



V LAFAYETTE VISTAS

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ONE OF CALIFORNIA'S MOST EFFICIENT CITIES *How does Lafayette do it?*

Recently, the government watchdog website *Transparent California* compared 395 California cities and concluded that Lafayette had the 43rd lowest cost per resident¹. That means Lafayette is more efficient than about 90% of the State's other cities.

Not bad! Meanwhile, Lafayette also maintains a AAA bond rating from Standard and Poor's. Last we checked, only about 25 of the State's cities had received that sought-after rating, putting Lafayette in truly elite company.

This sort of efficiency doesn't happen by accident, and in this day and age of chronic pension crises, we're proud to say that Lafayette is one of the few cities that gets it right. While the City is by no means perfect, the organization is distinctly different from many other public agencies.

How does Lafayette do it?

We Limit What We Do.

When Lafayette first incorporated in 1968 it received no property taxes and, because it had no shopping mall or big box stores, it also collected few sales tax dollars. Thus – born more out of necessity than anything else – the original City Council had no choice but to provide only a few essential services, namely, the “Four P's”: *police, public works, planning and parks*. That elemental frugality and limited scope was written into the City's original mission statement (it's still there, in fact) and is now firmly mapped onto the organization's DNA. When you call, don't be surprised if we tell you, “Sorry, we don't do that.”

We Contract for Almost Everything. Many homeowners, when they paint their house, take the time to acquire two or three bids in order to assure a good price from a qualified contractor. Lafayette does the same. We competitively contract for street and sidewalk repairs, traffic signal maintenance, roadway striping and stenciling, and downtown median landscaping. The orange-shirted workers you see tending the plants and changing the banners downtown are contract employees. This newsletter was designed and printed by contractors. Lafayette's recreation instructors are contractors. Our meeting minute takers are contractors. Even the City's police officers are contract employees. By contracting for services we hope to ensure that – like the homeowner looking for a painter – Lafayette gets the best combination of price and quality.



A Small Staff. All those contractors mean that Lafayette needs fewer employees, and we have just 44. That makes us much smaller, from an employee standpoint, than most comparable cities. El Cerrito and Lafayette, for instance, both have about 25,000 residents but, at 173 employees, El Cerrito's staff is nearly 400% larger than Lafayette's.

No Automatic Pay Increases. In most California cities it's standard for employees to march up the pay scale through seniority and tenure, regardless of performance. Not here. In Lafayette, every employee receives two evaluations each year and, without positive performance, there is no pay increase.

No Pension Plan. One of the signature benefits that most California public employees receive is a defined benefit pension. Unfortunately, however – as we have seen in the

newspapers – underfunded pension plans have forced scores of cities to cut back on services. Lafayette, in stark contrast, does not offer a defined benefit pension plan to its employees. That's right: *no Lafayette employee receives a pension*. Instead, just like most workers in the private sector, City employees are enrolled in a 401-style defined contribution plan. At the end of each pay period the City deposits the equivalent of 10% of the employee's salary into a tax-

free savings account, and agrees to sock away another 5% if employees match that contribution. The goal is to provide a fair and reasonable retirement to our dedicated public servants – but one that doesn't bankrupt the City.

No Unfunded Obligations. Because there is no defined benefit retirement plan, Lafayette has no long-term unfunded pension obligations. And, while the City does provide a retirement health benefit to its long term employees, we have worked with an actuary and the City's independent auditor to ensure that the liability for that program is fully funded.

Balanced Budgets. We balanced our budget this year, and we have done so every single year for the last twenty five years. Even during recessionary times, we've managed to make the ends meet, with a little left over.

A Big Reserve. What do we do with that savings? We add it to the City's reserve, which now totals \$8.7M. That's equal to about two-thirds of the City's annual General Fund budget.

(continued on back page)

¹Ranking for cities with population greater than 10,000. See www.transparentcalifornia.com.

THE RESULTS ARE IN!

People Very Satisfied But Want Further Improvements

In a recent survey, four out of five Lafayette residents said they were satisfied with the job that the City is doing. That's a nice vote of confidence!

But it gets better: Two-thirds went on to say that they would vote for a sales tax increase if the funds were used for purposes such as protecting open space and smoothing traffic flow.

Why Do A Survey?

Regular *Vistas* readers will recall that, last spring, the City Council spent several evenings roaming around town, hosting a series of *Community Conversations*. About fifty residents attended each of those public meetings and, in combination with online participants, described their dreams for how the Lafayette community could be improved. Over several months, they told the Council they'd like to see more downtown parks, better open space protection, more police patrols, a revitalized Park Theater, and improved downtown parking opportunities.

