

# CONTRA COSTA TIMES

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## Lafayette Works to Jump-Start Historic Plaza Way

By Jennifer Modenessi

LAFAYETTE -- Lafayette's historic Plaza Way is on the road to getting a much-needed boost.

The city council is moving ahead with plans to revitalize the small but significant block between Mt. Diablo Boulevard and Moraga Road.

The council approved on Dec. 12 spending \$40,000 to lay the foundation for the Plaza Way Overlay, a proposed arrangement between the city and property owners that would maintain the neighborhood's old-time feel, create sorely needed parking spots and -- hopefully -- fill some vacant storefronts.

It could also pave the way for Fentons Creamery to set up shop at the Park Theater.

"We think this is really the first step in promoting revitalization," Mayor Carol Federighi said in an interview. She is one of four city leaders who formed a subcommittee to devise ways to solve the parking problem.

There are 19 existing off-site parking spaces to accommodate the handful of businesses occupying Lafayette Plaza.

According to a city staff report, if property owners choose to participate in the voluntary overlay plan, their responsibilities would include updating existing facades or constructing new buildings that retain the historical character of the site.

Storefronts would be limited to retail, restaurant and other cultural uses, and parking would need to be added in the rear.

In exchange, the city will lease off-street parking spaces to Plaza Way employees and complete a consolidated parking lot behind the buildings.

They will also have meters for these spaces, and use the meter income to help create more parking, improve traffic circulation, beautify the area and maintain the new lot.

The overlay will help property owners such as the Poy family, who operate the Squirrels Coffee Shop, develop new food-based businesses.

"Getting retail that's based more around place and related to food is essential to making that a vibrant area," said Craig Semmelmeier of Main Street Properties, who is working with the Poy's.

The area could also draw Fentons.

"It's something we've been looking at and exploring for two years," said Scott Whidden, who owns the Oakland-based business and has family ties to Lafayette.

He said reusing the Park Theater and preserving its integrity is good for the community.

"The theater is a landmark. It's something that the city has placed a big emphasis on," Whidden said. "We kind of see it as the hub for Lafayette."

But parking is a problem.

"That's something we want to make sure is in place," Whidden said. "To make this successful, we need to make sure people have a place to park."