

Lafayette City Hall: Then & Now

In 1969, the first full year of operations for the newly incorporated City of Lafayette, revenue from all sources totaled \$904,150. Compare that to the expected \$22 million in revenue for this fiscal year.

Sales tax revenue was \$246,000 or about 10% of what it is today. But not all of that can be attributed to inflation. Adjusting today's revenue to 1970 dollars shows that sales tax has doubled in 40 years — a testament to the vibrant business community that's been attracted to downtown Lafayette over the years. Another interesting fact is that in 1969 the City received \$85,000 in Cigarette Taxes (that would be approximately \$540,000 in today's dollars). It was the third largest General Fund revenue category behind sales tax and Motor Vehicle taxes. Around 1995, the Cigarette Tax was taken by the State for their General Fund. So that's one thing that hasn't changed — the State raiding local funds to bridge their budget gaps!

When Lafayette incorporated in 1968, it did so as a "no property" tax city, meaning that while residents still paid their county and state property taxes, the City did not levy an additional municipal tax. And that meant that upon incorporation, the City received zero percent of any property tax paid by residents. That changed in 1988 when, ten years after the passage of Prop 13, Lafayette began receiving 6.2% of the property taxes residents pay. While this is still relatively low compared to other communities in the county (e.g. Hercules – 33%, Brentwood – 11%, Martinez – 15%), the City has no mechanism by which it can capture a higher percentage.

(continued inside)

REMEMBERING ERNIE MARRINER

The legendary **Ernie Marriner**, Lafayette's first permanent city manager, died in late January. Legendary? In fact and indeed. Ernie served Lafayette for thirteen years from 1969 to 1982 and left a profound impact on the community. His story is worth telling.

Ernie Marriner was a parsimonious Mainer through and through. Born in 1920 and the son of Ernest and Eleanor Marriner, Ernie was raised in Waterville, Maine and later attended Colby College. He earned his master's degree in public administration from Syracuse University at a time when that degree was still relatively obscure, and quickly launched into his career by serving first as town manager of Guilford, Maine and then of Wells, Maine. In the 1950's, ready to try some warmer weather, Ernie headed for northern California where, in 1955 he became the city manager of Pittsburg.

According to former Mayor Donn Black, when Lafayette incorporated and became a city, in 1968, "we interviewed a lot of people (for city manager), and had many more applications. Ernie Marriner didn't actually apply; we sought him out and got him to apply. We stole him from the City of Pittsburg! They never forgave us, but from the first interview, it was obvious that he was our first choice. (After) he came aboard...we rented offices and got the organization going."

Ernie became known for his direct (some would call it unorthodox) approach to city administration. He was famous not only for his meticulous attention to detail but also for keeping down costs. How did he do it? By doing the work himself! He served as both city

manager and city clerk, and he kept a shovel and a pair of Wellington boots in his pickup truck. Former planner Betsy Van Popering writes, "In the winter months he would patrol those street drains and clear them himself. He was in the office before anyone else and went home after most of us."



Said former mayor Bob Fisher, "Ernie was indefatigable, and no job was too big or too small. One of my most graphic memories of Ernie relates to his practice of walking the creek

beds throughout Lafayette after the heavy rains to identify sloughing and erosion problems that might require immediate attention. I picture him emerging on a Saturday or Sunday from a creek bottom, up through the heavy undergrowth, and standing in his Wellingtons on the nearest road making notes on what he would need to do on Monday. The stories

abounded of citizens spotting him wading or mucking along on a Sunday morning past/through their backyard. Ernie was everywhere!"

The City had no enforcement staff — none. Former mayor Black describes it this way: "Ernie was it. The new sign ordinance had been duly adopted and publicized, but several of the merchants along Mt. Diablo Blvd. hadn't gotten

around to taking it seriously — especially the ban on sidewalk "A-Frame" portable advertising signs. Well, after blanket notice to all, Ernie simply started driving down the Boulevard in a pickup and picking up (single handedly) the offending 'frames'. It didn't take long before the A-Frames were history, thanks to Ernie's brand of frontier justice." *(continued inside)*

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Remembering Ernie Marriner *(continued from front)*

Marriner pioneered the concept of the “contract city” in Northern California, wherein the municipality contracts for most of its services with private enterprise. And, indeed, many of the service delivery systems that Ernie created and/or promoted for Lafayette — the independent fire district; the contracts for sheriff’s and other services; the minimally-sized staff that does not participate in CalPERS — still define the organization forty five years later.