While the input was helpful, the Council couldn't be sure if the participants represented the entire community because they were self-, rather than randomly-selected, which could bias the results.

To confirm or refute the outcomes from the *Community Conversations*, the City hired Godbe Research to conduct a statistically significant public opinion poll. During a ten-day period in March, surveyors made telephone calls and collected online opinions from 436 residents that were carefully selected to mirror the population of people who are likely to vote in a Lafayette election. The results have a 4.6% margin of error.

When the surveys were completed and the numbers all tabulated, Godbe informed the City that 81% of Lafayette residents are either somewhat or very satisfied with the way that

Lafayette provides municipal services. Only 5% indicated that they were very dissatisfied.

Furthermore, between 64% and 68% of likely voters signaled that they would support a sales tax increase if 100% of the funds were guaranteed to stay in Lafayette and that the money would be used to increase the City's quality of life. Since a general sales tax measure requires a simple majority to pass, the news is encouraging to those who favor placing a measure on the November ballot.

81%
satisfied

The Favorite Projects

In addition to testing whether the general idea of a sales tax has merit, Godbe probed to find out which specific programs people support. All of these received positive responses:

- Protect open spaces
- Smooth traffic flow
- Revitalize the Park Theater
- Build more bike and pedestrian paths
- Increase downtown parking
- Enhance police protection
- Create new downtown parks

What Happens Next?

Armed with input from both the *Community Conversations* and the statistically significant poll results, the City Council will, over the next several few months, chew on the question of whether to place a sales tax measure on the November ballot. In order to meet the Elections Office deadline, a final decision will likely be made in June or early July.

If you have opinions or questions about this matter, please send them to cityhall@lovelafayette.org.

IMPROVEMENTS COMING TO OLYMPIC | RELIEZ STATION CORRIDOR

After years of study, planning, and public input, the City of Lafayette is about to start work on two sets of improvements to the Reliez Station Road / Olympic Boulevard corridor. The first project involves **installing traffic signals** on Reliez Station Road at both Olympic Boulevard and Las Trampas/Richelle. Adding signals should make traffic flow more smoothly, make the corridor safer, and also allow local residents better access to the busy arterial.

For the second project, the City will **install its first ever roundabout** at the intersection of Olympic Boulevard and Pleasant Hill Road. This project should eliminate the traffic congestion that plagues that intersection while improving pedestrian and bicycle mobility.

These projects are the culmination of a number of traffic studies, some dating back at least two decades. Signals at the Reliez Station/Las Trampas intersection were first proposed in the early 1990s, but Lafayette opted, instead, to implement a series of low-cost alternatives to improve traffic conditions in the area. Responding to residents' more recent complaints, the City Council agreed to re-examine the effectiveness of these measures.

Over the course of a year-long study concluded in May 2015, engineers re-evaluated traffic conditions along the corridor to determine whether additional changes could improve

traffic operations. The consultants found that side-street turns onto Reliez Station Road are particularly risky, and that the safety conditions for pedestrians crossing the mainline are less-than-ideal. With rising traffic volumes on Reliez Station Road, the engineers suggested that new traffic signals could solve these safety issues and still accommodate the arterial demand.

A Roundabout and Two Traffic Signals

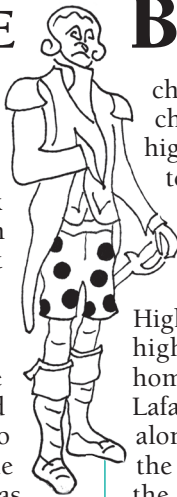
Meanwhile, the intersection at Olympic Boulevard and Pleasant Hill Road has long experienced traffic congestion and delays during the peak hours. The recent study considered a number of traffic control options for this location, and there was broad agreement that a roundabout was the right solution.

Commonplace around the world and widely used in many US states, roundabouts are gaining popularity in California as a proven strategy to smooth traffic flows, reduce emissions, and improve safety. The geometry of the design creates a low-speed intersection that minimizes the typical head-on and broadside collisions that cause the most serious injury accidents.

What's Next?

City staff is now hard at work preparing construction bid documents, and we expect that Council will award the contract in June 2016 with a target finish date of December 2016.

