

Issues stemming from future growth pervade Lafayette's City Council candidate forum- Boulder Daily Camera

Thursday, October 12, 2017 5:12 PM

Clipped from: http://www.dailycamera.com/lafayette-news/ci_31369707/issues-stemming-from-future-growth-pervade-lafayettes-city

[Murmurs of fracking make way into discussion](#)



Lafayette Promenade development work is pictured in September. (*Paul Aiken / Staff Photographer*)

Lafayette's hot-button issues surrounding the potential for growth in the near future dominated the city's 14-member council candidate forum Wednesday night.

The November election will have a deep candidate pool: Chelsea Behanna, Allen Bishop, Michael Daniels, Jamie Harkins, Dana Kusjanovic, JD Mangat, Merrily Mazza, Andrew J. O'Connor, Gustavo Reyna, Cliff Smedley, Jarrett Tishmack, John William Watson, Richard Welty and Brian Wong.

Wednesday's forum, hosted by the League of Women Voters, comes at a transition point for the city, and the election could shape the east Boulder County city for the next several decades.

Among the issues discussed at the forum were topics of affordable living moving forward and preserving the city's small-town feel while balancing its diversity, the arts and open space, among others.

Perhaps the most pressing issue on the tip of candidates' tongues Wednesday night was how to manage the introduction of growth reverberating eastward throughout the county.

"Strategic and intentional" is how Harkins spoke of shaping the current growth reshaping the city.

"I care deeply about attainable housing," she said, "and a little more density makes sense in places. There's a myth that high density means automatically affordable, so we have to ask: How do we create that where it's needed and keep our open space?"

Advertisement

Between 2010 and 2015, according to U.S. Census Bureau data released in March, Lafayette's population increased by 2,995, to a total of 27,548 — a 12 percent surge.

"We are approaching build-out," O'Connor said, "and the job of the City Council is to preserve quality of life. We will have to pass stringent building codes and we're gonna have to say no to development; unlimited growth is not sustainable."

Officials earlier this year approved an overhaul of Old Town's zoning codes aimed at preserving the region.

Also approved were a string of development plans in recent months aimed at ushering in large-scale, affordable housing, including the SoLa Subdivision, slated to bring 260 units to the city's southern edge, and a \$3.5 million, 24-acre land deal with Flatirons Community Church with plans for up to 500 units.

Amid the questions of growth came the issue of how local government could encourage diverse businesses. Lafayette has introduced several new eateries to its downtown corridor in the last couple years.

"We have finally reached that critical mass and now businesses finally want to come here," Kusjanovic said. "Now, we need to maintain our zoning and our codes so that housing is housing and that business is business; maximize tax dollars and maintain that small-town feel."

"Prevent the drain of businesses going to Erie," Wong echoed, referring to rumors last year that the neighboring town had conspired to take the King Soopers for its controversial Nine Mile Corner development.

Questions of growth and the city's small-town feel turned to the issue of traffic challenging the city's main corridors.

"We can start addressing the issue with proposals for increasing bus ridership and increasing bikes," Tishmack said, but that it will only make a dent in the problem. He added that more long-term goals could focus on bringing in more small business and widening the corridors to Boulder.

The county is currently in the early stages of a study focused on congestion along the Arapahoe Road corridor, one of the city's most frequented headaches.

"It's crucial to divert traffic from around Lafayette," Mangat said. "We need to create more local jobs and small retail so people aren't traveling to the cities."

Welty echoed that getting the traffic coming from Erie — a town slated for major growth in the coming years — circumvented around Lafayette "is critical."

While fracking loomed large over the evening, there weren't any questions about the issue.

Lafayette's City Council may consider the first reading of a yearlong moratorium on oil and gas development next week amid recent potential for new drilling plans.

"We didn't get one question about fracking," Mazza said at the end of the forum, "but we have the spacing plan (that's slated for the heart of Lafayette). It's the critical issue of our community and we're in the fight of our lives with this."

Election Day is Nov. 7. Residents must return their mail ballot or be in line at a voter service center by 7 p.m. that day.

Anthony Hahn: 303-473-1422, hahna@dailycamera.com or [twitter.com/ anthonyhahn](https://twitter.com/anthonyhahn)