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## Conflict Continues as Downtown Plan Wraps Up

*By Cathy Tyson*

Passionate discussion over the Downtown Specific Plan continued with last week's full house at the Community Hall. There doesn't seem to be much common ground between homeowner groups, especially the Lafayette Homeowners Council, and the City, mostly due to requirements to meet state mandated affordable housing numbers.

Themes that have been reiterated throughout the multi-year process once again were brought up to the City Council. Longtime opponent Eliot Hudson asked the Council, "What homeowners association has been before you that has supported the Downtown Specific Plan - none." Throughout the process, not a single homeowners group has come out in favor of the plan. This, coupled with concern about traffic congestion, air quality and school funding made it unanimous - audience members are clearly not in favor of the Downtown Specific Plan (DSP).

At the prior City Council meeting considering the DSP in June, Council members asked staff to provide answers to specific questions related to a proposal prepared by the Lafayette Homeowners Council (LHC). Specifically, how will the LHC proposal impact the city's ability to meet the states regional housing needs allocation?

Niroop Srivatsa, Building and Planning Services Manager, answered those questions at length in her staff report prepared for the July 23 City Council meeting and verbally for the benefit of the audience. The lengthy answers are best examined via the staff report available online, through the City's website, [www.lovelafayette.com](http://www.lovelafayette.com).

In its June 25 letter the LHC argues, "Increased density with its projected impacts on our downtown remains a threat to our small city's viability." They recommend a 25-foot height limit for properties fronting Mt. Diablo Boulevard.

The staff report prepared by Srivatsa responds in part, "a lowering of the height limit allowed by right will significantly reduce the City's ability to meet the State's regional housing needs allocations. The reduction in the height limit will likely be viewed by the State as a constraint on the development of housing for all income levels." The report points out that this concern was examined by the Planning Commission during its analysis, back in 2010 and 2011. The bottom line: the Planning Commission believed the height question should be dealt with through design guidelines and the City's discretionary review process, and that lowering the height limit to 25 feet would discourage private investment in the downtown. "Greater height does not equal greater density," emphasizes the report, "the DSP's maximum of three stories guarantees this."

The public hearing on the DSP will continue at the August 13 City Council meeting, 7 p.m. at the Lafayette Library and Learning Center Community Hall. A decision on the Plan is slated for September 10, 2012.

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