, like differing residents - there are sections where staff has two different points of view. These are complex issues and a variety of factors play a part. Even staff couldn't come to agreement - so both sides of the argument are spelled out, and the issues opened up for public comment.

The Planning Commission meeting focused on controversial height issues. Planning and Building Manager Niroop Srivatsa suggested that building heights in the downtown retail district should be allowed to 35' with the ability to go to 43' with conditions. A staff report best sums it up, "The downtown retail district is the heart of the Downtown and should be the district that allows greater intensity of uses, density and height. It should not be a large district in area or length; rather it should be compact and walkable...the goal of protecting views of the hills should be balanced with providing the right environment and tools for the development of pedestrian oriented retail uses and housing."

Srivatsa also encouraged the Commission to treat Lafayette Circle gently and carefully to limit development due to the quieter, smaller street.

Commissioner Thomas Chastain hit the nail on the head when he asked staff how to put into a Specific Plan the nuance particular to a site - especially without an actual project at hand.

"Lay down a vision to talk about preservation of views and clarify what that means, list important design guidelines - like views or setbacks. It requires a lot of analysis and preparation; it's crafted to be more of a guide," said Srivatsa.

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