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KENSINGTON OUTLOOK

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DECEMBER 2024-JANUARY 2025

A PUBLICATION OF THE KENSINGTON COMMUNITY COUNCIL

VOLUME 82 NUMBER 11



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Kristin Rios of Fuse Fitness counts down to the moment when Colusa Circle's beloved oak tree achieves its full holiday splendor. Photo by Cory Humak.

Colusa Circle Tree Lighting & Holiday Fair Dec. 1

It's Always a Festive Evening

By Rae Quigley

The Colusa Circle Tree Lighting & Holiday Fair ushers in the holiday season on Sunday, December 1, from 4-6pm. The beautiful oak tree at the center of Colusa Circle, known for its year-round twinkling lights, will sport extra sparkle for the season.

This year's fair brings back beloved traditions, with some exciting new additions. By popular demand, the holiday tree-lighting countdown returns, offering a magical moment for residents and visitors alike. The evening will feature a special holiday set of live music by the Landlines, a band beloved by Kensington families.

Benchmark Pizzeria will be serving up freshly made hot cocoa right outside to add warmth to the winter evening. And they are also bringing back face-painting for the kiddos!

The art market, first introduced by Zip Code East Bay, will return with even more to explore. New vendors will join this year, offering a variety of unique, handmade treasures perfect for holiday gifting.

Mark your calendars and bring your loved ones to Colusa Circle on Sunday, December 1, starting at 4pm. The Colusa Circle Tree Lighting & Holiday Fair promises to be a magical evening of lights, music, art, and delightful treats. See you there!

Consolidation Analysis Accepted by Both Boards

By Linnea Due

On November 7, at a meeting scheduled past the *Outlook's* press time, the two district boards met to hear a presentation by Dmitry Semenov, the principal of Ridgeline Municipal Strategies. The firm was hired to conduct fiscal analyses of the Kensington Police Protection and Community Services District (KPPCSD) and the Kensington Fire Protection District (KFPD). After those two analyses were presented and accepted (KPPCSD in August, KFPD in September), Semenov turned to what the finances of a consolidated district would look like, with one board and one pot of money. (See Semenov's report on each district's website under the Nov. 7 meeting agenda.)

The intent at this meeting was to hear the presentation and for each board to vote to accept or reject the report. The next opportunity for residents to comment publicly on the report will be at a community Town Hall on January 11, during which Semenov will again run through his slides and listen to feedback from residents.

The meeting was sparsely attended, with ten residents in the audience and fewer than 30 online. KPPCSD board president Dave Spath reminded everyone why these studies had been commissioned: LAFCO, the county agency that would manage consolidation, requires a financial analysis to prove that the finances of a combined board would not be markedly different from each board

See Consolidation, Page 4

Kensington and Beyond Update

December 2024



JUST LISTED | 2027 Harper Street
El Cerrito Hills
4 BR | 2 BA
OFFERED AT: \$1,998,000
To view online visit: 2027harper.com



SOLD | 24 Highgate Court
Kensington
4 BR | 4 BA | Includes Attached ADU
OFFERED AT: \$1,998,000
SOLD AT: \$2,700,000
To view online visit: 24highgate.com



SOLD | 669 Oberlin Avenue
Kensington
3 BR | 3 BA
OFFERED AT: \$1,298,000
SOLD: \$1,200,000
To view online visit: 669oberlin.com

With holidays approaching, my thoughts turn gratefully to those who have made my success possible. Wishing you and your families the happiest of holidays! It has been my privilege to serve you. For those of you I have not worked with, it would be my honor to do so. I am grateful for the little things, big things, and everything in between.



Just another reminder how a home becomes the canvas of your life, an environment that stimulates, soothes, allows you to reminisce, escape...and be surrounded by things that bring you joy - and those you love. I calculate on my magic calculator to measure the EPSF - Enjoyment Per Square Foot - and it simply read.....Priceless!



Happy holidays and best wishes in the coming year!

Ruth Frassetto, CRS | 510.697.8606 | ruth.frassetto@compass.com | DRE 00779030

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Kensington Market Update

SEPTEMBER - PRESENT 2024	SEPTEMBER - NOVEMBER 2023
14 Closed Sales	9 Closed Sales
Median List Price: \$1,347,000	Median List Price: \$1,095,000
Median Sales Price: \$1,555,000	Median Sales Price: \$1,526,500
Median Sq. Ft.: 2,119	Median Sq. Ft.: 1,905
Average Days on Market: 14	Average Days on Market: 13
Median Cost Per Sq. Ft.	Median Cost Per Sq. Ft.
List Price: \$709,42	List Price: \$670,13
Sales Price: \$866.33	Sales Price: \$944.44

What do buyers want today? Move-in ready.

