

Lafayette Receives Watershed Grant

Kathi Futornick, Chair

Lafayette Watershed Citizens Advisory Board

This week the City of Lafayette received a grant from the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board to provide much-needed revenues towards the development of a Watershed Management Plan. The receipt of this grant award of \$22,000 is to be applied toward necessary field work and studies to help the City better understand and manage its watershed. But the grant represents more than just money. It represents the hard work of a group of individuals: the Mayor, the City Administrator, the City Council and a group of citizen volunteers who make up the Watershed Citizens Advisory Board and interested public. It is this group of people who are putting together a vision for the future of Lafayette's watershed with commitment, passion, and plain hard work.

One year ago the City was at a crossroads: log the watershed in order to obtain revenues from the sale of timber to pay for repairs to the City's water supply system or let the aging system continue to deteriorate. That summer, the City Council, following public input and development of a harvest plan, decided to move ahead with the tree harvest. Not an easy decision and not everyone was in agreement. For Lafayette, the selling of trees was a last resort. For those of you who remember, the News Register was filled with "Letters to the Editor" asking for more citizen involvement in its watershed decisions and articles entitled, "Water Solution of Last Resort", and "Growth, Money, Complicate Water Efforts". The letters and articles continued throughout the summer and into the fall. While the public debate was going on, the Mayor, the City Council, the City Administrator, and volunteers listened to the community and turned the heated debates into constructive action.

Public debates over the environment are not unique to Oregon, but they are unique to Lafayette. Lafayette was faced with a major public controversy and they already had their hands full with managing double-digit growth, financing repairs to their aging water system, and finding ways to pay for a new wastewater treatment plant. Funding a plan to manage their watershed was not going to happen without outside help. Lafayette turned to the state's Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board (OWEB) for guidance and learned that money was available for watershed activities. Assisted by several volunteers, they submitted a grant application to OWEB in September 1999. The application committed to conducting additional studies to better understand the watershed ecology, to establish a Citizens Advisory Board, and to prepare a Watershed Management Plan for use by the City in planning for and managing the watershed.

Late last year the City received word that its application had been accepted with certain modifications, and this past week the money was made available. The City hasn't sat idle waiting to hear from OWEB. In December 1999, the City Council appointed a Watershed Citizens Advisory Board to begin work on developing a watershed management plan. The Citizens Advisory Board is a volunteer organization consisting of one public official, several experts in water quality, forestry, hydrogeology, soils, and wildlife, a member from the agricultural community, and community members. The Board meets each month and has done so since January. During this time, a Mission statement and Watershed Management Plan outline have been submitted to and adopted by the City Council. The Mission Statement and workplan outline are an excellent beginning.

The Mission came about after much dialogue and serves as the Board's mandate:

"Before July 1, 2001, the Watershed Citizen Advisory Board shall complete a comprehensive master plan for the management of and use by the City of Lafayette...The primary goal of the Master Plan shall be to

preserve and maximize the quality and quantity of the water available in the Watershed for use by the City...While protection of drinking water is the primary beneficial use to be ensured in the Master Plan, other areas that should be considered ...include: preservation of...riparian areas for fish and wildlife habitat...protection or enhancement of fish and wildlife habitat...protection of aquifers and wellheads from contamination...desirability and feasibility of establishing a sustainable tree harvest program...gaining an increased understanding of the nature of the watershed...feasibility or desirability of expanding that acreage owned by the City...The Master Plan shall be developed in a way that involves as many residents of the City and interested persons as possible...integrate the interests and concerns of City residents, interested persons, and the mandates of state and federal agencies and relevant studies.”

The Board, in developing the Mission Statement, wanted to include all the concerns raised by the community and to ensure that all meetings were held in public and that the public would have a chance to raise their issues at each meeting. Since the Board meetings began, the public has been invited and many have attended and raised issues regarding use of chemicals to control vegetation, recreational use of the watershed, and future harvests. The issues raised by the community have helped modify the workplan by the Board. Some of those issues concerned replanting the watershed with more diverse species, others dealt with chemical use in the watershed and potential impact to water quality. In the Spring, following replanting of the watershed with 18,000 douglas fir seedlings, some members of the Board and scout volunteers purchased native plants with donated moneys and added native plants to the logged areas such as Pacific madrone, Oregon grape, cascarra, and vine maple. A discussion on chemical use, which lasted through several Board meetings, resulted in no chemical applications to emerging undesirable vegetation until a full review and vegetation management plan was decided on.

During one of our last meetings, the Board prioritized which watershed assessments would be completed first. These assessments would become incorporated into the Watershed Management Plan over this next year. Water Quality and Quantity, Vegetation Forest Management, Chemical Impacts, and Hydrology and Water Use were ranked as top priority. Subcommittees have been established and workplans are being developed to identify objectives, a budget, and a schedule for completing the studies. The next assessments to be completed are Channel Modification, Soil Erosion and Characteristics, Fisheries and Wildlife Habitat, Riparian Habitat, and Sediment Sources. With information compiled from this set of studies, the Board will be better able to develop a Plan for the Watershed that is based on good science and public input while meeting the needs of the City.

Lafayette has come a very long way in the past year. From some very rocky beginnings has come a solid effort to improve and enhance the watershed. But more than creating a Plan for its watershed, the City has created a blueprint for involving and listening to its community, and providing opportunities for public input. Lafayette has also come out as a leader in Yamhill County and most likely a bellwether for other rural communities caught between too few resources and diverse community interests.

Lafayette is going through growing pains that many other West Coast rural communities are experiencing. This week I am attending an international conference on watersheds sponsored by the Water Environment Federation in Vancouver, British Columbia. After one look at the topics for each session, I can easily see that 1/3 of the conference is dedicated to urban watershed issues and ways for government to build partnerships with their communities. Watershed management can only move forward with an educated audience on the issues and support from the community.

Over the next year, the Board will be conducting studies and assembling the information into a Watershed Management Plan. The Plan is intended as a living document which will change as needed to reflect the community's interests and new information. Our meetings are the 2nd Tuesday of each month and are held in the Council Chambers at Lafayette City Hall from 6:30 PM – 8:00 PM. I invite all interested parties to attend, provide input and expertise. We can only succeed with broad participation. We look forward to

seeing you there and hearing your ideas.

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