

REVIVING THE PARK THEATER: THIS COULD BE OUR BEST, LAST CHANCE

There is a buzz, a loud buzz about town. Citizens are meeting, a task force is being formed, and the City Council is discussing what – if anything – can be done to preserve Lafayette’s iconic Park Theater. Everyone has an idea of what to do, and this story is developing as we go to print. It could all change at any moment, but here’s what we know as of press time: An Oakland-based developer, Madison Park Financial, had been interested in purchasing the Park Theater and then giving it to the City free of charge in exchange for a “density transfer” on their project at the Lincoln Apartments. For those not steeped in urban planning speak, a density transfer is a trade of allowable, already-zoned housing units from one location to another.

Unfortunately, Madison Park informed us at the end of August that it would not purchase the historic single-screen film venue. Instead, it decided to focus its efforts on developing a smaller scale project on the property it already owns on Golden Gate Way. Simon Chen, Madison Park’s Chief Financial Officer, told the City that there were several factors that led the developer to decide against an idea that might have

saved the Park, which was built in 1941 and has been closed since at least 2005. Specifically, Chen said that, after laying out all the required setbacks and carve-outs for the creek, it became clear that the scale of a larger project would be unwelcome given the feedback from both the community and the Council.

In the wake of Madison Park’s withdrawal, several residents have enthusiastically expressed interest in finding a way to reopen the Park Theater – perhaps as a movie theater, a community center, or for some other inventive use. Given the strong citizen interest on September 10, the City Council agreed to convene all-volunteer Park Theater revival meetings, which are expected to occur this fall to study the efficacy of those many ideas.

All that said, the bottom line is that the project will have to “pencil out” financially. This appears to be the biggest challenge of all. City staff’s initial estimate of the annual cost just to run the venue is at least \$600,000 annually, and no funding source for this reoccurring expense has been identified. If you’re interested in getting the lights turned back on at the Park Theater, get your popcorn out and keep your eyes open for future public meetings.



The iconic façade of the Park Theater has stood over Plaza Park for more than 75 years. It is hard to imagine downtown Lafayette without it.

Briefing Papers: Get Behind All the News in Lafayette

Can’t keep up with the news? You’re not alone. There seems to be a lot of news of interest to those of us who live in and around the City of Lafayette. One easy way to keep informed is to sign up to receive the City’s news products via our e-Notification system. It’s simple, free and takes only a minute or so. The main news items we publish are the *Almost Daily Briefing*, General News (press releases), the *Weekly Roundup* and this quarterly publication, *Vistas*, which in addition to being mailed out to households is also sent to e-Notification subscribers. You can also choose other areas of interest such as public meetings, events, commissions, etc. Here is the link to register: www.lovelafayette.org/e-notification. And if you need to catch up on the news, check out our archive right here: www.lovelafayette.org/news. Get behind the latest Lafayette news before it gets in front of you!



You’re on Social, We’re On Social

We know you’re out there on social media. You can’t hide it – we see that iPhone in hand! And so, too, is the City of Lafayette. Come visit us on all the usual social media sites: **Facebook**, **Twitter**, **YouTube**, **Nextdoor**, and **Instagram**. You’ll find the latest events and news about the City, great photos, and videos of things happening around town. Speaking of photos, did you know we have a photo gallery of pictures and videos of life in Lafayette? You can find everything from scenic views, celebrations, performances, City Council meetings, awards and even historic photos uploaded by residents. Best of all, you can download any of the photos and send them to family members or use them on social media. Check out our photo gallery right here: <https://lovelafayette.smugmug.com/> and don’t forget to tag **#lovelafayette** when you post. You can find out everything you need to know about our social media sites on our new Connect With Us webpage, www.lovelafayette.org/connect.

CAN'T FIND PARKING DOWNTOWN? TRY ONE OF THE 11,152 SPACES WE FOUND

Most everyone seems to think that there aren't enough parking spaces in downtown Lafayette. Well, not to go all contrarian on you, but here's a fun fact: we went out and counted each and every parking space we could find (not including the BART parking lots), and it turns out that there are 11,152 spaces in and around the downtown – one for every household in Lafayette! That's worth repeating: **There is one parking space downtown for every household in the City.** And, moreover, there are almost always a few spaces available at any given time, even in the most popular downtown blocks!

So then, why the hue and cry heard throughout town about the lack of parking? Well, there are essentially two reasons. First, the spaces are just not always located *exactly* where you want them to be. Sound familiar? That's because downtown Lafayette has a "strip" (rather than a "grid") orientation – and this longitudinal configuration makes for longer walking distances between popular shopping and gastronomic destinations. So, in a very real way, the parking situation in Lafayette is actually "historic." We are dealing, sometimes on a daily basis, with an artifact of our origins as a town that developed along a regional highway. The result is that our thousands of parking spaces are spread all along a two-mile stretch of Mt. Diablo Boulevard and not concentrated where they might be most useful to us now in the modern world.

