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Senior Needs Assessment Study Findings Announced

By Jonathan Seclow

On Monday, July 13, the Lafayette City Council heard the results of the Senior Needs Assessment study that it commissioned in March. The study was commissioned in an effort to prepare Lafayette for projected growth among the 55 and older population, a segment that already comprises 30% of the Lafayette. Due to the aging boomer generation, Contra Costa County estimates 5% growth among that segment by 2020. The study indicated three major areas of concern for seniors in Lafayette. Respondents primarily emphasized the lack of transportation options for seniors who can't drive. Currently there are several services in the area that offer rides for seniors. The study found that the rides offered by those services, primarily the Lamorinda Spirit Van, Rides for Seniors, or Orinda's Seniors Around Town, did not meet the needs of respondents. In executive interviews, participants indicated that they would like to see those services expanded.

The layout of Lafayette demands that its citizens have access to vehicles for transportation. Most of the goods and services are

centralized in downtown Lafayette, while most of the residents

live in the surrounding foothills. In order for seniors to continue living where they do, they will need to have some way to transport themselves to the downtown area. The current offerings are not sufficient, the study found.

The second area of concern for participants was the low availability of moderately priced housing. Currently there is only one senior housing development in Lafayette and it is designated for low-income seniors. Respondents indicated that they would like to see a centrally located senior housing community that would make it easier for them to stay in Lafayette as they age.

Finally, seniors also stressed the need for a centrally located senior center. While the vast majority did know about the existing senior center, they claimed that it was too remote to be fully utilized. The old library was often suggested as a possible location for a new senior center. They also expressed a desire for the new center to be integrated into other community facilities. Essentially, they do not want for it to be a "seniors only" center.

"I was surprised to find that the seniors wanted something that was not just for seniors. I think that a multi-generational facility will be better for everyone," said Council Member Brandt Andersson.

Other council members reacted in similar ways to the results of the study. They found the data obtained to be interesting and helpful for future decisions. They all stressed the importance of making it possible for Lafayette's aging residents to live in their homes for as long as possible.

"We want for everyone to be able to live in their homes for as long as possible. I certainly don't ever want to have to leave mine," said Council Member Carol Federighi.

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