

Lafayette unveils two projects honoring the city's indigenous roots

By Sora O'Doherty



Photos Sora O'Doherty

Lafayette Vice Mayor Wei-Tai Kwok and John McCormick, chair of the city's Land Acknowledgment Task Force, unveiled a utility box wrap honoring indigenous people.

An acknowledgment that Lafayette occupies unceded indigenous land is featured on a utility box wrap, alongside artwork portraying women of the Saklan tribe. The new utility box wrap was unveiled on April 8 on the corner of Mt. Diablo Blvd. and Lafayette Circle, adjacent to the Bank of the West building.

The event was presided over by Lafayette Vice Mayor Wei-Tai Kwok and John McCormick. McCormick served as chair of the city's Land Acknowledgment Task Force, and was appointed this year to fill the vacancy on the City Council left by the resignation of Teresa Geringer.

In addition to the utility box wrap, the city also unveiled a new street sign that incorporates both the current name of the street, Mt. Diablo Blvd., and the name of the mountain used by the Ohlone, "Tuyshtak," which means dawn of time.

The utility box team included graphic designer Danielle Gallagher, council member and former mayor Carl Anduri, members of the Lafayette Historical Society Mary McCosker and Andree Hurst, and members of the Public Art Committee: Erling Horn, Yukie Fujimoto, Janice Peacock, and

Christy Mack. In his remarks, Kwok explained that the city "had a year-long exploration of the city's past, including going further back than 175 years to ensure that we understood and honored the original settlers of this land, the indigenous people whose land was taken from them." A task force was appointed to consider an official land acknowledgment statement to symbolize "our city's commitment to honoring indigenous heritage," Kwok said, "and to recognize the

long and rich history of this land well before we arrived here." The task force was composed of McCormick, Steve Kalogeras, Mary McCosker, Janet Thomas, and Lafayette City Manager Niroop Srivatsa, who consulted with indigenous elders in the community. The acknowledgment reads: "We acknowledge that Lafayette is part of the unceded, ancestral homeland of the Bay Miwok people. The Bay Miwok and neighboring Ohlone people have lived in and moved through this place for thousands of years. They stewarded and shaped this land for hundreds of generations. We express our appreciation and gratitude for this profound legacy, which enhances and contributes to our lives to this day. We will strive to honor this land and strengthen our ties with the Indigenous communities that continue to live and work in our East Bay region as our neighbors and community members. We acknowledge and honor them and their ancestors, elders, and next seven generations."

According to Danielle Gallagher, the artwork reproduced on the utility wrap was painted by the artist Louis Choris in 1822. More information is available on the City of Lafayette website, at www.lovelafayette.org/why-lafayette/land-acknowledgment



Budget Process Update

By Lou Fancher

City Manager Niroop Srivatsa at the council's April 8 meeting provided a report on the city's goals and priorities set by council for the upcoming fiscal year. The updated report for FY 2024-25 followed a workshop held on March 24, at which a number of objectives and challenges were discussed. Three priorities were established at that workshop:

1. Develop a Fiscal Sustainability Plan for Short-term and Long-term needs.
2. Wildfire Prevention and Preparedness/Responsiveness and Utility Safety
3. Mt. Diablo Corridor/ Downtown Enhancement Plan

"All three of them are reiterations of your current year's priorities," Srivatsa said. "We ask you to confirm these are indeed your priorities. Then staff can use

your guidance to develop our budgets, look at the resources, and come back to you during the months of May and June for budget adoption."

David Clark offered public comment on the report, noting a missing element in the staff report about making Mt. Diablo Boulevard a "good street." On the overall enhancement plan, he asked for more specificity about elements such as signage or work on creek pathways, and a suggestion the work contributed by volunteers be mentioned in addition to staff time. A member of the public commenting virtually requested more details about making a main thoroughfare through the city, Mt. Diablo Boulevard, "multi modal." Pedestrian and vehicle traffic, parking, the pressure on emergency evacuation traffic,

and other factors, he suggested, should be carefully and thoroughly evaluated.

Mayor Gina Dawson responded, saying the issues had been discussed at the workshop and providing updated information on each item. "We're not looking to throttle the downtown," she said.

The report coming back to the council received comments to add the missing details, clarify specific language referencing the Mt. Diablo corridor, as well as several minor, but important additions to the wildfire protection practices, partnerships, and priorities.

The council voted unanimously to adopt the report and approved staff moving forward based on the priorities. Details on FY 2024-25 and the complete staff report can be found online at the city's website.

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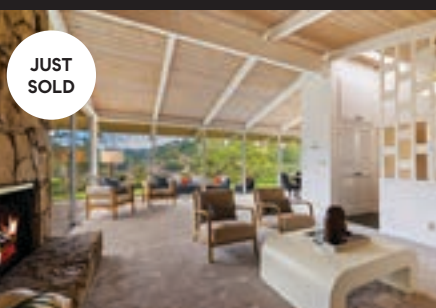
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