His personal style was distinctive. Betsy Van Popering tells this story: “When I first joined the city staff in Lafayette, I was an intern answering the telephone. One morning, a woman in the Burton Valley area called, screaming into the phone that the frogs in the ditch along the city’s park were making so much noise that her child couldn’t sleep nor could she. She insisted that the city come out immediately and kill all the frogs. I put the poor woman on hold and asked Ernie what I should tell her? Ernie said, “Tell her Lafayette doesn’t kill things – Period.” I did, and she promptly hung up on me. One of Ernie’s defining characteristics was being a Mainer.”

Says Fisher, “Ernie was from — and of — Maine. He was not one for small talk and he was a man of few words. If a councilman wanted an answer, he or she better be careful to ask the right question otherwise the councilman would receive a curt “yes” or “no” answer to the wrong question. Occasionally Ernie had to be asked a series of more and more carefully articulated questions before Ernie would offer the answer sought.”

Another example from Fisher: “On Mayor Donn Black’s to-do list was a “solicitor’s ordinance,” to regulate door-to-door solicitors. Since it was important to Donn, Ernie agreed to add this to the City Manager’s to-do list. A year later, the Mayor asked Ernie in a Council meeting about the status of the solicitor’s ordinance, Ernie reassured Donn that it was on the list and that he would get to it. Donn was never one to let something like that go, and repeated his question at regular intervals. Ernie, in turn, always faithfully reassured the Donn and the Council that it, indeed, was on the list. He just never said WHERE it was on the list! Ernie would happily do whatever he believed was best and most important for Lafayette in HIS time. Fortunately, he was as wise as he was independent, and the City prospered.”

Parks, Trails and Recreation Director Jennifer Russell, the only current staff member who worked with Ernie Marriner, writes, “As a young, college graduate starting my career in Lafayette, I was fascinated by the way Mr. Marriner kept the public happy while maintaining a small, loyal city staff.”

Summing him up, Bob Fisher says, “Ernie was a great human being and a superb City Manager. He, along with City Attorney Charlie Williams, left Lafayette with a remarkable legacy of prudent, progressive, professional management and a remarkable tradition of volunteer-citizen involvement.”

When Ernie finally retired, in 1982, he was named by the Chamber of Commerce as Lafayette’s Citizen of the Year, and the community even collected contributions and presented him with a brand new, shiny car to thank him for his service. Always the Mainer, says Betsy Van Popering, “he promptly gave it to his son.”

After leaving Lafayette, Ernie built a house on the shore of Wilson Pond in Maine and remained active by working for 17 years as a bookkeeper for the town of Readfield, followed by 11 years as an accountant for the town of Clinton.

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(continued from front)

Another Lafayette tradition is a lean staff. In 1968 there were six employee positions: City Manager, Assistant City Manager, (who was also a professional planner), an Administrative Assistant, and three Clerk Typists. Then, as now, the City contracted with the Sheriff for police services; nine patrolmen cost the City \$220,000 annually. Planning, engineering, and public works services were also contracted.

Today there are roughly 38 full-time equivalent employees working for the City. And while the population hasn’t increased much, the range of services offered by the City has. We now have a robust Recreation program (which is largely self-supporting), Code and Parking Enforcement, and the Lamorinda Bus Program. In addition, since 1995 the Pavement Management Program has required at least three engineers.

Furthermore, over the last four decades the state and federal government also has imposed many new regulations and mandates such as stormwater pollution control, environmental reviews and protections, and permit streamlining that have required the addition of staff. Perhaps most importantly — and the main reason the City incorporated to begin with — is the effort to maintain the semi-rural character of Lafayette.

Towards that end the city now manages complex planning activities like implementing the hillside protection ordinance, monitoring parking & circulation, and enacting tree protection and sign ordinances. The six staff planners were brought “in house” in order to ensure that these critical activities are done “the Lafayette way” and their expenses

are largely supported by fees.