Second, even if the parking spaces were conveniently located, they would not always be available to everyone at any given time. Businesses zealously guard their coveted parking spots and discourage non-patrons through signage and active parking patrols. Thus, while there is, in fact, plenty of parking in downtown Lafayette, there is often a shortage of **convenient and available parking**, and these popular spots are definitely a scarce resource at certain times of the day. All of us have experienced the frustration of not being able to park **close** to where we want to go.

How, then, does one ensure that there are at least a few conveniently located parking spaces available throughout the downtown at all times of the day? Ask any economist – and there are quite a few economists around town – and they will tell you that the best way to allocate a scarce resource is to put a price on it. Welcome, parking meters! The goal of metering

parking spaces is to ensure there is adequate turnover that allows, theoretically anyway, everyone to park. Some might remember that before the meters were installed in the La Fiesta parking lot, it was usually full and there were often no spots available at all. Today – thanks to those dreaded parking meters – there are always a few open spaces near Chow and the Cooperage, two of our most popular eateries. Both of these private lots are metered and anyone can park in them as long as they drop a few coins into the meter (or swipe a card).

Which Meters are Public, and Which Are Private?

The parking meters installed in private parking lots like La Fiesta Square, Fiesta Lane and some of the spaces behind Town Center were installed by the owners of those properties, not the City of Lafayette. The Lafayette Police Department does not enforce the time limits or meters in these private lots, it only does so on Lafayette's public streets and in our public parking lots. Additionally, the City does not receive any money from private parking meters or lots.

The City *does*, however, get money from the meters on public streets and in lots, and this money goes not only towards the maintenance of the meters and the cost of the parking enforcement officers, but also towards creating more parking. For example, the City recently used money collected from parking meters and fines to purchase the Oakbridge lot on Golden Gate Way, in September 2016, which added 24 more public spaces. However, as we've said before, the primary goal of parking meters is to generate turnover, not to make money.

You don't need an economist to tell you that paying for convenient parking is, after all, a choice each of us makes. If you despise the one-armed bandits, you can park a few blocks away and get some exercise while heading to your destination. Or, of course, you can leave the car at home and get even more exercise! Regardless, we understand why many people feel that having to pay for parking is, well, wrong given that parking in many smaller cities (including Lafayette) was free for so long. No one loves parking meters, but once you understand why the meters are there (stopping BART commuters and other long-term parkers from hogging spaces) and appreciate how effective they are in circulating the most convenient parking spaces in town, the meters make more sense.



Parking isn't as scarce in Lafayette as some might believe. And those pesky parking meters actually have a purpose.

A Reconstituted Planning Commission for Lafayette

It seems ages ago, but some of you may remember that back in March, a City Council vote adopting a revised conflict of interest policy for Planning and Design Review commissioners triggered a mass resignation of five of the seven members of the Planning Commission. In the past six months, the Council has been busy interviewing commissioner candidates, and has named five new members so that the Commission is back to its full complement of seven

members. Since April, the Council has appointed Farshad Farzan, Stephen LaBonge, Gregory Mason, Anna Radonich, and Kristina Strum, who join Gary Huisingh (Chair) and Steven Bliss (Vice Chair), on the reconstituted Planning Commission. You can read about the Commission's work and see the dates of the Commissioners' terms at www.lovelafayette.org/city-hall/commissions-committees/planning-commission.

THE STATE OF RETAIL DOWNTOWN AND PG&E SAFETY CONCERNS: THE CITY COUNCIL STEPS UP

What are the important issues we face as a City? How can residents be informed about what impacts Lafayette and make their voices heard directly by those most involved in these issues? The City Council felt it important over the summer to hold public forums on two matters affecting everyone in Lafayette. The first of these forums – and both were packed by residents – was on July 23, when the Council and Planning Commission heard from a distinguished panel of experts on the “State of Retail in Downtown Lafayette.” The Council wanted to provide a means for the public to hear why there is an increase in the number of vacant storefronts and to determine if there are measures that the City can implement to encourage retail growth in this quickly evolving world of e-commerce. With more than a hundred residents and business owners filling the Community Hall, the panel provided insights into a range of topics.

Recommendations – although not all universally shared – included expanding the types of businesses that are allowed downtown, improving the pedestrian experience, “micro-zoning” to ease parking and other constraints, establishing a “parking code” and building a parking garage, and making street improvements so that sidewalks are “friendlier” and pedestrians feel more comfortable.

