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Discussion continues regarding Housing Element and Res Tower

By Lou Fancher

City Manager Niroop Srivatsa in her bi-weekly update at the Feb. 12 council meeting, said the city had received the third review letter from the State Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD). The six-page response indicated Lafayette's sixth?Cycle Housing Element requires additional revisions. The city in January of 2023 adopted and submitted the first iteration. Two months later, HCD notified the city that additional analysis and revisions were necessary to comply with state law. The updates supplied by staff were subsequently reviewed by the planning commission and city council in late summer and early fall. Once again, further clarifications and metrics were added and the revised HE was submitted to HCD on Dec. 14, 2023.

Upon receiving HCD's latest notice that the city has more work to obtain a certified HE, Srivatsa said the city immediately contacted HCD to request a meeting. She said face-to-face contact was integral to understanding the deficiencies and specific actions staff and the council could take that will allow HCD to deem the HE is substantially compliant with state law. The council planned to discuss HCD's letter and the results of any meeting that has taken place at its next regular meeting on Feb. 26.?(Information on the Housing Element Update process can be found at www.PlanLafayette.org?or email? GeneralPlan@lovelafayette.org.)

Srivatsa also provided information about the Lafayette Reservoir Tower Seismic Retrofit project. A proposed design for the required retrofit included a tower shortened by 40 feet and received comments of concern from residents and members of the council. Srivatsa said the reaction indicated high levels of concern to EBMUD's plan that would reduce the tower, leaving "only a truncated remnant of the iconic structure." A committee of highly qualified residents with expertise in seismic structural retrofit design, structural engineering, architecture, and construction volunteered to review EBMUD's plans. Over a period of nine months, the committee studied the project's technical reports, analyses, plans, and references cited by EBMUD's structural design consultant (AECOM) and the Division of Safety of Dams (DSOD) to determine if the existing scale of the tower could be retained while still ensuring safety for Lafayette residents and visitors.

A revised plan which concluded the tower could remain at the same height, requiring only a modest addition of mild steel reinforcement in the upper half of the tower, was submitted to EBMUD. Srivatsa told council she will make sure the committee's report "finds a home" on the city website where council and members of the public can review the plans and find updates.

Finally, Srivatsa said city staff are meeting with Caltrans the first week in March to discuss the El Curtola Bridge situation.

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