Home improvement projects with the greatest return on investment (ROI) include:

- **Garage door replacement:** A quality garage door with updated features can recoup about 102.7% of its cost.
- **New entry door:** A new entry door can offer a 96.6 percent return on investment
- **Replacement windows:** A vinyl window replacement can provide a 72.3% return.
- **Kitchen remodeling:** Upgrading your kitchen with energy-efficient appliances, quality countertops, and ample storage can significantly increase your home's value. 85.7%
- **Bathroom remodel:** A properly planned bathroom remodel can recoup as much as 66.7% or more of its cost in your home's resale value.
- **Building a deck:** A deck can enhance your price point at resale. 50.2%
- **Siding replacement:** Replacing your siding with new material can improve curb appeal and increase the value of your home. 94.7%
- **HVAC Conversion | Electrification (Heat Pump):** 103.5%
- **Roofing replacement:** 101%
- **Electrical upgrade/remove knob and tube wiring:** 100%
- **Landscaping Projects:** This can vary depending on the project, but it can be significant. Some say that smart landscaping design can provide a return on investment of 200-400%
- **Painting interior and exterior:** 107%
- **New light fixtures:** 100%

Other factors that affect the ROI of home improvements include: Location, Market conditions, Project scope, Timing, and Work quality.

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I am thankful for you! Happy Holidays, Cheers!

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Important Town Hall Meeting January 11

By Mary Morris-Mayorga, KFPD general manager

The Kensington Police Protection and Community Services District and the Kensington Fire Protection District jointly commissioned an independent fiscal analysis of the possibility of merging Kensington's two special districts into one entity. At the joint special board meeting held on November 7, the district boards approved holding a Town Hall meeting on Saturday, January 11 at 10am in the Kensington Community Center where Dmitry Semenov, of Ridgeline Municipal Strategies, will present the joint fiscal study to the community. The meeting allows participation in person or via Zoom. Please visit either district website for details or contact KPPCSD Interim General Manager David Aranda at daranda@kppcsd.org or KFPD General Manager Mary Morris-Mayorga at mmayorga@kensingtonfire.org.

The Kensington Community Council is dedicated to the improvement, development, and education of the community, and to the promotion of social welfare in Kensington. It enriches the community by providing educational and recreational programs for all ages and by publishing the Outlook, a monthly newsletter that covers local events and issues. KCC also provides a forum for all Kensington community groups to meet and coordinate their respective efforts toward the common good of the community.

KENSINGTON OUTLOOK

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Use one space, not two, after all periods.

Letters to the Editor

Consolidation Saves Money

Dear Editor:

Great news—the financial analysis of the viability of consolidating our two districts into one is done, and frankly, it looks great! Dmitry Semenov of Ridgeline Municipal Strategies presented his report, which indicates that by 2034, a consolidated board is likely to have saved Kensington \$1.8 million!

Read the report here:

https://www.kppcsd.org/2024-11-07-kppcsd-board-joint-kppcsd_kfpd-mtg

Of course, the potential benefits of consolidating our two boards only begin with the financial part! We would have a much less dysfunctional governance structure with just one board—thus we can avoid problems like we've had in the recent past, when the Kensington Fire Protection District decided to expel the Kensington Police from the Kensington Public Safety Building, leaving them with no adequate home in Kensington—a problem we are still trying to solve.

Consolidation will also improve our government transparency, reduce the number of meetings for citizens to attend, improve public engagement, and achieve better planning and analysis, because the single board would be planning for Kensington as a whole, instead of in parts (having two boards in a tiny town is like creating a divorced family on purpose!) We can hire specialized staff and a full-time general manager, creating a more professional and functional district.

We'll soon have larger financial reserves, and can better access government grants. Politically, we can hope for less infighting and avoid turf wars. I am hoping that we can create an administrative office in central Kensington with office hours five days a week, where the public can get their questions answered.

When I heard about consolidation three or four years ago, I thought, "What a great idea for Kensington!" I'm proud that the "Save Kensington's Future" slate with whom I was elected has now accomplished the financial analysis, with the help of our colleagues on both boards.

Please come to the Town Hall on January 11 to tell us what you think. After that meeting, each board will vote on whether to take further steps towards consolidation. This is the process mandated by LAFCO, the Local Agency Formation authority. Thanks to all who have helped with this!

Cassandra Duggan, KPPCSD board director

Garbage in, Garbage out

Dear Editor:

At the recent joint meeting of the two boards (KPPCSD Police) and (KFPD Fire), an analysis prepared by Ridgeline supporting consolidation was accepted by eight of the 10 board members. Julie Stein and I opposed Ridgeline's 10-year projection to 2034 and their assumptions about the cost savings and benefits if the two districts are consolidated. Following are the major errors in the Ridgeline assumptions.

Ridgeline assumes annual costs for both police and fire services will increase by a meager 1.7 percent. However, El Cerrito fire costs in the last four years have increased by eight percent annually, while Kensington police officers received six percent annual pay and step increases over the last three years, with probably higher increases going forward. These increased costs will significantly reduce the available cash balance of both districts by 2034.

Ridgeline assumes both boards will have no major capital expenditure through 2034. However, the KPPCSD is currently analyzing costs for an expensive police station in Kensington Park, requiring significant debt obligations and voter approval of a parcel tax increase. The fire district needs to set aside money for fire reduction and improved fire truck access to Kensington's border with Tilden Park. These costs will reduce Ridgeline's assumed available cash reserves by 2034.

Ridgeline's assumptions concerning administrative savings due to consolidation were misleading. Here are two major reasons.

Ridgeline assumes the fire district's existing administrative service needs will continue through 2034. Current costs are based on staffing needed to complete the Public Safety Building (PSB). Now that the PSB is completed, and Ridgeline's assumptions of no additional capital projects for 10 years, the current PSB payroll costs of \$357,863 can be reduced by more than \$150,000, wiping out the assumed consolidated savings of \$141,104.

