

March 24, 2023

CALISTOGA LITTLE
LEAGUE OPENING DAY

Families celebrate start
of 61st season

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School District floats workforce housing solution

By Tom Chorneau
Tribune Editor

A 16-acre parcel of open space on the north end of town might one day become an affordable housing development benefitting the public employees of Calistoga and perhaps the workers of the area’s hospitality industry.

The idea, raised this week by Audra Pittman, superintendent of the Calistoga Joint Unified School Dis-



Audra Pittman

trict, could be the solution to the vexing problem of attracting and retaining employees in Napa Valley’s expensive housing market.

“We’re still researching what options we might have,” said Pittman. “The next step is to investigate

the feasibility of providing workforce housing and what that might look like in Calistoga.”

The target property for the development is owned by the school district and is already zoned for housing, Pittman said. Most recently the property was rented to the General Motors Corp. and used as a testing site for the company’s new electric Hummer truck.

Finding housing for educators is a challenge facing school districts

all over California. A 2016 study from Redfin, a Seattle-based real estate firm, found that only 17 percent of the homes on the market in California were affordable to teachers, whose average salary then was about \$74,000. That affordability gap has undoubtedly increased, especially after the price of housing jumped 25 percent in some parts of California during the pandemic.

California lawmakers have taken some steps to help districts find hous-

ing relief. Legislation passed in 2016 established state policies to favor district-backed housing projects and offered tax credits and state grants as incentives. Those steps, however, were not enough.

Although school districts throughout the state collectively own about 75,000 acres of developable property, only a handful of housing projects have been completed specifically for

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PHOTO BY CLARK JAMES MISHLER

Walter Abernathy says he walks the 3-mile route known to Calistogans as “the Loop” every day.

Doing the LOOP

By Julie Mitchell | For the Tribune

Wally Abernathy started using Calistoga’s unofficial walking path in May 2005 and says that in the nearly 18 years since then he hasn’t missed a single day.

Abernathy, a hardy 86-year-old, is one of hundreds of Calistogans – and more than a few out-of-towners – who regularly make use of what locals refer to as “The Loop,” an unmarked route that crosses two footbridges and coils around the west side of town, creating a circular route that ends where it began, no matter where in town the walker started.

With additional miles added from before he began walking The Loop, Abernathy says he has only a little more

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Council takes next Fairgrounds steps

By Staff Writer

The Calistoga City Council moved this week to resurrect efforts to buy or otherwise take control of the Napa County Fairgrounds.

The council appointed Mayor Donald Williams and Councilman Scott Cooper to serve as a subcommittee to decide the next steps the city should take.

The action came two weeks after voters overwhelmingly rejected Measure E, a \$27.5 million bond measure intended to pay for purchase of the 70-acre property, which is owned by Napa County.

Although an outright purchase of the Fairgrounds remains an option, Williams said that he wants to consider other alternatives, as well.

The city’s business leaders, for instance, have proposed that the county lease the property to the city now, giving the town time to arrange more acceptable financing for the purchase.

“I’m wide open,” Williams said after the meeting. “I want to look at all other options.”

He said that the first step for the subcommittee is to review city finances as it relates to revenue sources for either purchasing, leasing or some other pathway. He said he also wants to consider ideas for what might be done with the property if the city takes over.

The council asked that after analyzing the city’s finances, Williams and Cooper begin consultation with the public.

“Nothing is going to happen without massive public input,” Williams said. “We are not going to go into closed session, decide among us what to do and come out and tell everyone. That’s not going to happen.”

The council, however, took time during Tuesday’s night meeting to consider appointing a citizen advisory committee drawn from those most active in the political contest over the Measure E bond proposal. The focus at one point during the discussion was

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Groundbreaking day for the Brannan Center

By Tom Chorneau
Tribune Editor

If all goes well, the Brannan Center will emerge sometime late in 2025 to fulfill its promise to serve as the heart of Calistoga.

Envisioned as a five-star performing arts and community hub, the center will one day be home to student theater events, concerts by touring musicians and enrichment programs put on by lo-

cal nonprofits.

Rising out of Calistoga’s historic Community Presbyterian Church, the Brannan Center will, in a sense, be returning to its roots as the place locals came to celebrate, to learn and to interact.

“Our community needs a place to gather, celebrate and educate,” said Ed Kozel, a Calistoga resident and member of the Brannan Center Board, which oversees the nonprofit corporation or-

ganized to manage the renovation and oversee the venue after its opening.

A groundbreaking ceremony was held last Saturday, and the first steps in bringing the church back to life began this week.

Much of the early work will be done inside, and out of view of the public. Drywall will be broken away and the interior walls will be stripped down, said

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PHOTO BY CLARK JAMES MISHLER

Sara Kozel (center), with Brannan Center board members, breaks ground on March 18.