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Housing 101 – opportunity to weigh in on the housing element update



Photo courtesy Jeff Heyman, City of Lafayette

Currently, higher density housing such as the Towne Center condos are focused in the downtown area.

By Pippa Fisher

Lafayette is on a mission; a mission to teach residents about the housing element – an overview of what it is,

background on why it needs to be updated, how it affects the community and to provide an opportunity for residents to make their voices heard.

To that end the city is

holding a series of six Zoom webinars, each focusing on a specific neighborhood or group with opportunities for residents to meet their representatives on the General Plan Advisory Committee.

The first of these virtual meetings was held Feb. 25 for the Burton Valley district and had an attendance of over 130.

City staff gave an overview, explaining that the General Plan is a blueprint of a community's vision for the next 20 years, consisting of "elements" such as the housing element, with goals, programs and policies that guide decision-making to ensure day-to-day decisions align with the vision. California state law requires all cities and counties to have a current general plan.

The housing element must be updated by law every eight years, with Lafayette's next

update due in 2023. It considers housing in relation to other general plan elements such as transportation, parks and open space.

Staff then went on to explain that by law local jurisdictions must ensure there is enough land zoned at appropriate densities to allow development of housing for all income levels, but they emphasized that thus far, it is not a mandate to build. Not having a certified housing element carries risks, including loss of local control over how and where housing is built, and heavy fines.

Each city is given a regional housing needs allocation number, arrived at through methodology approved by the state's Department of Housing and Community Development and distributed regionally through the Council of Governments. For

Lafayette in this sixth cycle (2023-31) the allocation is currently 2,114 units, with 28% (or 599 units) for very low income. This compares with the previous cycle (2015-23) in which the total allocation was 400 units.

And this is why the city wants to hear from its residents, while it continues to examine zoning, currently and historically largely single family residential, with downtown density at 35 units per acre, as it looks to prioritize where and how much to upzone.

While no decisions are being made at any of these informational webinars, city staff were listening to residents. At the Burton Valley session several residents asked questions, including about infrastructure and schools.

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City holds webinars, answers questions on free business assistance program

By Pippa Fisher

The city of Lafayette is once again making available the Business Assistance Program to assist Lafayette-based businesses and nonprofits as a resource to help navigate the maze of loans available with the latest round of federal stimulus packages.

Any Lafayette business with less than 300 employees, gig workers and those without employees can qualify for the free consulting service, overseen by Townsend Public

Affairs – a service paid for by the city.

Currently 152 local small businesses have registered for free guidance with the BAP.

According to TPA Associate Johannus Reijnders, these 152 businesses reflect over 910 employees and independent contractors within the Lafayette community. Total reported Paycheck Protection Program funds, self-reported by those businesses that choose to share the information, currently come in at \$232,000, which, says Reijnders

in a Feb. 17 memo to the city, "is in addition to the \$1.5M in 2020 awards that we are continuing to guide to forgiveness and grant compliance."

The BAP is providing webinars to discuss the PPP and to offer tips for successful applications, including a Q&A panel for answering questions live, with the next one planned for March 4, from 4 to 5 p.m. (See link below to register.)

Those Lamorinda businesses located outside of

Lafayette should not fear the process either, however, according to Lamorinda Weekly Co-Publisher Wendy Scheck who says that the application process has been streamlined for this second round of funding.

With Lamorinda Weekly's revenue impacted by COVID shutdowns, Scheck, who is responsible for the company's accounting, decided earlier this month to apply for a PPP loan. As a Mechanics Bank customer, Lamorinda Weekly used the bank's online appli-

cation process.

"All necessary documents were reports in our accounting and payroll systems and of course a copy of the tax return was needed," said Scheck. "We decided to apply for the loan instead of reducing costs again. The pandemic and its impact should eventually come to an end and we hope the loan will help us to keep our service to the community going," Scheck added, noting that the loan was approved and funded within a week.

For more information on the BAP, go to: https://www.lovelafayette.org/businessassistance?fbclid=IwAR0ix70hMz_8QnZZ1L8Lr9lxWZf6S7cwERnC84g_meqtsUhq1IVbEgTeh4

To register for the webinar, go to: <https://register.gotowebinar.com/rt/8894497526695144719?fbclid=IwAR1JmybtNgUKibkM6R2ilpIMbZoSdVS-sjncqOZszIX3dkeWR9f625k3oCY>

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