As they did with police and fire, Ridgeline assumes staff will accept a meager 1.7 percent annual salary increase while inflation increases at three percent. Ridgeline also assumes no employee turnover for 10 years. This won't happen, and costs will go up, reducing any savings.

These mistakes should be corrected before any final conclusion about consolidation is reached.
Jim Watt, KFPD board director

Consolidated Government Would Serve Kensington's Best Interests

Dear Editor,

After attending the meeting to review the financial analysis of consolidating the police and fire board, I first want to thank the boards for their hard work supporting the process. It became clear that the financial benefits of consolidation would be significant, amounting to almost \$2 million in year nine.

But more than that, there would be one single board that had Kensington's best interests at heart instead of the warring boards we have experienced in the past that resulted in the expulsion of the police from the public safety building (among other costly problems). Workflow, staffing, transparency and accessibility would all be improved.

We are a vulnerable community in terms of fire and evacuation risks. A consolidated government could focus on these issues. That's what we need.

Thanks especially to the KPCSD who have been working to achieve this goal. Let's support them and get it done, so we can turn our attention to restoring democracy to our beleaguered country!

Meryl Rafferty

Safety Takes a Back Seat

Dear Editor:

Consolidation of the fire district and the police district is not simply about rearranging Kensington's administrative organization chart. "Consolidation," also known as dissolving Kensington's dedicated fire protection district board, should be about forming a new board with genuine interest in a culture of fiscal responsibility and excellence in public safety service delivery in Kensington.

At the November joint meeting of the fire board and the police board to hear a draft

fiscal analysis of combining the boards, any improved delivery of public safety services was barely mentioned. Delving into the details of this very important fiscal analysis was of little interest to most of the board members and was even met with opposition.

Fire board members Jim Watt and myself, who prepared for a meaningful discussion of the full report and its underlying assumptions, were roundly dismissed by various police board members. The chair of that board displayed some diplomacy and some interest in the concerns raised by Watt and myself, but his attempts at allowing dialogue were overridden and flatly shut down by three of his board members. The fire board president joined the cacophony, challenging our questions about potentially faulty assumptions, even using words "wildly," "out there," and "not relevant." I felt that valid concerns raised in the interest of Kensington taxpayers were kicked to the curb.

Example? The report appears to imply that KFPD may have unfunded pension obligations to El Cerrito beyond the fire services contract term, which ends in June 2030, and even beyond any particular past or future fiscal year. Yet, KFPD pays the contract fee in full every year. This implication is concerning and should have been fully vetted for accuracy before accepting the fiscal analysis report. It is among the reasons I voted against accepting the report without further study.

Of even greater concern to me was the tone of the meeting and the genuine disregard of board members who came prepared. Don't ask questions. Just rubber-stamp what the staff and the consultants put in front of the board. Was this a preview of the culture of a consolidated board?

Julie Stein, KFPD board director

About that \$10M Building...

Dear Editor:

I agree with the Ridgeline conclusions that the police district alone will not have sufficient funds to maintain staffing and build a new facility, but that a combined district will be able to, and that the administrative staffing will be much more efficient and attractive for hiring. Both good reasons to restructure.

Regarding housing the police department: Note that the Ridgeline report categorically says for Alternative 4 (moving police into the public safety building) is not a workable solution. It is time for everyone to accept that and move on.

I have no problem with permanently keeping many/most of the police activities where they are in El Cerrito. Note that it is the most cost-effective solution. In any event, they are going to be there for quite a while longer.

I have heard that some folks are pushing for a "fancy" (solid built) structure, saying prefab modules are not "good enough" for Kensington. I have no problem with using the prefab modules. They are the most cost-effective. Do the boards think that a parcel tax to fund a solid structure would pass? I won't vote for that. It will be hard enough to pass one to pay for modules in Kensington.

Mabry Benson

Many Advantages to Consolidation

Dear Editor:

The facts are in regarding the financial feasibility of combining Kensington's two public safety districts into one. Ridgeline Municipal Strategies LLC was hired to analyze the current and projected financial conditions of our two services districts, and to assess the financial and operating strength of Kensington's services if the two districts were consolidated into one community services district. This analysis is a required component of an application to LAFCO, which oversees district formations.

The key findings in the Ridgeline report (see www.kpoa.net) are that district consolidation would save \$120K initially, increasing to \$290K annually by adding economies of scale and eliminating redundant costs; increase reserves at least \$1.8 million over nine years; provide flexibility to use property tax dollars where Kensington residents have their highest priorities, while meeting all contractual obligations; have sufficient funds to maintain critical public services; have sufficient funds to hire a full-time general manager and professional staff, reduce turnover and reliance on consultants, and reduce the current practice of unnecessarily long board meetings; provide streamlined governance with one board, similar to our neighboring cities governing structures and communities across the U.S. As with much larger communities, little Kensington's single board's workload would be manageable.

Continuing to operate under the current split-government structure puts the KPPCSD (police-parks) at significant operational and financial risk. Ridgeline projects budget deficits for KPPCSD until 2034 based on current services and revenue. KPPCSD has limited ability to borrow money for improvements such as a police facility in Kensington. Additionally, KPPCSD has been unable to find a permanent general manager for two years. The KFPD (fire district) has projected annual operating surpluses of at least \$900K which far exceeds its current and projected services costs. It is a far less complex organization than KPPCSD to manage given that most of its budget is under contract with El Cerrito.

