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Lafayette council adopts Vision Zero traffic safety policy



Image provided

By Lou Fancher

The Lafayette City Council on Nov. 22 unanimously approved a resolution adopting a Vision Zero policy, which is “a strategy to eliminate all transportation-related fatalities and severe injuries, while improving safe, healthy (and) equitable mobility for all,” according to a staff report presented by Engineering and Public Works Director Mike Moran. “The Vision Zero approach views transportation-related fatalities as preventable, not inevitable, relies on multi-disciplinary collabo-

ration and is data-informed and equity-centered,” Moran noted in the report.

This presentation followed a Vision Zero presentation to the council on Oct. 12 from Tim Haile, executive director of the Contra Costa Transportation Authority. Moran encouraged the council to carefully consider costs, downtown improvements already planned that might reasonably be put on hold in order to consider the plan’s impact, and staffing needs such as a transportation manager and traffic safety engineer to support the project.

Other concerns included lesser, but still important, realities: possible longer emergency response times (examples: beacon lights, speed humps and/or lane reductions implemented to increase pedestrian safety or provide more bike lanes could restrict and might slow emergency vehicles), and no guarantee that Vision Zero would change behaviors of drivers and cause citizens to walk,

bike, reduce speeds or take similar actions that increase public safety.

Receiving questions from the council after his update, Moran said synergistic, cooperative projects undertaken with other cities – or simply Lafayette on its own adopting the Vision Zero plan – would allow access to increased grant opportunities. Lafayette’s Local Roadway Safety Plan (LRSP) has already been awarded state grant funding. Among the first tasks of a contract transportation engineer recently hired by the city is to solicit proposals for the LRSP. After selecting a consultant, a technical advisory committee will be formed to help with plan preparation.

Outlining the format largely shaped by Vision Zero protocols and guidelines, Moran clarified the stark differences between the city’s 2003 Traffic Calming Guidebook that outlines an extensive public process to implement traffic-calming measures. That process required

the community to come together, often in multiple meetings, to develop a consensus on the safety strategies to implement. Neighborhoods were most often responsible for funding the approved traffic-calming improvements. Under a Vision Zero policy, safety measures would be implemented expeditiously by city staff. Addressing safety concerns for the most vulnerable users would take precedence over concerns about traffic congestion, aesthetics, and public opinion. Moran said the plan might, for example, reduce or eliminate on-street parking in a specific congested corridor in the downtown to create a bikeway.

Council Member Carl Anduri at multiple times during the discussion expressed concern that a promised joint city council and transportation-circulation committee meeting had not taken place. He said the committee should be involved now and represented on the task force that is ultimately formed. Finding agreement

from other council members, Moran and City Manager Niroop Srivatsa confirmed members of the commission were in attendance at the council meeting, would be included in planning, and will be represented on the task force.

Although Vision Zero follows a standard format, the plan enacted in Lafayette can include specific details. Moran pointed to examples such as improvements the General Plan already outlines, such as improvements made near schools, increased connections between roadways and county trails, and more.

Council Member Gina Dawson acknowledged the importance of making improvements that encourage more people to walk and bike in the downtown core, but emphasized also taking steps to increase access for seniors and other people who move within the city by means other than walking or biking.

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Environmental Excellence Award

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There are around 80,000 documented monkey bar injuries in the United States each year in children under 16, according to a 2020 Biomed Central study. No leaf injuries were noted.

After the children did their research, they introduced their case for banning leaf blowers to the Lafayette City Council and shared it with the Lamorinda community last January. Renton said her children continued writing to the city council and members of the community began writing in support of their cause. The children didn’t stop their efforts in

Lafayette. They also shared their concerns with Sen. Diane Feinstein and California Gov. Gavin Newsom. “When Gavin Newsom announced the ban of (gas-powered) leaf blowers by 2024, my kids threw a loud party.”

Where is it that the Renton children get their persistence from? Renton said it may be a number of factors. The family has traveled extensively and moved to Lafayette from South Africa seven years ago.

“I think there’s something to be said for coming to a new place and having to start from scratch and having a strong work ethic,” Renton said.

In the family’s extensive world travels, Renton said they had never witnessed the quantity of leaf blowers they’ve seen, heard and smelled in Lafayette. Renton says they didn’t quite understand the root of Lafayette’s dislike of leaves, which she points out can serve as mulch or can be contained with a good old fashioned rake or an electric blower. On an environmental level, the Rentons are a one-car family and are already invested in reducing their own carbon footprint. “I don’t drive them to school every morning just because it’s a little cold,” Renton said. “Unless it’s raining, they

cycle to school on their bikes.”

Environmental Task Force Representative Nancy Hu recognized Finn, Jaime and Scout Renton for their activist grassroots outreach efforts to neighbors, the school district and the city to address the use and proliferation of gas powered electric leaf blowers at the Nov. 22 meeting. “Because of their efforts and because of the multitude of public comments the ETF is working on an ordinance to restrict gas leaf blowers and plan to have language for the city next year,” Hu said while presenting the Rentons with an Environmental Excellence award. Hu had nomi-

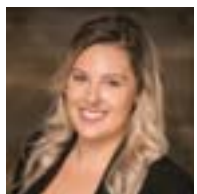
nated the Rentons for the award and was glad the rest of the committee agreed they deserved it. “Given that there are more than 100 cities that have banned or restricted (gas leaf blower) use ... I think it’s time Lafayette did something about them.”

The children thanked the Environmental Task Force for their award, adding, “We hope Lafayette will join other cities in banning leaf blowers.”

The Environmental Task Force will recognize Project Earth, the other recipient of the Environmental Excellence Awards at a future meeting.



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