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Letters to the editor

The saga of Lot 66

Former Lafayette Planning Commissioner Richard Holt's application to develop Lot 66 is a mistake. City Attorney Mala Subramanian has directed the planning commission and city council to ignore the road and utility easement issues and to allow a home to be built on Lot 66 which is bisected by Sessions Road. There are many road easement lots around the city with the low tax valuations. In fact, Lot 66 is currently valued at only \$25K; Mr. Holt's annual tax bill for 2019-2020 is a mere \$630. The time to apply the brakes is now. By approving development on Lot 66, the planning commission would be setting a new precedent that permits "dual use" lots-buildable even though they are highly encumbered. This will inadvertently give huge profit opportunities to anyone who wants to develop these types of previously "unbuildable" lots and we will see more and more development of lots that were never intended to be built upon.

At the January 6, 2020 hearing, commissioner Stephen LaBonge said, "As much as we'd like to take into consideration someone's motivation for developing something, it's really out of our purview whether it's financial or whatever, it doesn't really matter ..."

I would highly disagree. It totally matters and ignoring motivation is irresponsible. If the planning commission decides to allow development of these "dual use" lots, the commissioners not only have to consider the developers' motivations, they must act within a new set of rules and announce the city's new stance on dual use lots to all Lafayette homeowners.

If the primary use of a lot is for a road and a secondary use, such as a house, is permitted, then perhaps it should fall under the mandates of California's new Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU) laws, including the home's size, typically less than 1000 square feet. Is the City of Lafayette prepared to approve ADUs on dual use lots throughout the city?

This dual use lot concept should be debated more thoroughly prior to considering Lot 66's project massing and siting which the commission is doing prematurely. Let's also hear a second opinion from an outside city attorney and professional planners to determine the best outcome for all Lafayette property owners-and to eliminate any possible favoritism toward the applicant, a former Lafayette planning commissioner.

Jeff Swarts
Lafayette

The importance of Lafayette Parcel Tax Measure

We recently received a mailing from the Lafayette School District (LafSD) that illuminated, again, the fiscal challenges the LafSD faces because of inadequate funding from the State of California. This State support is responsible for the majority of our local school funding.

We are long-time residents of Lafayette, as well as, parents of alumni and grandparents of current LafSD students. We have watched our Lafayette schools persevere to maintain their high quality throughout the ups and downs of California's education finances.

While Lafayette residents have always been generous partners in supporting our public schools, LafSD now needs broader-based financial support that will allow its leadership to plan into the future.

The district must be able to make long-term commitments to staff and to programs that are necessary in providing the same high quality of education to its current and future students. The outlook for school funding appears to be status quo at best. The base per student grant provided to our LafSD is increasingly absorbed by CA State mandated pension costs and educational programs/services and rising healthcare costs. Finally, over the past five years CA State public educational monies have been reallocated and given to lower-performing school districts.

LafSD continues to fiscally balance its budget with ever increasing difficulty. It has cut \$3.0M in expense over the past three years.

We understand that the district has put forth a proposed \$290 parcel tax, Measure L, on the upcoming March 3rd ballot which would allow the district to fund its needs for the future. It will have a sunset provision of seven years. Measure L funds would stay locally and a Citizen's oversight Committee would ensure proper spending. Measure L includes a Senior Citizen Exemption option.

For those Lafayette citizens who feel they don't have "skin in the game" or personal interest please understand that there is a direct correlation between Lafayette property values and the excellent public education provided by the LafSD.

We urge our fellow Lafayette citizens to vote Yes on Measure L on your March 3, 2020 Ballot.

Katrina and Rick Silvani
Lafayette

Request for more detail

I was perplexed by the Jan. 22 article "Skinner letter prompts outrage." It didn't clearly explain what State Sen. Nancy Skinner allegedly did that was wrong (much less an "abuse of power") by entering the debate over The Terraces project. It didn't give Sen. Skinner an opportunity to explain her position, nor did it give State Sen. Glazer or Assembly Member Bauer-Kahan a chance to explain theirs. But it gave Council Member

Burks plenty of ink.

As a Lafayette resident and voter, I'd like to see a clear, straightforward account of what's going on here. It might help to get input from unbiased experts on the topic.

Chris Rauber
Lafayette

Potential increase to noise pollution

Plane noise pollution in Lamorinda will dramatically increase if the FAA implements a change to send all of Oakland Airport's southbound incoming traffic straight over Orinda and Moraga. Read on for details: I just saw a report from a meeting earlier this month of the Oakland Airport/Community Noise Management Forum. It included the news that the FAA is considering rerouting OAK inbound traffic from its current route (just east of Highway 13) 2 miles North and East, which would put it squarely over Lamorinda. Currently, most of the noise we hear from planes in Lamorinda is outbound traffic from SFO, at around 10,000 feet of altitude.

Incoming traffic to Oakland would run at less than half that--around 4,000 feet up.

Though the report I read didn't include diagrams, the existing flight path is shown in blue at <http://soseastbay.org/east-bay-nextgen-flight-path-maps/>, so it's clear this new FAA plan would run the planes over San Pablo Dam Road, Camino Pablo, and Moraga Way.

If, like me, you think that this plan would have a major negative impact on our quality of life, please let the FAA, Representative De Salunier, and Senators Feinstein and Harris know. We need to nip this misguided idea in the bud.

