

LHC Candidates' Night reveals accords and divisions in City Council candidates

By Elaine Borden Chandler



Photo Elaine Borden Chandler

From left: Bill Bucher (at podium), Carl Anduri, Gina Dawson, Lauren Herpich, John McCormick, Mario DiPrisco, and Jim Cervantes at Candidates' Night.

On the mild evening of Oct. 9, a steady stream of people walked into the Lafayette Library's Don Tatzin Community Hall. They were going to attend the Lafayette Homeowners Council Candidates' Night, the only live event scheduled where all of the candidates for the Lafayette City Council would speak to the public and answer their questions.

The candidates — Carl Anduri, Gina Dawson, Lauren McCabe Herpich, John McCormick, Mario DiPrisco, and Jim Cervantes — stood on stage and chatted with each other while the auditorium slowly filled up. Note cards were handed out so the audience could submit questions and extra chairs were hustled out so everyone would have a place to sit.

Bill Bucher, the president of the Lafayette Homeowners Council (LHC) and the MC for the evening, officially started the event with an introduction of the LHC and how the event would work. For the first portion, all the candidates left the room and came back one by one to give a statement on themselves and present their opinion on Measure H, the proposed 1/2 cent sales tax measure.

The candidates all gave speeches that generally matched what they had previously publicly stated. Dawson, Anduri, Cervantes, and McCormick said they fully supported it, DiPrisco said he reluctantly supported it, and Herpich said that she opposed it.

The mood among the candidates seemed to be one of general camaraderie during this first section of the evening. Laughter and conversation poured out of the back door every time one of the candidates entered. However, that changed during the second section of Candidates' Night.

As they answered a series of questions that had been submitted beforehand by the public and at the beginning of the evening by the audience, the candidates quickly divided into two unofficial camps. Cervantes, McCormick, Dawson, and Anduri were the more financially liberal group and supported the Council's past actions. Herpich and DiPrisco were the more financially conser-

vative group and were critical of the Council's past actions.

Each of these groups, while having some differing opinions among members, tended to share many opinions and support each other through the evening. As the questions progressed and more detailed information came out about each candidates' opinions and plans, other candidates would subtly nod, smile, wince, and even raise their eyes in exasperation depending on how they felt about expressed ideas.

For the question on dealing with traffic congestion, Mayor Dawson stated that money would be needed to deal with the problem and if Measure H passed an administrative analyst could be hired to look for grants. Herpich responded that the City had already hired a public affairs consultant for \$57,000 per year who wasn't doing their job, exemplified in part by how Lafayette does not receive any sales tax from online sales to Amazon.

McCormick replied that Lafayette's public affairs consultant, Townsend Public Affairs, was "phenomenal" and not only ensured that local Lafayette businesses received money during the pandemic, but also provided the expertise for Lafayette to know which California legislation to propose and support.

He noted Lafayette needs to use consultants with its small staff of 51, saying, "There's more people that work at Diablo Foods or Tutus than work for the City of Lafayette."

DiPrisco said that he wanted to have more bussing for the schools to reduce traffic but mostly focused on how Lafayette had been in a structural deficit for three years and had used "one-offs" like money from the Recovery Act and a settlement received from a Moraga developer to cover the budget. "No household would ever budget this way," he said.

Cervantes responded to Herpich's comments, stating that efforts by Senator Glazer to change the online tax shopping allocation had been stymied and that all cities in California the size of Lafayette or larger had a public affairs consultant. He then responded to DiPrisco

saying that the remaining money from the Recovery Act was used to cover the budget so that voters could vote on Measure H to decide what the City should do.

Anduri ended the exchange by first answering the question by saying that Lafayette needed money to carry out the recommendations of previous studies by the City to reduce traffic. He replied to DiPrisco, stating that the Moraga settlement was the Palos Colorados settlement and it had been used to improve traffic safety around schools. He then replied to Herpich, stating that online sales tax goes to the cities who have distribution centers and that these cities would argue that the sales tax paid for the difficulties that having these centers create.

These exchanges continued throughout the evening, some more obvious and some more subtle. The candidates' larger political opinions came out indirectly during the question on the vitriol in the community with demonstrations for the Israel-Hamas war, gender affirming care for minors, and presidential political candidates. During the question on term limits, Dawson, Cervantes, and McCormick stated their support for Anduri, DiPrisco said that he didn't have a hard rule but thought new voices were a good idea, while Herpich stated she thought there should be term limits for all elected officials.

The questions covered the range of topics from accommodating mandated housing, wildfire safety plans, making the City commissions and task forces more efficient, local control of Housing decisions, getting the General Plan Advisory Committee back on track, increasing affordable housing, and rising fire insurance costs.

After the questions were finished, each candidate gave a closing summary during which the candidates reiterated their views and expressed their gratitude to the remaining audience for lasting for the entire event.

After two hours and 40 minutes, the Candidates' Night ended. As they stood up and stretched, many members of the audience commented that one of the most valuable aspects of the evening was being able to see each of the candidate's personalities.

To watch a video of the Candidates' Night, go to the recording titled "LHC candidates night meeting 20241009" at the Lafayette Homeowners' Council Youtube channel, LHC Lafayette Homeowners Council.

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