For years we have hosted governmental and independent experts to assist us in understanding consolidation and are happy to assist.

Rob Firmin, KPOA president and KPOA board of directors

Ride the Bus

Dear Editor,

A small group of #7 AC Transit bus riders have begun meeting to advocate for this convenient bus that currently goes north and south through Kensington, every 30 minutes, 6am-10pm, seven days a week.

We urge you to ride the bus because it is less expensive than operating a car or hiring a ride share, it is convenient, and it connects to many other transit operators, including BART, Amtrak, Golden Gate Transit, WestCat, East Bay Paratransit, Solano Express, DHS Express, Emery Go Round, Soltrans, FAST (Fairfield-Suisun Transit), Napa Vine, and Flixbus.

Want to be a part of our awesome advocacy team? Contact Joannapace4@gmail.com.

Give the 7 a try today!

Joanna Pace

Hand-crafted Items Offered at Holiday Sale

By Mary Ghidella

The crafters of Saint Jerome Church meet weekly to make hand-knit items for the annual Christmas sale, held Saturday, December 7, 2:30-6:30pm and Sunday, December 8, 9am-1:30pm at 308 Carmel Avenue, El Cerrito. There are many colorful knit creations ranging from sweaters and blankets for baby, scarves and fingerless gloves, hats and shawls for adults, and colorful Christmas ornaments.

Consolidation

...from Front Page

remaining separate.

Before Semenov launched into his presentation, the two boards, with five directors each, listened to public comment. Steve Bates said that he had lost faith in "who we vote for and what you guys do. You have a fiduciary responsibility to do what's best for the community. There are a lot of people on fixed incomes in this community."

Bates' concern underlies what many have been and still are concerned about: that the KPPCSD, which is treading water financially, will absorb the fire district's surplus and use it as capital to take out loans to build a police station on park land. Gail Feldman, a longtime consolidation advocate, spoke to this directly: "I think it's become very clear that the KPPCSD's financial projections leave it in a precarious state going forward. There is no wiggle room with the current revenue stream. I would like it addressed in this meeting if you could explain what the advantages to consolidation are in regards to doing major capital improvements. I'm discussing the need to find a home for the police and how that might be funded."

Semenov took the microphone and dialed through slides in a PowerPoint presentation. "This has been a work that has taken months," he began. "A lot of time has been contributed by staff and many of you as well as the fire chief and police chief. The goal is that this is not our report but your report." He ran through a quick summary of the two individual district reports, explaining that the KPPCSD has four funds, a general fund, police fund, parks fund, and solid waste. The police and parks funds operate at a deficit, which are covered by the general fund. Solid waste operates at breakeven.

"Going forward we made some assumptions: keeping everything as is and looking at maintaining the level of service, the district will have a small shortfall every single year." Semenov explained that they assumed that the district was at full employment, which is often not the case. "It's such a small shortfall that it's pretty easy to cure. In the global scheme of things, the district is operating at breakeven. Any major capital projects and especially the building for the district would require additional funding. That could come from grants, assessments, or bonds. The district could not engage in a major capital expense on its own."

He then turned to the fire district. "The fire district only has one fund. The district is projected to have a surplus each year. The capital outlays are new fire engines." For decades, the KFPD has set aside a specific amount each year so that it can pay for a new engine when it's time to replace the old one. "The district generates an annual operating surplus of \$900,000 to \$1M while offering the same level of services, so it has the capacity to pay for capital projects," Semenov reported.

Then he began the summary of what a consolidated district could look like. In this analysis, as Semenov pointed out several times during the meeting, his team assumed no changes—no capital projects, no changes in the fire contract with El Cerrito, which operates the Kensington fire station, maintaining a status quo based on the analysis from each district. Although it was not stated in this meeting, for the purpose of the fiscal study, Semenov's team assumed that the police would stay in El Cerrito. Their analysis confirmed that the district could afford the rent or the modular purchase for the police to remain on San Pablo Avenue.

Semenov predicted consolidation costs would amount to about \$56,000 and around \$141,000 in savings would start in 2026, assuming a 2025 start date. These dates became confusing later in the meeting but finally it boiled down to that this was a snapshot of savings uncoupled with what year consolidation actually occurred. He said there would be no changes to police, parks and waste management expenditures. Police and parks would still operate at a deficit covered by the general fund. Semenov predicted an annual operating surplus of approximately \$900,000, gradually rising to about \$1.4M in 2034. "Starting in 2026," he said, "the consolidated district would generate better results than the two districts operating independently." He said that the district would be able to retain a fulltime staff of a general manager, a finance manager, and a public safety coordinator. "It's unusual," he said, referring to the fire district, "to have such a big district managed by one staff person. You have good people." Having fulltime employees, he said, would reduce reliance on consultants.

