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# Wildfire prevention and preparedness tops Lafayette's budget items list

By Lou Fancher

Lafayette Administrative Services Director Tracy Robinson in presenting to the council the Fiscal Year 2022-23 proposed budget and work plan addressed four goals set this year by the council she described as "very ambitious." Wildfire prevention and preparedness topped the list that included improving pedestrian and traffic safety and mobility, creating a downtown and Mt. Diablo Corridor Specific Plan, and developing short- and long-term fiscal sustainability plans.

Robinson said the budget proposal also included full year funding for newly authorized staffing positions and for additional office space that will be necessary as the staff expands.

The cost for additional staff is approximately \$675,000 per year; the expense for additional space comes from the General Fund. At the end of the fiscal 2021-22 period on June 30, the General Fund Reserve is projected to be at an estimated

86% due to the council's careful fiscal management, according to Robinson. She said the city remains in "good and robust financial health" in part because of adjustments to the timing of ongoing and planned programs.

Revenue trends beginning in 2019 and mapped annually through 2022 show the city is making a faster than expected recovery, but is behind the growth that would have happened had the pandemic not occurred. Special revenue the city did receive includes the first tranche of the American Rescue Plan Act that has been allocated, with a second tranche expected in July. The total of the two disbursements is \$3.18 million and money coming in from the second tranche will be reserved in a sinking fund and released as approved.

A second source of city revenue is the Palos Colorados settlement of \$2.25 million. This money has been allocated to the Vision Zero capital projects and safety improvements around schools (see related story on Page A3).

New staffing and the resulting additional office space Robinson showed are projected to put the city in a deficit situation in roughly three years. In fiscal year 2023 the reserve dips and by 2025 would fall below the 60% threshold.

Unfunded requests under consideration included improvements to the Community Center, allocations to Lamorinda Village, money for an economic development manager contract, pre-engineering for the School Street Project and others. The total added up to just over \$1 million. Projecting forward with continuing structural deficits and increased inflation impacts, Robinson said the net effect will force the city to reduce the number of projects planned. ARPA money, she reiterated, could fund the requests and cover shortfalls, but cautioned the one-time money is a short-term fix.

When Vice Mayor Carl Anduri asked for clarification about the fiscal surplus of \$1.8 million in 2021 included in Robinson's report and whether

it represented an amount over the 60% reserve, not actual cash, Robinson reiterated that tranche 2 of the ARPA funds is not a part of those budget figures.

Anduri asked about funds for wildfire weed abatement and tree maintenance and if that is a stable figure or one that increases year-to-year. Robinson replied that the expenditures for those purposes do not necessarily increase, unless allocations from a general fund that are directed to maintain streets and trees is specifically designated for wildfire safety.

During public comments, Suzy Pak, a volunteer for Lamorinda Village, advocated for continued support and funding allocation for the nonprofit. Robert Lavoie suggested the city not apply ARPA funds for additional office space and instead save the funds for other use by having new staff members work remotely.

Robinson responded to Lavoie, explaining that only \$135,000 of the \$650,000 budget

item for additional staff and space would go to office space and would not relieve "the bulk" of that deficit. Issues the council she suggested would have to consider in regard to remote workers are lost efficiency, the impact on workers' home lives, jobs that require in-office consultations and other concerns. "It might, over time, cause problems," she said.

Council discussion relating to actions recommended by Robinson and staff regarding unfunded requests included possible delays or denials of approvals for unfunded items and the timing for approvals or further fact gathering by staff. Using tranche 1 ARPA funds to pay for items was determined to be the best solution for the necessary items needing funding.

Ultimately, the council directed Robinson on next steps related to the base budget, unfunded requests, use of ARPA funds, and confirmed the council at the June 27 meeting will select members of the Financial Sustainability Subcommittee.

# Inaugural Lafayette Community Day brings folks together to give back



Photos provided

Nearly 200 volunteers rolled up their sleeves June 4 to work on various projects throughout Lafayette to benefit local nonprofits as part of the first annual Lafayette Community Day – the brainchild of the Lafayette Community Foundation, the City of Lafayette and the Lafayette Chamber of Commerce as a way to give back and serve others in the community.

Volunteers picked up trash along Mt. Diablo Boulevard, painted the gazebo at Gazebo Park, installed fencing at the community center, cleaned up the creekside at Leigh Creekside Park, and collected and sorted food for the White Pony Express Ukraine Food Drive.

The community donated approximately 350 cans of shelf stable food to be sent to Ukraine and approximately 20 volunteers came out to help, according to White Pony Express General Store Director Steve Harrell, who described the energy of the event as "upbeat and joyful thanks to our wonderful WPE volunteers."



Since the war began, White Pony Express has shipped 33 pallets of needed medical supplies, hygiene kits, blankets, and food to refugees in Poland and Ukraine. Twelve more pallets of food will be shipped shortly as hunger is rampant, according to WPE Development Associate Maisie Carney. WPE is working with nonprofit and business partners to ship items to trusted organizations in Ukraine and neighboring countries to ensure the supplies reach those most in need.

Volunteers gathered at Plaza Park in downtown Lafayette after work was complete to enjoy music by the Traveling Wilburys Review and participate in community art projects.

The event was sponsored by Republic Services and Martin Homes, as well as these in-kind sponsors: Amy Dryer Designs, Peet's Coffee, Evergood Sausage, Lafayette Social, Minuteman Press – Lafayette, Noah's Bagels, and Andrée Hurst Communications. - J. Wake

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