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## Letters to the Editor

Dear Editor,

On Monday night, February 8th, the Lafayette City Council will continue to hear public comment about the proposed rezoning of the 1.75-acre parcel at Deer Hill Road and Pleasant Hill Road known as the Christmas tree lot across from Acalanes High School. The City proposes to rezone this parcel from Administrative/Professional Office to Multi-family residential, which would allow application to build about 30 multi-family housing units on this small site. Residents and representatives of numerous Homeowner Associations throughout the City spoke at the recent January 25th meeting and unanimously opposed multi-family zoning. In fact, all public speakers opposed the proposal for multi-family housing and the vast majority favored a lower density single family zoning consistent with the surrounding homes and neighborhood. The reasons for opposition from the numerous speakers and emails included, inconsistency with the General Plan, which states that any development be consistent with the semi-rural character of the community, inappropriate development at a major entryway to the City, increased traffic at this intersection, the busiest intersection in the City, ingress and egress problems, lack of community need for such a project, distance from shopping, transit and Downtown services, and many other significant concerns.

The City Council plans to begin public comment at 7:00 p.m. and decide this important issue on Monday, Feb. 8 at the Lafayette Library and Learning Center. Interested residents need to speak at the meeting to express their opinions about the appropriate zoning and use of this land. To learn more and read public comments, see the staff report at [www.ci.lafayette.ca.us](http://www.ci.lafayette.ca.us) or e-mail [SaveOurSchools@yahoo.com](mailto:SaveOurSchools@yahoo.com).

Guy Atwood  
Lafayette

To the Editor:

Entrepreneurial thinking is badly needed at the Acalanes Union High School District. The district's high schools serve Lamorinda and a part of Walnut Creek.

The district has a voracious appetite for more money. In 2008, the district proposed extending an existing tax for 17 years. In 2009, the district wanted to make a temporary \$189 property (parcel) tax permanent. In both cases, voters gave the district what it wanted.

Now, the Acalanes district has voted to spend up to \$26,750 to poll district residents on raising property taxes (Lamorinda Sun, Jan. 15). Whenever the district takes a poll on raising taxes, the meaning is clear: the district plans to ask voters for more money.

When voters pass a tax increase, the increase is the equivalent of a mandatory price increase. However, a private business would have to think carefully about raising prices. Higher prices might mean fewer customers.

The answer to the Acalanes school district's insatiable appetite for more money is to privatize the district's schools.

If schools were privatized, excellent schools, like Miramonte High School in Orinda, would be able to sell any extra student places to parents who wanted to buy these places. If there were no extra places, Miramonte could find some extra space and expand business as needed.

Also, Miramonte could, as it is now doing through the Educational Foundation of Orinda, raise funds by asking parents for contributions. As a private school, Miramonte could use any extra money for whatever purposes it liked, such as teachers' salaries, science laboratories, music programs, or a new swimming pool. Currently, there are restrictions on how foundation money can be spent.

If the Acalanes high schools were privatized, then such schools as Miramonte High School and Campolindo High School could compete with each other for students. If Miramonte became too expensive or too low in quality, then parents could send their children to Campolindo.

Privatization would eliminate excessive bureaucratic overhead. If a given school spent too much money on administrative costs -- especially on the salaries and retirements plans for administrators -- parents would be free to transfer their children to another school.

A privatized school could hire a money manager to raise funds. Harvard University hired three men who, in the 1990's and beyond, increased Harvard's endowment by \$18 billion (The New York Times, Jan. 12, 2005).

Once privatized, schools would not be dependent on government for money. Thus, budget difficulties in Sacramento would not affect how much money a school received.

Privatized schools could adjust teachers' salaries according to the laws of supply and demand. Thus, if there were a shortage of physics teachers, privatized schools could pay higher salaries to recruit and retain physics teachers. The current public school system offers minimal salary flexibility.

Miramonte High School is already partially privatized. On January 16, the fund-raising sign at the Orinda Crossroads showed that the Educational Foundation of Orinda, which gives funds to Miramonte, has, in its latest attempt to raise money, garnered \$1 million.

There are some objections to school privatization. Private schools could discriminate against students on the basis of race, religion, or income. To remedy such defects, discrimination could be legally banned. Parents not able to afford

a private school could, at taxpayer expense, be given money to be used for tuition.

Schools, once privatized and competing with one another for students, would be forced to become more responsible with money. And taxpayers would not have to hear constant pleas for higher property taxes.

Richard S. Colman  
Orinda

Reach the reporter at: [info@lamorindaweekly.com](mailto:info@lamorindaweekly.com)

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