Semenov said that on the pro side would be greater operating efficiencies and a simplified public process, with one board meeting resulting in easier board member recruitment. On the con side is that those board members would have increased responsibilities with perhaps less institutional knowledge of running a fire department and a police department, leading to less attention being paid to certain details. He also predicted a large time commitment of both board members and staff in order to wade through the actual process of consolidating the two districts. And finally, currently the fire district generates a surplus, he said, and those funds could be used for things unrelated to reducing fire risk and providing emergency medical services. He suggested that the KPPCSD, which would still have two programs running at a deficit, would need to be stringent about spending. "Fiscal discipline will be necessary," he concluded.

Next steps are simple: the boards should review the analysis and determine if consolidation is viable. If either district decides not to move forward, that decision should be made promptly. If the boards decide to move ahead, staff should be directed to apply to LAFCO.

Next came board questions. Fire board director Julie Stein asked about the district's unfunded actuarial liability (UAL), which Ridgeline had estimated at \$9.1M. Stein said the district was not responsible for CalPERS. What would happen, she asked, if either Kensington or El Cerrito terminated its contract?

"For the purposes of this analysis," Semenov said, "we assume there is no termination on either side. I don't remember the contract saying anything about that. If

you can get out of that payment by just walking away and [El Cerrito] is OK with it, then great. I'm sure that if you stay in the agreement, that unfunded liability with CalPERS would come up. It's outside the scope of our study."

"But why?" Stein asked. "These individuals are not our employees. We are contracting for their services. They rotate back and forth through our station. We don't even know which CalPERS plan they're in."

Semenov agreed that the arrangement was murky. "We did not see a consistent methodology with CalPERS' costs to you. I think that is something you should consider. The goal of the fiscal analysis is that whatever is in place will continue to be in place. The document goes into how we calculated that share of CalPERS that is passed down to you from El Cerrito."

Stein said, "Our colleagues on the KPPCSD took out an obligation bond to deal with the unfunded liability. If this is really true, it's something we haven't planned for at all."

The police district's Sarah Gough asked if there was a question of cancelling the contract. Fire board president Daniel Levine said there was not. Stein was not assuaged. "Quite frankly, anything could happen. The state auditor has suggested to El Cerrito that they outsource their services. They could cancel the contract. This is something new to the fire district, and I think we need to understand it."

Eventually, Semenov agreed to add a paragraph, a disclaimer of sorts, that the analysis assumes continuing services under El Cerrito's agreement. After that came a discussion about whether the employees of the combined district would be on CalPERS. Stein saw it as a recruitment issue: "Everyone in CalPERS knows that a 401K plan is not going to reap the benefits of CalPERS." Semenov said the analysis assumes that employees in the consolidated district would not be offered CalPERS. "If you provide CalPERS, you'd probably want to notch those salaries down."

The fire board's Jim Watt took the floor next. He objected to the conclusions of the report because it assumes that neither board "will invest in any capital improvements. This means no police station and no work on making Kensington more fire-safe. I'm sure all of us agree that this ten-year assumption is completely unrealistic. The fact is, both boards are contemplating large capital expenditures." He was referring to the police station, estimated at approximately \$10M, and to reducing fire risk and instituting emergency access and evacuation improvements.

He also brought up numbers from the district's earlier five-year plan, in which it was expected that the district's revenue would rise by four percent but the costs of El Cerrito's contract would rise by eight percent, thus dropping the surplus over time. Watt also wanted to see payroll increases of at least five percent for the consolidated district factored into the analysis.

Semenov said, "You're absolutely correct that we're assuming no capital projects for the fire district. And we're assuming no capital projects for the consolidated district. We dissected the entire fee for the El Cerrito contract line item by line item. That fire contract is 85 percent of the district cost. Yes, there is obviously differences between [the five-year plan] number and our numbers. We are very transparent about our assumptions."

See Consolidation, page 10

KIC adds Kiosk to Colusa Circle after Eight-Year Effort

By Sarah Paul and Lisa Caronna

A beautiful new kiosk has been installed on Colusa Circle, providing our special districts, residents, and businesses a place to post fliers with announcements and other information.

The Kensington Improvement Club (KIC) spearheaded the effort, which kicked off in 2016 and overcame myriad hurdles along the way. For many years, there has been a kiosk in the business district on Arlington Ave. at the corner of Amherst. On the Circle, a bulletin board was made available by the Colusa Market owners, but it was small and didn't seem sufficient.

KIC envisioned the kiosk project back in 2016, designating Sarah Paul to lead the charge. She enlisted architect Alan Fleming of Studio Fleming Design, the firm that also designed the new building on the Circle at 401 Colusa. Fleming developed a conceptual design that would meet the needs of the community, be attractive, use innovative materials and meet ADA requirements. The conceptual design was then tentatively approved by the Contra Costa County Public Works Department, and the search for an appropriate location along the sidewalk began.

Many locations around Colusa Circle were reviewed, and the one selected (near the small open space by the bus stop) met both pedestrian safety issues as well as vehicular concerns for clear sightlines for drivers. Once KIC had a firm construction estimate and a metal fabricator (DEKA Fabrication & Design) on board, secure funding was needed. Paul solicited donations from residents and businesses. But then COVID hit, adding a nearly two-year delay. Other hurdles KIC faced were county approvals of an encroachment permit and the need for a new insurance policy. County Supervisor John Gioia provided invaluable assistance meeting these needs.

