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Lafayette

Sales Tax Measure Decision on Hold Until June

By Cathy Tyson

City leaders weighed the pros and cons of placing a 1 percent sales tax measure on the November ballot, after hearing opinion poll results and the recommendation of the Sales Tax Revenue Study Committee at the May 9 Lafayette City Council meeting. Although it appears they support the concept, council members chose to defer making a final decision until their June 13 meeting.

While the city budget is balanced, the Sales Tax Revenue Committee found after months of meetings and investigation, that “there is little additional revenue available for new projects or programs.” Their official recommendation is for a general transaction and use tax of 1 percent for a duration of 29 years, with revenue raised staying in Lafayette, to preserve and enhance the community with annual audits and citizens’ oversight. The measure would raise about \$3 million per year.

Professional pollster Brian Godbe of Godbe Research presented the overall findings of

the voter attitude survey that assessed potential support for a tax, and identified respondents’ priorities for city facilities and services at the May 9 meeting. The firm contacted a total of 426 random voting-age residents either by phone or over the Internet in March.

Apparently people really do ‘Love Lafayette.’ Of those who took the survey, over 80 percent are somewhat or very satisfied with the provision of city services, with a meager 16 percent somewhat or very dissatisfied.

Godbe’s recommendation: “It is feasible to move forward” with a sales tax measure, but he cautioned there has to be a strong public outreach effort. The survey showed in the initial test that 67.4 percent of respondents answered definitely yes or probably yes that they would vote to provide funding that would stay in Lafayette, and maintain the city’s quality of life by funding general city services, including protecting open space from development, enhancing police protection, increase downtown

parking, create and maintain downtown parks, revitalize the historic Park Theater and reduce downtown congestion.

As a general tax, if the measure is approved by voters, it only needs a simple majority to pass. Revenue raised would be placed in the city’s general fund and may be used for any lawful government purpose. However, City Attorney Mala Subramanian clarified, “the city may still identify specific services for which it intends to use tax proceeds.” City leaders were clear their intention is to allocate money to certain areas in addition to seeking matching funds from grants where possible.

Mayor Mark Mitchell was hoping to get an unambiguous picture of what the public wants in an unbiased way, and was happy that “the results of the survey are clear, by a comfortable margin.” A review, and decision on the proposed ballot measure will occur at the June 13 City Council meeting.

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Leigh Creekside Park

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Additional passive features like handicap accessible pathways, picnic table areas and more take up 12 percent of the area, but leave the majority of the park in its natural state.

Many neighbors came to the city council meeting to voice their concerns about the revised plans, while others asked that the park be cleaned up and not developed, simply left in its natural state. Many residents of nearby Merrill Gardens signed form letters in favor of the Leigh Creekside Park Improvement Plan. Woody Karp, senior project developer of nearby Eden Housing, wrote the council urging support of new ADA-accessible pathways as a wonderful destination for its senior residents.

Parks, Trails and Recreation Commissioner Geoff Bellenger highlighted that this version represents a “vast compromise” and utilizes play elements that will attract children for active use. “Part of our job is to make sure our parks can serve all children and adults,” he said.

Although the council did agree on a designation change

– from passive to active – they appeared to support a compromise, but didn’t make a decision on keeping some of the park, especially the heritage oak, in its natural habitat while including a smaller play area and handicap accessibility. Council Member Traci Reilly suggested a hybrid solution that seeks a balance in order to “speak to the entire community.”

“I think we can do both,” agreed Council Member Mike Anderson, who supported the PTR Plan. “I don’t think having structures destroys a park experience,” explaining that it is not an either-or situation. He added that there is no funding for this at the moment anyway; this is just the beginning of the process. The hunt for money starts a year from now.

The issue of Leigh Creekside Park, and firmer information on costs and maintenance estimates, will be back before the city council on June 27. If a decision is made at that meeting, the proposed plans will go to the Planning Commission for further review.

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Lafayette

Watch Out for Water Plant and Pipeline Construction

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When complete, the new garage-like facility will be 20 to 24 feet tall, with the pumping equipment partly underground to dampen noise and reduce the size of the structure.

Drivers should be aware that construction is going to get worse with the next phase, as the construction process requires the boulevard to shrink to two lanes.

Scheduled for the end of May and the beginning of June, three 30-inch waterlines will be running underground approximately 200 feet from the new plumping plant footprint, across the street and to the westbound lanes of Mt. Diablo Boulevard.

Another 1,000 feet of 30-inch waterline will be installed under the outside westbound lane of Mt. Diablo Boulevard from approximately Mt. Diablo Court to Carol Lane in late June and July, or perhaps early August, according to

EBMUD spokeswoman Michelle Blackwell.

Original plans called for not being able to make a left turn out of the Mt. Diablo Court, instead having drivers loop around at Pleasant Hill Road. While turning left is possible now, it’s a little tricky with bright orange barriers creating a safe walking space for pedestrians in front of the chain link fence that surrounds the construction site.

Lafayette Chief of Police Eric Christensen would like to remind drivers that the speed limit in the area has been reduced to 25 miles per hour, and fines are double in construction zones.

His advice? “Slow down, people! It’s a minor inconvenience and it will save you a ton of money.”

The project is slated to be complete in September 2017. – C. Tyson

Share your thoughts, insights and opinions with your community.
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