LAFAYETTE BRIEFS



Too Expensive! Council Sends Leigh Creekside Park Back for Review

The Council chambers were full on a cold Monday night in March and almost everybody was there to talk about little Leigh Creekside Park, located at Fourth Street and Moraga Boulevard. Fifty five people filled out speaker slips to express their opinion regarding whether architect James Dixon's ambitious plan for custom play equipment should be added to the park. Many people enthusiastically favored the idea but just about the same number were opposed, saying the peaceful place should be left alone. When the discussion finally got back to the Council, staff noted that the estimated cost for the proposed plan was about \$1M, and that no funding was available and would not be available for many years to come. After some discussion, the Council decided that the plan was too expensive. One councilmember nailed it when she said, "if we make it simpler and cheaper, the kids will get to play on it sooner." And so the Council sent the matter back to the Parks, Trails, and Recreation (PTR) commission, with the direction to scale back the plan with a target cost not to exceed \$500,000. If you're interested in this matter, you can subscribe to PTR agendas at www.lovelafayette.org.

Pay Attention to the New Truck Regulations

New truck regulations, no big deal, right? Wrong! In March, the City Council adopted a new ordinance that establishes, for practically every residential street in Lafayette, a maximum 10,000 pound weight limit for trucks. It turns out that ten thousand pounds isn't that heavy for a truck, and so the new rule will apply not only to heavy trucks like cement mixers and tractor trailers, but also to lighter vehicles like lumber trucks, dump trucks, furniture trucks, step vans, and many if not most delivery trucks. These vehicles will still be allowed to rumble down your street if they are making a local delivery – but they will otherwise be prohibited from using roads like Reliez Station Road, Reliez Valley Road, St. Mary's Road, or Happy Valley Road to cut through to other communities. The point is to improve traffic flow and safety. Large trucks, of course, will still be allowed on Mt. Diablo Boulevard, Pleasant Hill Road, Moraga Road, and the streets near the Central Lafayette freeway onramp. If you have concerns about large trucks in your neighborhood, let the police know via cityhall@lovelafayette.org.

You Think You Know About Earthquake Risk?

But do you really know about earthquake risk? For instance: who do you believe is at greater risk for an earthquake, someone living in San Francisco or Lafayette? Someone living on the Hayward fault near the UC Berkeley campus or someone living near the Lafayette Reservoir? Someone living in downtown Los Angeles or someone staying at the Lafayette Park Hotel? In all cases, it is the person in Lafayette. So says a new web application called www.temblor.net. Developed by Stanford scientists, Temblor uses historical data to chart which faults have been distressed by recent earthquakes, and which are loaded with stress and ready to let loose. The news isn't great for our town. Indeed, according to Temblor, if you live in Lafayette the estimated chance that your home will be damaged by an earthquake anytime in the next thirty years is high. How high? Temblor says that, for the average Lafayette home, there is a one in five



chance that it will experience \$30,000 in damage, and a 1 in 6 chance that the damage will cost \$90,000 to fix. That's really high! What can you do? Two things: (1) retrofit your home to make it more earthquake sound, and (2) purchase earthquake insurance.

New Video: How To Prevent Home Burglaries

One of the great features of Lafayette is its easy access to Highway 24 and all of the amazing places it can take you. That highway, however, also allows burglars easy access to your home and all of the amazing things they can take from you. Lafayette has thus, for a long time running, been a favorite stop along the way for light fingered crooks. Over the last few years, the City has concentrated on anti-burglary efforts, including the installation of motion-activated hunting cameras around town, and the results have been impressive: burglaries are down by more than 50%! Last year there were just twenty-two within the city limits. But to reduce that number even further, we need your help. What can you do? The Lafayette Police Department has recently put together a short video filled with all kinds of helpful tips for how to discourage burglars from ransacking your home. Check it out at lovelafayette.org on the Crime Prevention Commission page

What's All That East End Construction About?

A regular reader recently asked what's up with all that construction down at the east end of Mt. Diablo Boulevard. Here's the answer. In order to keep our water pipes pressurized, EBMUD has pumping stations located all around its district. One of those pump stations is located in that funky little blue building next door to Ace Hardware. It's been there for decades and, as happens with things that are old, it is getting worn out and isn't as reliable as it should be. EBMUD needs to replace it but, because the water always needs to stay pressurized, the utility can't just shut it down for a year and build a new one on the same site. And so the City and EBMUD worked out a deal wherein the water utility will build a new pumping plant on a piece of city-owned right-of-way next to the cemetery and, once that's completed, tear down the old one and convert the parcel near Ace Hardware into a public parking lot for eighteen cars. This is one of those cases where just about everybody wins: EBMUD gets its new pumping plant, the City gets a new public parking lot, and the public gets a reliable water system and a place to park when visiting Ace Hardware or the Park Hotel.