And while much has changed over the last 40 years, the core ideals of the City have not. In his Budget Message to the Council in May 1969, Ernie Marriner wrote, “There are two principles which we recommend to your Honorable Body. One is that we retain at the end of each fiscal year a certain cash balance to provide working capital. A second recommended principle is that we use our accumulated reserves which are in excess of the working capital only for capital improvement projects.” The City is committed to meeting those goals even now. Lafayette has a very healthy reserve — approximately \$10M as of 2012 — and recently the Council signaled its intent to use \$3M of that to fix failed residential streets.



LAFAY VIGNETTES

The City's five year plan to **replace every street name sign** in town with larger and more reflective signs is underway and this year's phase — downtown — has been completed. Look for the new signs when you're out and about. ♦

The Planning Commission has begun consideration of the proposed **Terraces of Lafayette** project on Deer Hill Road. Once the environmental review is complete, there will be several opportunities for the public to comment on the project before the Planning Commission, Design Review Commission, and Circulation Commission.



Fresh Connection Headquarters

♦ The City Council has agreed to swap the vacant lot in front of **Blodgett's Floor Coverings** for the parcel just east of **Ace Hardware**, owned by East Bay MUD and on which an old water pumping plant now sits. EBMUD will build a new pumphouse near Blodgett's; when that construction is completed, the City will convert the Ace Hardware parcel into a public parking lot for customers of East End businesses. Both projects should be completed by 2016. ♦ The new building going up near the **Veterans Memorial Building** will be the world headquarters for **The Fresh Connection**, a leading exporter of farm-fresh fruits and vegetables. ♦ If you missed it, the City had a little problem back in December when a **storm drain failure on Mt. View Drive** entirely blew out the road. Total cost to repair the drain and road? \$872,484 ♦ There was much excitement at the prospect of the **Park Theater** reopening with **Fentons** as a tenant but the City and the landowners along Plaza Way have been unable to reach an agreement that would allow the buildings to be revitalized while ensuring quality tenants and sufficient parking. ♦ **Safeway** has made a proposal to raze the old **Valero** gas station and expand the grocery store parking lot. ♦ Registration for the **Parks and Recreation Department's Summer Programs** begins on April 16. ♦ **KB Homes** is in the final approval stages for condominiums behind **Panda Express**. ♦ Need new duds? Check out new clothiers **Francesca's** and **Venture** in the Clocktower Building. ♦ Andrew McCormick, owner of **City Tavern** in the Marina and son of **McCormick & Schmick's** co-founder Bill McCormick, will open a new restaurant this fall in the **Petar's** space. It's going to be called **The Cooperage**, and will feature "road-house-style" American food, inspired by places



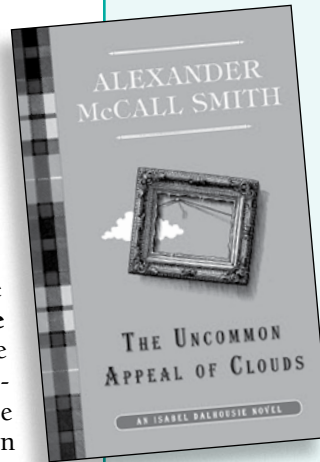
KB Homes Condominiums

like **Buckeye Roadhouse**. ♦ The City Council recently authorized the installation of **new parking meters that take credit cards** for downtown Lafayette. ♦ **GNC**, the health and wellness supplement store, has leased the old **Handlebar Toys** space near **Round Table Pizza**. ♦ The former manager of the **French Bakery** will soon be opening a new eatery in the old **Roya's Garlic Garden** space. ♦ The big building going up near **Bo's Barbeque** is all-affordable senior housing by **Eden Housing**. ♦ The large complex underway across from **McDonalds** is market rate assisted housing for seniors by Merrill Gardens. ♦ And construction is underway at the old **Hungry Hunter** site for 23 townhouses.

WHO DUNNIT?

