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Council makes difficult decision to focus development in downtown core

By Jennifer Wake

After 18 months of analysis, meetings, and lengthy deliberations, the Lafayette City Council found itself in an untenable position when faced with the decision to identify potential opportunity sites for the 6th Cycle Housing Element.

With the BART parking lot

properties determined to be only 5-10% likely to be approved by the California Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD) as part of the Regional Housing Needs Allocation (RHNA) numbers, set at 2,114 units plus a buffer due to Lafayette's proximity to public transit, the city council made the unpopular and difficult

decision to focus opportunity sites in the downtown core versus at the BART sites.

According to the staff report presented by Planning and Building Director Greg Wolff, Senior Planner Renata Robles and Housing Consultant Diana Elrod, the council decided at its Nov. 14 meeting "not to include the BART Parking Lots (Planning Area 7) and

DeSilva South (Planning Area 9-1) in the opportunity sites for the Revised Draft Housing Element Update, instead choosing a Downtown-Only option. Factors that were discussed included that both areas are in Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zones, that BART's Transit-Oriented Development Work Plan places Lafayette in the post-2030 cat-

egory, that BART's review and potential re-prioritization of TOD project timing is after HCD's housing element deadline, and that HCD has not accepted the BART parking lots as an opportunity site; instead asking for substantial evidence to demonstrate that housing could be built on the site within eight years."

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Regan takes the reins at Lafayette Chamber



By Diane Claytor

Sara Regan knew she had big shoes to fill when she took over as executive director of the Lafayette Chamber of Commerce. After all, she was replacing the much beloved, much respected Jay Lifson, who had been at the helm of the organization for 17 years. But after spending time with Regan, who is down-to-earth, warm, friendly, exuberant and passionate about Lafayette and its growing business community, one has little doubt that she will be every bit as successful – and appreciated – as her predecessor.

Regan has lived in Lamorinda for 22 years. Having grown up in larger metropolitan areas, she remembers thinking Lamorinda "was in the middle of nowhere" when her parents moved here in 1987. It wasn't long before she realized there's no place she'd rather be. "This is such a great community," she says, "both for living and working. I always wanted a place my kids could ride their bikes, walk to school. Lamorinda is a perfect example of a real community."

The Chamber was formed in 1947 with a stated mission of "promoting and maintaining a healthy business climate and preserving and enhancing the quality of life in Lafayette." The mission remains the same today.

At first glance, Regan may appear to be an unlikely choice to head up this 680-member nonprofit organization. She was a Lafayette stay-at-home mom for more than 16 years, actively volunteering in the community. Nine years ago, faced with the daunting prospect of putting four kids through college, Regan decided it was time to look for a paying job. It's pure luck that at the same time, the Lafayette Chamber was looking for an events coordinator. An interview with Lifson landed her the job.

She has worked with members throughout her time at the Chamber and, in her new position, she says the most important thing now is getting out and seeing the members, "letting them know we're here, always talking about what we can do the help them."

Kathy Merchant, a member of the Chamber's Executive Committee, has every confidence in Regan. Following Lifson's retirement announcement, Merchant said, "We tapped an equally amazing leader who shares the same values of community engagement and hard work."

Past President John McCormick echoes those sentiments. "While it was very sad to have Jay leave, the board knew that Sara would be an excellent executive director. We are excited to see her keep the Chamber moving forward as a tremendous asset for local businesses and our community."

Regan knows that following Lifson won't be easy. "I'm following an icon. He really built the Chamber," she says. The biggest thing now, coming out of COVID, Regan notes, is finding a good balance and determining the new normal.

COVID adversely impacted the Chamber, like it did with everything else. The organization decreased its staff, discontinued its events, lost some members.

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