The project was reviewed and approved by the Colusa Circle Merchants Association and viewed by both the Kensington Police Protection and Community Services District (KPPCSD) and the Kensington Fire Protection District (KFPD). Like the Arlington kiosk, both special districts can post their agendas and notices on a dedicated section of the kiosk. KIC was the major funder through both membership contributions and donations by individual board members. KIC is extremely grateful to all who contributed, especially to Alan Fleming, who donated much of his time for the design and for project management. Thank you also to Brian Collins for the wonderful oak tree graphic.

This project could not have been realized without generous community support. There are many stakeholders and contributors who merit recognition: KPPCSD, KFPD, Kensington Property Owners Association, Kensington Farmers Market, Colusa Market, Semifreddi's, Zip Code East Bay, Colusa Circle Merchants Association, Fuse Fitness, and Benchmark Pizza. Some individuals deserve special mention: Lorraine Omsundson, Sarah Paul, Lisa Caronna, David Spath, Linda Lipscomb, Lynn Wolter, Larry Thal and Nan Phelps. Thanks to all who contributed! Our eight-year odyssey has finally resulted in a beautiful kiosk on Colusa Circle.



Sarah Paul stands beside the new kiosk at Colusa Circle. Paul spent years ensuring this project would finally come to completion. Photo by Lisa Caronna.

Support a Community Treasure—KCC

By Cathy Garza, treasurer, KCC

The Kensington Community Council (KCC) wraps up the year successfully thanks to the support of our community and the work of excellent staff and dedicated board members. In this issue of the Kensington Outlook, you'll find a green envelope we hope you will use to make your tax-deductible donation to KCC to sustain our work. As KCC's treasurer, I have noticed that while some of our programming is self-sustaining, our community programming necessitates financial support from donors like you.

The Kensington Outlook is one such community resource KCC oversees and looks to the community for support. In a time when local news outlets are shrinking, the Kensington Outlook continues to provide local news and information. I usually read the entire paper in one sitting, but I'll admit to favoring the "Community Education" section (I enrolled in April's cooking class and loved it) and the "Kensington Eats Out" column (do you see a food theme here?!). The paper is delivered free of charge to every household and business in Kensington, with extra copies delivered to a few businesses and the Kensington library. KCC covers the financial gap between advertising funding and operating expenses (postage, printing, staffing). Your donation can help us cover this gap.

KCC also funds broad appeal community events free of charge: Movie Night in September and the Community Picnic in October. If you attended Movie Night (a showing of *Wonka*), you may have noticed that a trip to the concession stand was far cheaper than what a trip to the concession stand at a movie theater would cost. KCC keeps food prices low and covers the cost of the movie and screen rental to encourage families and the community at large to enjoy a (mostly) warm September evening in Kensington Park. The same is true for the Community Picnic where once again, food prices are subsidized and entertainment (local bands, the Bubble Guy) is covered by KCC.

KCC's main book of business is educational and recreational programming—a mostly self-sustaining endeavor. KASEP after-school classes and KCC Summer Camp continue to be popular, and we are pleased to provide this enrichment for the kids in our community. KASEP continues to blend programming, keeping long-standing and popular classes (tennis, carpentry, cooking, e.g.) while adding newer options (Spanish, coding). This was the year that we needed to replace gymnastics equipment that we were able to fund using previous years' donations. We are excited to have Jenny Parks, KCC's recreation director, working with a Hilltop parent group on incorporating neuro-divergent support in our classes. And don't forget to check out our adult classes (yoga, tai chi, cardio dance and cooking). You can find offerings and registration information in the "Community Education" section of the Outlook or online at <https://kensingtoncommunitycouncil.org/>.

KCC's 2024 Annual Fund donors will be acknowledged in the February 2025 Outlook. Please support KCC by using the green envelope, enclosed with this month's Outlook, to send us your check. Or make your online contribution of any size at <https://kensingtoncommunitycouncil.org/support-kcc/>.

Happy Holidays from KCC!

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895 Pounds of Fun at Halloween Celebration

By Karen Yencich

It was 9am, Sunday, October 27. The Great Pumpkin had taken its place in the center of the Farmers Market. The Scavenger Hunt was ready to roll at Zip Code East Bay. And air traffic control had just cleared a fleet of unicorns to land at Colusa Circle. A family of unusually large insects, several Star Troopers, some barnyard animals and baby beluga joined the crowd at the entrance to the Farmers Market.

Then—just like that—the annual Colusa Circle Halloween Harvest celebration hosted by the Colusa Circle Merchants' Association (CCMA) and the Kensington Farmers' Market, was underway.

Well over 200 children and families marched around Colusa Circle in the Annual Kids Costume Parade. About 100 of the marchers picked up numbers so that they could take part in the costume contest, a "people's choice" event that voted the Giant Insect Family, the Hansel and Gretel Family and the Potted Cactus as their top three favorites.

The Giant Pumpkin, provided by Pabla Singh and the crew at Colusa Market and Young's Market on the Arlington, presided over the granting of wishes and served as a play structure while 100 small pumpkins were claimed by visiting children. There were nearly 200 entries to "Guess the Weight of the Giant Pumpkin," with a winning guess, by Ivy Rosekind, of 892 pounds—actual weight, 895 pounds.



The traditional Obstacle Course created by Fuse Fitness in its new garage space, proved irresistible as always. And families lined up at the free photo booth in the parklet next to Benchmark Portavia.

