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ISSUES NIGHT

February 6 • 7PM

Community Center • 500 St. Mary's Rd.

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Council strikes a more measured note in response to Skinner letter



The Lafayette City Council at the dais. Photo Pippa Fisher

By Pippa Fisher

The Lafayette City Council spent close to an hour and a half thrashing out the nuances of language for their response to a message received in December from State Sen. Nancy Skinner at a recent meeting. Choosing between two versions of a response, four of the five members voted to send the more neutral version and not to escalate any questions regarding the ethics of the senator's letter.

At the previous meeting Council Member Cam Burks had expressed extreme concern over Skinner's Dec. 11 letter in which she reminded the council of her bills, Senate Bill 167 and SB 330, that would "likely impact not only the Terraces project but any project consistent with local zoning rules as defined in the amended Housing Accountability Act and in SB 330. Thank you for your consideration." Burks said at that meeting he had never been more outraged as he referred to what he called the "height of abuse of power" from Skinner's "interference in an active land-use application." It was a sentiment shared by Vice Mayor Susan Candell who said that she could not agree more, while Council Member Teresa Geringer took a more cautious view saying, although she was concerned, she wanted to find out more about any implications.

At that Jan. 13 meeting the council postponed a decision until the Jan. 27 meeting in order to get advice from Robert Hodil, the outside attorney hired by the council to advise on issues concerning the controversial 315-apartment Terraces project.

So, did Skinner cross a legal or ethical line with the letter and was it 'interference in an active land-use application' as Burks suggested?

Hodil, weighing in at the Jan. 27 meeting, said he did not see that. In terms of ethical rules the senator is bound to follow, he said that he didn't see any violations from a legal perspective.

"I can understand how many may feel that this is an unethical action on her part," he said, "but there's nothing in terms of any clear rules she has violated by doing this in my opinion."

Burks remained in favor of referring the senator's letter to various agencies for review and for sending a harsher draft of the response to register the city's concern with "a state senator declaring an opinion on the processing of a development project (the Terraces of Lafayette) that is not even in her district," and referred to "potentially unethical partiality regarding the Terraces project in Lafayette."

However the other four council members did not support such a response at the Jan. 27 meeting and opted to send a response acknowledging the senator's views on housing and assuring her that "the city will continue to focus on generating much-needed housing in compliance with the applicable laws."

Regarding Burks' proposal to have the matter examined by outside review, Mayor Mike Anderson responded, "I don't believe we are going to gain by pushing this into a question of ethics." Anderson said rather than ethics, this was a question of "poor form."

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Sold-out event celebrates Business Person of the Year



Jennifer Perlmutter receives her award from Mayor Mike Anderson. Photo Andy Schreck

By Pippa Fisher

The city of Lafayette celebrated its 30th Business Person of the Year, Jennifer Perlmutter, Jan. 31 with a sold-out dinner at the Lafayette Park Hotel and Spa. The annual event traditionally also features the mayor giving a State of the City address.

Mayor Mike Anderson gave a brief summation, touching on the city's concerns regarding congestion and the challenges of retaining local jobs while meeting needs for housing. He pointed to last year's acquisition of the Batwing property as an example of how the city is retaining open space and parks, and he highlighted the efforts currently underway to resurrect the Park Theater. "Overall, the city is in a good state," he said.

Incoming 2020 Chamber of Commerce Board President John McCormick made his remarks and then handed the evening over to master of ceremonies Hilary Shipway who works with Perlmutter.

And then the evening was all about celebrating Perlmutter. There were presentations of proclamations from local dignitaries along with one from the Lamorinda Arts Council, and one presented by the Mayor. Attendees enjoyed a musical performance from members of the Peter Pan Foundation. A series of speakers paid tribute to Perlmutter's vision and to the success of her two art galleries and the revitalization she has brought to the downtown.

Proof that art and business need not be mutually exclusive.



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