

LAMORINDA WEEKLY

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Brian, Cathy, Sophia, Theo and Sadie on the back steps of their new home in Orinda.

Photo Sora O'Doherty

New or old, Lamorinda real estate sales are on fire

By Sora O'Doherty

One effect of the coronavirus pandemic has been that in recent months the real estate market has been exploding, particularly in the East Bay and more particularly in Lamorinda. New Lamorinda resident and financial analyst Brian Schwartz says, "I think the pandemic in COVID-19 is an accelerator for the housing market in this area, but it is just the latest accelerator or catalyst or tailwind in a multi-

year secular dynamic." He attributes the heated housing market to the very strong tech economy and says that it looks like it will continue to be strong for the next 10 years.

Schwartz seized the opportunity in March to acquire a unique property in Orinda and he and his family – wife, Catherine, two children, 11-year-old Sophia and 8-year-old Theo, and a growing puppy, Sadie – are delighted to join the neighborhood. They had been in the market for a dream home for over a year, but they couldn't find the right fit because of

the lack of inventory and the high demand. When the pandemic hit, it created what Schwartz called "mass fear," and on March 19 they went into contract on their Orinda house.

"Had the house listed a month earlier, or had the buyers been able to have their open house," Schwartz said, "the odds would have been very, very low that we would have won this house."

Although inventory is low, new developments in Lamorinda are also selling out quickly.

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For more information, contact Regional Director Ron Mintz
e: ron@vanguardproperties.com
p: 925.872.0968 DRE# 01095341

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PG&E hydrostatic testing starts in downtown Lafayette



Photo Pippa Fisher

PG&E begins work testing gas pipelines in downtown Lafayette, which will last till November.

By Pippa Fisher

Hydrostatic testing of the underground transmission gas pipeline is underway in downtown Lafayette. And those coned-off lanes, contractor trucks, metal plates in the road, detour signs, air compressors, closed sidewalks, and heavy equipment will be a familiar sight until the work is com-

pleted in early November. Described as a "safety and reliability" project, hydrostatic pressure testing is designed to test pipeline strength and integrity by filling the pipeline with water and increasing the pressure to a level much higher than normal operating pressure. Pacific Gas and Electric Co. will repair or replace any pipeline that does not meet acceptable standards.

PG&E spokesperson Tamar Sarkissian says they do not anticipate any disruption of service connected with the work, explaining that customers in this area receive gas from two transmissions lines, which are the large high-pressure gas lines that transport natural gas throughout the state. "The transmission lines then provide gas to distribution lines, which are lower pressure, lower diameter lines that serve communities directly," she says.

While the transmission line is undergoing testing, customers will continue to receive natural gas service from the second nearby transmission line, while the other line is temporarily not in service. "Once the test is completed, we expect that natural gas we will be reintroduced to the line," Sarkissian says.

According to Sarkissian, this section of pipeline is due for federally-required assessment before the end of this year and has no correlation to the

Lafayette Transmission Integrity Management audits by the California Public Utilities Commission; audits that Lafayette's Gas Safety Task Force has long-called for.

"We're glad for the strength testing," says GSTF Co-Founder Gina Dawson, adding, "It should lead to safer pipelines in the heart of downtown as well as consideration for automated shut-off valves to protect the city center." Dawson says she is disappointed PG&E didn't communicate with the GSTF directly.

Save Lafayette Trees – a group formed in response to PG&E's proposal to remove hundreds of trees in Lafayette under the Community Pipeline Safety Initiative – and the GSTF are focused on PG&E's safety priorities. They say the CPSI is misguided.

"The CPSI calls for destruction of hundreds of trees without context of more significant pipeline safety threats to the public. There are laws for pipeline integrity testing, none for tree removal," says Dawson, adding that pipeline testing is a core part of proactive, preventative safety protections.

Noting that the pipeline sections in downtown Lafayette are almost 70 years old, Dawson says PG&E has no testing records to show for them.

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