CCMA brought back the extremely popular "Tracy the Animal Guy," with a show that included baby chicks, hamsters, guinea pigs, rabbits, snakes, tortoises, lizards, tarantulas, roosters, as well as many more creatures. And Tracy's signature move, the one that makes him such a hit, is the opportunity to interact with the animals—for many of kids, a first opportunity to stroke a snake, cuddle a bunny or hold a baby chick.

New additions to the Scavenger Hunt this year were Circle stalwart Semifreddi's and florist Freshly Cut. When the little scavengers had visited all of the participating shops and gathered their stamps, more than 100 of them trooped over to Benchmark Pizzeria for a free cup of soft serve ice cream.

The children had mostly straggled off by 2pm, and the Farmers Market was folding its tents, but the sense of community lingered. In the many years since the first costumes showed up at the market and a few free pumpkins were handed out, to be joined in later years by the CCMA Scavenger Hunt and then Animal Show, the Halloween Harvest Celebration has grown into a community event where neighbors can gather and be joyful, celebrating the holiday and each other.

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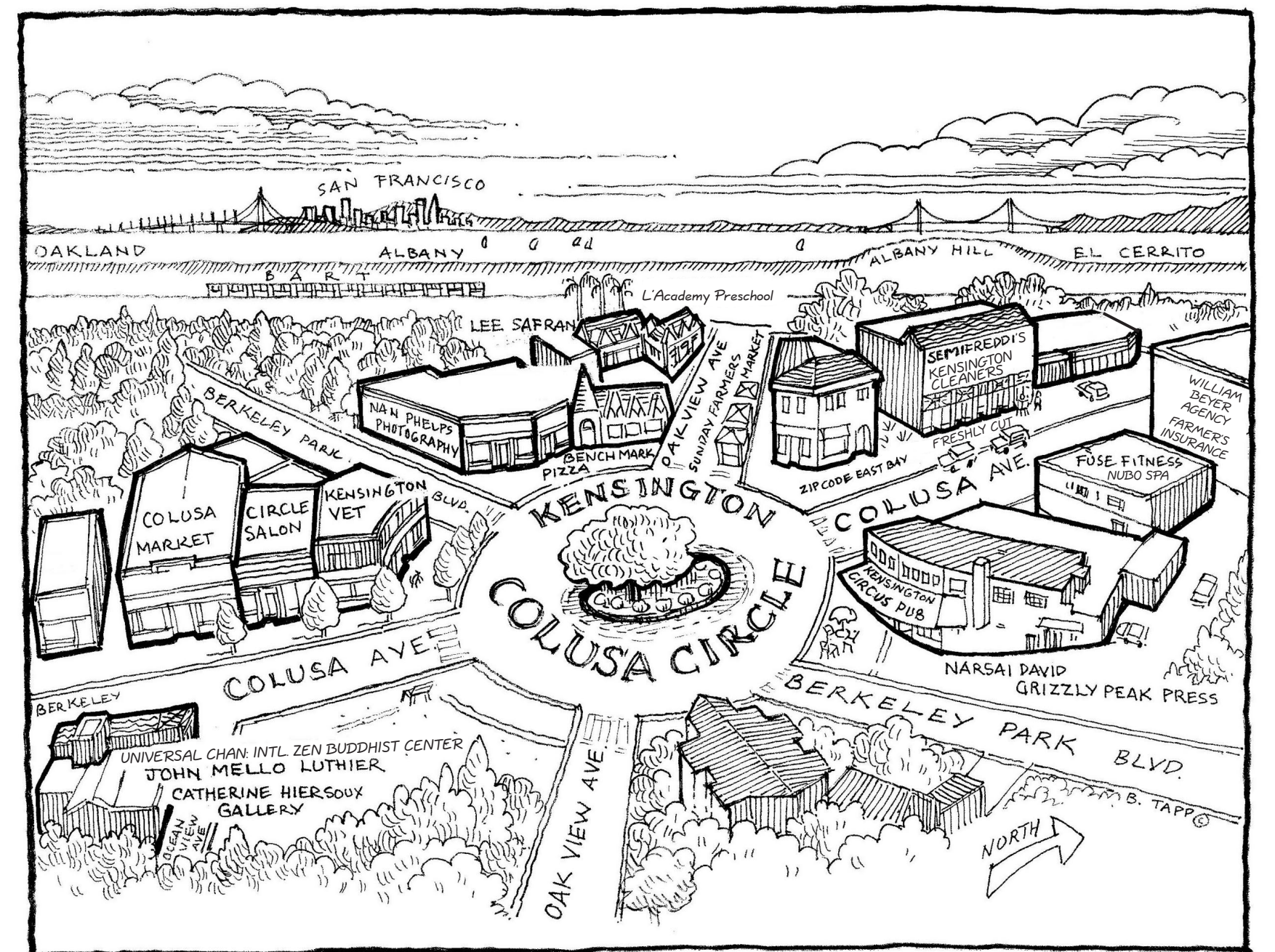
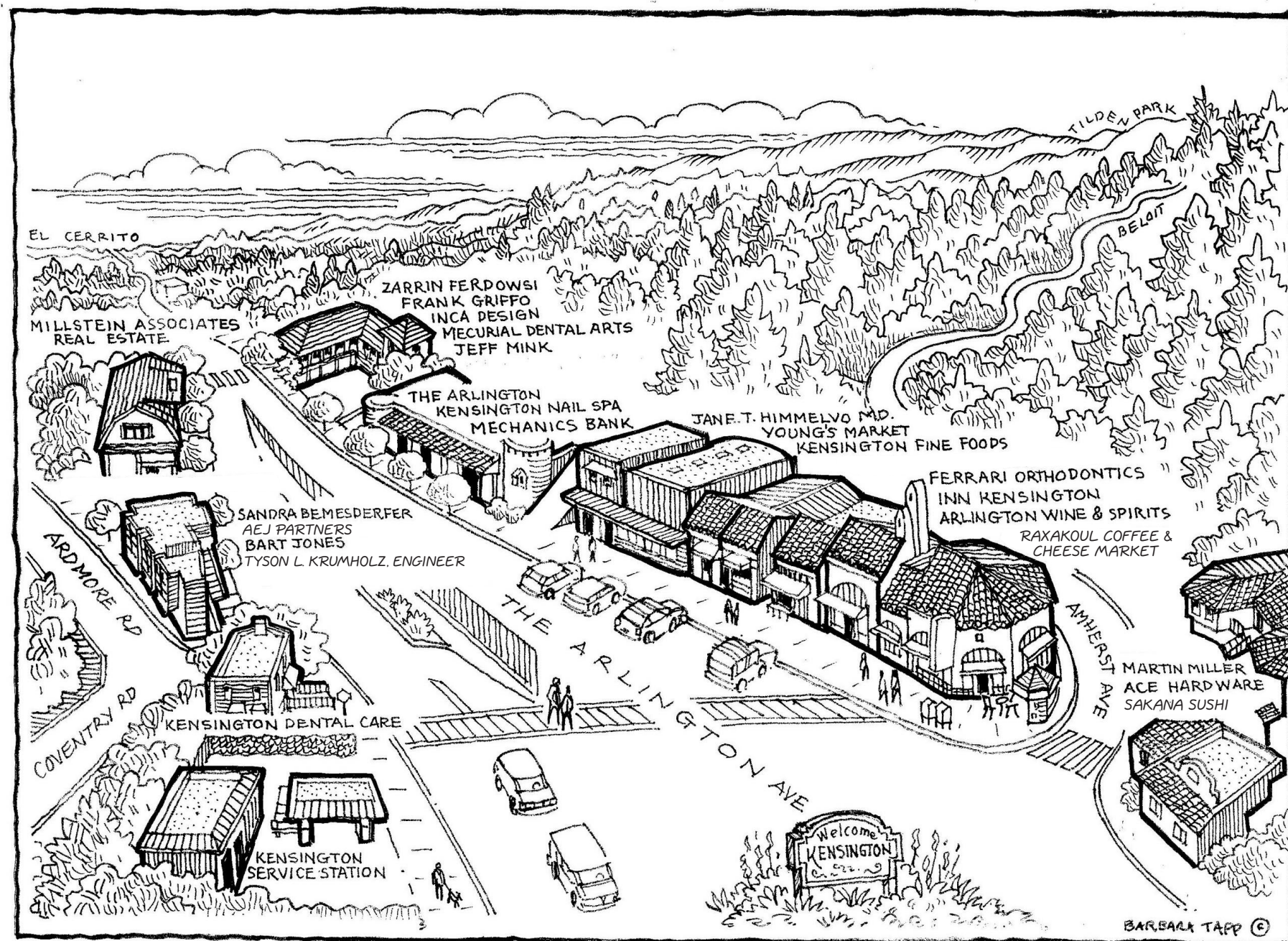
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Kensington Community Education