The Lafayette Library and Learning Center Foundation (LLLCF) did! First, they brought to town Cheryl Strayed, author of the national best seller *Wild*. Now, the second program in its **ALIVE with the Library & Learning Center Speaker Series** hosts renowned mystery writer, **Alexander McCall Smith**, at the Veterans Memorial on Sunday, April 14. He will be in conversation with *Diablo Magazine's* Peter Crooks. Special thanks of Sunrise Rotary for helping underwrite the event!

McCall Smith is the author of the international phenomenon *The No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency series*, the *Isabel Dalhousie series*, the *Portuguese Irregular Verbs series*, and the *44 Scotland Street series*. Born in what is now Zimbabwe and once a law professor at the University of Botswana, Smith's multi-national background plays a significant role in his novels. He is professor emeritus of medical law at the University of Edinburgh in Scotland,



where he lives today, and has served on many national and international entities concerned with bioethics.

ALIVE with the Library & Learning Center Speaker Series benefits the Lafayette Library Foundation, which funds over 50% of the hours, programs and operations of the LLLC. Please join us and help support your Library. As with *Wild*, this event will sell out quickly, so act fast! **Details at LLLCF.org**

Time: 2:00-4:00 pm

General Seating: \$35

Reserved Seats, Meet & Greet: \$75 (4:00-5:00pm)

Reservations: reserve@lllcf.org or call 283-6513



Alexander McCall Smith
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COUNCIL SETS GOALS FOR 2013

The City Council meets each year in January to set its goals for the upcoming year. These are the items that, in addition to the many basic services Lafayette provides, the City will concentrate on in 2013:

- The Circulation Commission will study traffic congestion issues in downtown Lafayette.** After considering regional impacts and reviewing the findings of the 2002 Moraga Road Traffic Advisory Committee, the City's all-volunteer Circulation Commission will propose a roadmap for moving forward on issues related to downtown congestion.
- Increase contact and coordination between the Lafayette School District Governing Board and the Lafayette City Council.** Recognizing that there are many opportunities for collaboration, the two governing boards will meet to discuss subjects such as improving circulation on School Street and optimizing the use of sports fields throughout town.
- City Councilmembers will work with the Chamber of Commerce to jointly develop a program that provides real world opportunities for the City's remarkable Youth Commissioners.**
- Convene a citizen's task force to develop a strategy for the Old Library and 941 Moraga Road.** These two buildings that sit across the street from each other near Lafayette School are currently vacant. The task force will make recommendations for the highest and best use of the facilities.
- Develop intersection control alternatives for the intersection at Pleasant Hill Road and Olympic Boulevard.** This intersection, controlled only by stop signs, is overwhelmed by heavy traffic loads at peak periods. This study will develop alternatives and a plan to fund the project.
- Revisit the Council's policy regarding reserves for the 2013/14 fiscal year budget.** The City currently has about \$6M in reserve – but blew through nearly \$1M in just nine days while repairing the winter drain failure on Mt. View Drive. Given that Lafayette is subject to earthquakes, fires, and floods, should the Council increase its reserve?
- Monitor ongoing public safety developments in Lafayette.** While it's technically not under the purview of the City Council, the closure of Fire Station 16 has the Council watching these issues closely. If deemed necessary, the Council will convene a task force to investigate alternative models of public safety service delivery and governance.
- Implement the Downtown Specific Plan.** After much discussion and debate, the Downtown Specific Plan was approved last year. Council and staff will now undertake the many steps to implement the new plans and regulations.



Old Library on
Moraga Road

CITY DIRECTORY

For Council Members call: 284-1968

Council Members

Michael Anderson	Mayor
Don Tatzin	Vice Mayor
Brandt Andersson	Council Member
Mark Mitchell	Council Member
Traci Reilly	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
Gonzalo Silva, Financial Srv. Mgr.	299-3213
Joanne Robbins, City Clerk	299-3210

Community Development

Tony Coe, Engineering Srv. Mgr.	284-1951
Niroop Srivatsa, Planning Srv. Mgr.	284-1976
Ron Lefler, Public Works Srv. Mgr.	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
Address	3675 Mt. Diablo Blvd. #210
	Lafayette, CA 94549

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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Example: SFalk@lovelafayette.org

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