Another highly anticipated forum was held on September 10, when California Public Utilities Commission members

and senior PG&E management officials attended a special afternoon community meeting on PG&E safety concerns convened by the Council. It is a rarity for the CPUC to attend such events, but they accepted the City’s invitation to be present and to observe the proceedings. The venue allowed residents to make their many concerns known directly to senior managers at PG&E and for PG&E provide answers to



City Council public meetings this summer on retail and PG&E safety have been packed with residents.

questions about the utility’s operations, safety practices, and tree pruning. PG&E addressed 150 safety concerns – one hundred and fifty! – raised by the community, including questions about PG&E’s Community Pipeline Safety Initiative, in which the utility proposes to remove and replace 207 trees, many along public trails and City streets. There were also questions raised concerning the need for automatic shut off valves,

something about which a number of residents are passionate. The Council

took note of the issues discussed – some would say debated – at this special meeting that was held to further dialog and engagement with PG&E and to build trust that the utility is operating safely in Lafayette. After all, PG&E is in charge of the safety of its pipelines and power lines, not the City of Lafayette.

The Council is planning to revisit the issue of PG&E safety at its October 22, 2018, meeting, and there is another retail panel planned in the near future – this one will include merchants to get their perspective. Stay tuned for details on both.

Boring City Council Meetings? Not in Lafayette!

Given Lafayette residents’ busy lives, there are only a certain number of people who will attend what could be a long evening of in-the-weeds proceedings on – let’s be frank here – not always the most stimulating inner workings of our beloved town. With that said, the Council came up with a brilliant idea to make its meetings more, eh, entertaining and to attract those who might not normally be drawn to the machinations of bureaucracy. Beginning over the summer and continuing into the fall, the City Council starts its meetings with arts performances. Held prior to the first regular City Council meeting of each month, these special performances brought not only smiles to the faces of those who attended, but

many of those faces were new to Council meetings! Moms and dads, relatives and friends, came to enjoy the incredible range of local talent that we are so proud to have right here in Lafayette.

The first performance featured students enrolled in Town Hall Theatre’s Summer Education program, along with Education Director Madison Geringer and Teaching Artist Andrew Mondello. The students performed selections from *Bye Bye Birdie*, *Alone in the Universe* from *Seussical* and *Song That Goes Like This* from *Monty Python’s Spamalot*. Upcoming performances will include piano recitals, a choral concert, and a special event staged by students of the Performing Academy. Oh, and we’ve



The Stanley Middle School’s Julia Burke Flute Choir performs for the City Council and residents.

heard that Stanley Middle School’s Julia Burke Flute Choir (pictured) may also return to the Council for an encore performance. If you missed their first performance, you can see a video on our YouTube channel: <http://bit.ly/LoveLafayetteYouTube>. Usually beginning at 6:30pm and always free and open to all, the performances will continue into the fall and showcase new local talent. We hope to see everyone there – with a smile on their face. If you have an idea for a performance, email details to **Dick Holt** at rwholtcb@aol.com.



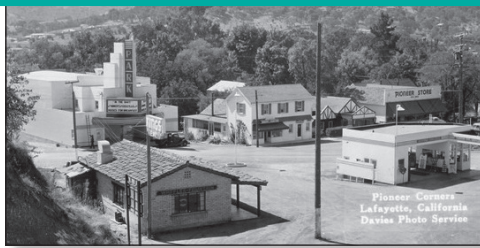
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Vox Populi - Street Interviews:

One Friday morning recently, we visited American Kitchen on Lafayette Circle to ask residents a simple question: Should the City be involved in preserving the Park Theater? Here's what they told us:



Preserving the Park Theater, shown in this undated photo, has been on the minds of folks about town this summer.



John Kiefer

Yes, the City should be involved, but not financially. The Park Theater is valuable and we should do everything we can to preserve it as a part of our heritage, but short of the City putting up City money.



Brad Crane

Yes, the City should be involved in preserving the Park Theater. The theater is a huge opportunity to continue the positive development of the downtown area, and to let it languish the way it is, is borderline a crime.



Victor Ivry

Absolutely. The reason being is that it's been here for a long time and it is part of the history of the City of Lafayette. I would love to see a mixed-use development that incorporates retail, the theater, office or residential. However, [any development] needs to address the parking situation as well.



Amy Platt

I think the City should be involved in saving the Park Theater. Because it is part of Lafayette's history and we need to keep historic buildings in our community.



Gina Dawson

I do think the City should be involved in preserving the Park Theater, not in a financial way, but more in terms of facilitating discussions and ideas on how the Park Theater can be preserved.



Gailene Nelson

Yes, the City should definitely be involved. It is a critical cultural attraction and adds value for all of our residents here, as well as anyone who comes to Lafayette. Its location is ideal, and any ideas to use the venue, film festivals, a speakers series, all kinds of events, could actually make it a centerpiece of downtown.

CITY DIRECTORY

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cityhall@lovelafayette.org

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