Ian Crew
Moraga

Fire code changes

The front-page headline in the current Lamorinda independent newspaper is alarming: "MOFD Chief proposes aggressive, radical code." What is wrong with this headline, writer and the newspaper? Journalists are supposed to be neutral. This article is very biased using words such as radical and aggressive. Has this reporter or the newspaper not understood the warnings about our city's potential for disastrous wildfires? Has your newspaper not done their reporting and looked at Marin County and seen what they are doing, not radical, given the serious threat we all face? Marin has banned numerous plants and are very aggressive in trying to educate and demand that residents take this issue seriously. Insurance companies know how bad the risk is - they are cancelling people and raising rates in our wonderful Lamorinda area.

As a member of a neighborhood that is a certified Firesafe neighborhood, I know the hard work that our Fire Chief Dave Winnacker faces trying to convince Lamorinda homeowners to realize that this is a serious and major issue. Has the writer of this story and the paper not seen photos of Paradise, Coffey Park, Kincadee fire or remember the Oakland Hills fire? This fire code is not radical and will benefit our community and children. We live in a community that has become a tinder box and it's about time that homeowners, the Lamorinda newspaper, city council members and local realtors join together and support the Chief, who is actually a trained fire professional and is wanting us all to be safe from the firestorms that have surrounded us. I hope that in the coming weeks other neighborhoods will think about becoming certified firewise neighborhoods and band together and work to eradicate this backwards thinking as a call to action and support the Chief and Fire Marshall and work together before it's too late. Shame on the Lamorinda News. One just needs to look at photos of Coffey Park after the firestorm, and they lived in a quiet neighborhood with no idea what might come. Let's not put blinders on!!!

I wish Lamorinda News would report the issues around wildfires in a more supportive and educational way so that we might educate our community and not use words like aggressive and radical. Maybe words like the Chief is taking a rational and calculated approach in defending our communities against wildfire!

Ken Light
Orinda

A vote for Measure L

As a dad, my children's education is an extraordinary priority. We moved to Lafayette because of the outstanding schools and the special character, semi-rural nature of the community. When we saw that the town's official motto was "Green Hills, Great Schools" it was a done deal! This is now at risk. I appreciate the exceptional instruction and enrichment my kids receive here. But State-driven, irresponsible & poorly managed budget cuts are threatening our local quality of education and, correspondingly, that special character of our city.

Passage of Measure L will keep the very best teachers, instruction and enrichment here in Lafayette. If you value protecting the exceptional quality of our local schools - whether to prepare students for success, or simply to protect your property values - then L deserves your YES VOTE too.

I hope you agree - supporting our local schools is a wise investment. Stand with us - you'll be in good company. Please VOTE YES on Measure L!

Note: I write this letter, and support Measure L, solely as a parent and citizen of Lafayette, not in my capacity as a current member of the Lafayette City Council.

With profound gratitude for your consideration,
Cam Burks

Lafayette

Yes on SB 50

We don't have only Tesla's on the road, so we should not build only luxury housing.

Please urge Senator Glazer to vote YES on SB 50, the More Homes Act.

SB 50 is critically important if we hope to address the Bay Area's intertwined housing and transportation crises.

I am a Lamorindan; we moved to Moraga in 1992 for its semi-rural atmosphere and good schools. That said, I am not threatened by adding apartments and condos in the town center, to help our St Mary's students and faculty, our residents who want to downsize, and the people who work in Moraga.

SB 50 has been improved; it provides local government with ample flexibility to determine where and how (but not if) to build new housing.

Lamorinda will enforce good design guidelines on new construction.

Please join me, the League of Women Voters of California, and a broad coalition of housing advocates, and support SB 50.

Ashley Coates

Moraga

More support for Measure L

I am the current Student Body President at Acalanes High School. I have been fortunate enough to receive an amazing education from Lafayette schools.

My all-time favorite class was a robotics class I took in 8th grade at Stanley Middle School. This fueled my love for engineering and opened up a world of opportunities for me to take part in. On top of this, throughout my time at Stanley Middle School, I had remarkable teachers who challenged and pushed me. I was able to participate in advanced math courses and encouraged to try a variety of electives. My computer science teacher helped me start a Girls Makers Club where we taught girls how to code. My 7th-grade math teacher helped me get accepted into a Science and Technology summer camp at Stanford where I got to build robots and learn Python. Every teacher I had at Stanley cared so much about me and every student that they had. These are the type of teachers that good funding attracts.

I have two younger brothers who are currently attending Lafayette K-8 schools. Every day my eight-year-old brother waits for me to come home from school and excitedly tells me about his day. His favorite days are when he gets to do labs in science or practice an instrument in music.

Measure L will prevent deep cuts to programs like these. It is my greatest hope that my brothers receive the same exceptional education I was given.

California is under-funding our K-8 schools and while our community continuously does an outstanding job of fundraising for our schools, there is still a sizeable funding gap. Measure L will help Lafayette keep quality teachers, maintain funding for programs such as art, science, and math, and ensure small class sizes. I want my brothers and every child in Lafayette to have an outstanding education.

Vote YES on Measure L and protect our schools!

Maddie Wilson

Lafayette

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