Woodbury Wins Big

The Bay Area Chapter of the Building Industry Association (BIA) presents awards each year, and in 2016 it was Lafayette's Woodbury townhome community that cleaned up. At this year's awards, Woodbury won for best architectural design for an attached home over 2,000 square feet. It was also named as the Bay Area Community of the Year. Finally, the New Home Company was named as the Best Builder in the Bay Area. Congratulations to all who were involved in designing and building this community that now gracefully anchors the west end of Mt. Diablo Boulevard.





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DOWNTOWN CONGESTION STUDY ROLLING ALONG

One of Lafayette's most persistent problems is downtown traffic, and so the City is conducting a Downtown Congestion Reduction Study. The purpose of the study is to identify solutions to reduce traffic congestion in the downtown while preserving the City's treasured small-town downtown feel and quality of life.

The first phase of the study – fact-finding and problem identification – is nearing completion, and the project's Steering Committee is sorting through the many potential solutions that have been identified by residents who participated in on-line survey tools and public workshops.

In the second phase, which will commence this summer, the best ideas will be evaluated using sophisticated traffic models developed by outside expert traffic consultants. Once this is completed, the City will launch a new round of public outreach to gather community opinions on the alternative options. Look for your opportunity to participate sometime this fall.

Once armed with the technical analysis and public feedback, Lafayette hopes to develop a preferred plan that serves as a long-term blueprint for future transportation projects and programs that will sustain a vibrant and viable Downtown Lafayette for decades to come.

The public can follow progress of this study at the City website under "Hot Topics." You may also request information or send a note about the study to jhinkamp@lovelafayette.org.

MOST EFFICIENT CITIES *(continued from front page)*

Like any well-funded savings account, this healthy reserve allows the City to smooth its revenue during recessionary times and maintain consistent levels of service. The reserve also serves as a bulwark against natural disasters. Since Lafayette is at risk for earthquakes, wildfires, floods, and landslides, the importance of maintaining a large reserve cannot be underestimated.

AAA Bond Rating. As noted above, Lafayette's conservative financial practices – no unfunded obligations, balanced budgets, very strong unreserved general fund balance – are what Standard and Poor's called out when, eight years ago, it raised its bond rating from AA to AAA.

We're Transparent. It was Justice Louis Brandeis who said, in praise of transparency and honesty in public policy, that "sunlight is the best disinfectant." It was eight years ago – well before the City of Bell scandal – that the Lafayette City Council ordered that an Open Government feature be added to the website and, in so doing, placed the City at the forefront of open government practices in California. Click one button and you'll have access to salary ranges for all employees, compensation for the top five city employees, the city manager's employment agreement, and the City's whistleblower policy. We recently also added a financial transparency tool to our website that makes it easy for anyone to understand the budget. All of these are available for your review 24 hours a day at www.lovelafayette.org.

Lafayette, of course, still has its problems. You might have noticed, for instance, that we've got some traffic and parking challenges. But we're doing the best we can with our money – whoops, make that *your money* – in a way that's transparent, easy to understand, and more efficiently than just about any other city in California.

CITY DIRECTORY

For Council Members call: 284-1968

Council Members

Mark Mitchell	Mayor
Mike Anderson	Vice Mayor
Brandt Andersson	Council Member
Traci Reilly	Council Member
Don Tatzin	Council Member

Messages to all Council Members:
cityhall@lovelafayette.org

Administration

General Reception and	284-1968
Steven Falk, City Manager	Fax: 284-3169
Tracy Robinson, Admin. Srv. Dir.	299-3227
Jennifer Wakeman, Financial Srv. Mgr.	299-3213
Joanne Robbins, City Clerk	299-3210
Tony Coe, City Engineer	299-3203
Niroop Srivatsa, Planning & Building Dir.	299-3206
Mike Moran, Public Works Dir.	299-3214
P.W. Hotline (to report problems)	299-3259

If you observe illegal dumping in creeks & storm drains or accidental spills on roads, call Contra Costa Hazardous Materials Division 646-2286.

Lamorinda School Bus Program

Juliet Hansen, Program Mgr. **299-3216**
or **299-3215**

Parks, Trails and Recreation **284-2232**

Jennifer Russell, Director

Senior Services **284-5050**

Police Services

Emergency: 24 Hours	911
Police Dispatch: 24 Hours	284-5010
Police Business Office:	283-3680

Anonymous tipline, traffic enforcement, suggestions & LEARN (Laf. Emergency Action Response Network), 299-3230

Fax **284-3169**

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Website **www.ci.lafayette.ca.us**

E-MAIL: Council/staff members can be reached via e-mail using this address format:

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