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Published April 28th, 2021

Letters to the editor

Concern over Lafayette traffic circle for cyclists

I was shocked and saddened to hear of the death of Joe Shami, Lafayette resident and local cycling legend. He was struck by a car in the traffic circle at the intersection of Pleasant Hill Road and Olympic Blvd and died of his injuries. Joe was an extremely experienced cyclist and is famous for having bicycled up Mt. Diablo 500 consecutive weeks in a row.

I believe that part of the blame for this tragedy lies with the decision to install the traffic circle at that intersection, which has no provisions for cyclists. I have been bicycling along that route to work for 9 years and prior to the traffic circle, there was a 4 way stop. Bicyclists traveling east could stay on the right shoulder and continue on to the bicycle lane on Olympic Blvd.

When the traffic circle was being proposed, reportedly there was a desire to connect the Lafayette-Moraga Trail with the Iron Horse Trail in Walnut Creek to facilitate bicycle traffic. However, the final design proposed by the City Council for the traffic circle included no accommodations for cyclists at all. An alternative, much safer design was offered by the Bike East Bay organization (<https://bikeeastbay.org/events/city-lafayette-pleasant-hill-rdolympic-blvd-roundabout-public-meeting>), however the Lafayette City Council went ahead with a very car-oriented traffic circle that makes no provision for cyclists. When riding through this intersection, cyclists must take the lane with cars, with no area dedicated for cyclists. I have felt much less safe going through this intersection since the traffic circle was installed.

Every year I stop at the various "energizer stations" in Lafayette that support Bike-To-Work Day. Those stations are supposedly to encourage people to make bicycling to work a regular habit. We are told using a bicycle instead of a car will help combat climate change. But those of us who try to bicycle to work regularly are continually disappointed by the lip-service paid to improving the infrastructure to make bicycling safer.

Eric Bain
Lafayette

PG&E priorities

Regarding "PG&E work continues in downtown Lafayette" (April 14, 2021), PG&E's boilerplate statement of safety being "PG&E's top priority" belies a history of uneven engagement and communication in Lafayette. The article should have stated that PG&E is working on 13 sections of the pipeline where significant corrosion merited immediate repairs. In total, PG&E found 69 areas of corrosion in just one pipeline mile during recent testing on the high pressure pipeline downtown. Testing was initiated only after the resident Gas Safety Task Force requested CPUC do an audit of PG&E gas operations in Lafayette.

We wish legally mandated pipeline testing had been a priority over discretionary PG&E programs, like tree removal. Trees have never caused a gas transmission pipeline accident for PG&E, while corrosion of pipelines continues to be one of the leading causes of incidents. Significant portions of high pressure, vintage pipeline in Lafayette remains untested.

The Task Force has worked for years to help PG&E focus on real-world safety issues in Lafayette, identifying significant risks that PG&E later addressed. These include dangerous exposed pipeline spans in high fire zones including the Springhill Neighborhood and Briones; exposed pipeline along the highly trafficked Lafayette-Moraga trail that blocked a seasonal stream; adding important cathodic protection to protect against corrosion; pipeline testing; and more.

We ask PG&E to continue to focus on mitigating major causes of gas pipeline accidents: corrosion, incorrect operation, and excavation dig-ins. PG&E should complete inline testing of all transmission pipelines in Lafayette; better identify High Consequence Areas, a designation for higher safety standards, especially in high wildfire zones; and work to reduce dig-in accidents, which average more than once per month in Lafayette. We agree PG&E's top priority should be safety. There's still a lot of work to do, and we're counting on PG&E's partnership on the real gas safety issues to make this a reality.

Michael Dawson
Lafayette Gas Safety Task Force member

Enough is Enough

I spoke at a Lafayette City Council meeting in September 2018 to protest a Tree Removal Agreement with PG&E. PG&E cited safety as the primary reason that they needed to cut down 272 trees along the Lafayette-Moraga Trail, Reservoir Rim Trail, and some neighborhoods and backyards. This list included many old, heritage oaks. The main reason for my opposition, and the opposition of others, was simple: PG&E had not shown any correlation, evidence, or data that showed that cutting down trees near gas lines enhances our safety. In fact, they failed to give one single example of where a tree had caused a gas leak or pipeline accident or any other problem. I was pleased to see all of the research by the new group Save Lafayette Trees uncovering real, honest ways that our safety could be enhanced, such as having automated shut-off valves. And I applaud the City of Lafayette for setting up a Gas Safety Task Force. But, unbelievably debate about trees has persisted for 2 1/2 years and PG&E continues to press for cutting them down. Enough is enough! I ask again that PG&E focus on real gas safety concerns and that the City of Lafayette do whatever

they can to finally preserve all 272 trees and put this issue to bed.

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