KASEP: Enriching Young Minds for Over 40 Years



For more than four decades, the Kensington After School Enrichment Program (KASEP) has been a vibrant part of the Kensington community, dedicated to broadening children's horizons beyond the classroom. Beginning with just a handful of classes like sewing and carpentry, KASEP has grown tremendously to meet the interests and needs of today's youth, now offering over 70 classes each week.

KASEP's programs are diverse and engaging, with options spanning creative arts, culinary skills, sports, and various crafts. Thanks to the well-equipped community center kitchen, children can explore international cuisines in Cooking Around the World, develop culinary skills in Making Family Meals, and much more. These hands-on cooking classes not only teach food preparation but also encourage teamwork, cultural awareness, and an appreciation for the culinary arts.

In the arts department, students can discover and develop their talents with classes in watercolor painting, pastels, paper crafts, crocheting, and other artistic mediums. These classes allow students to experiment, express themselves creatively, and build fine motor skills.

Our sports programs offer fun and active ways for kids to build teamwork and coordination. Classes in soccer, basketball, flag football, volleyball, and tennis provide children with skills training, fitness, and friendly competition in a supportive environment.

Upcoming Winter Session: Our next KASEP winter session begins on January 6th and will run for 9 weeks. Registration opens on December 10th, with staggered times: at 7:00 PM for TK and kindergarten, and at 7:30 PM for grades 1-6.

KASEP's success is a testament to the Kensington community's dedication to creating enriching, educational opportunities for children after school. As the program continues to expand, it remains committed to helping young people develop new skills, foster creativity, stay active, and form lasting friendships.



Winter Schedule for Adult and Family Classes

Family Yoga in the Park with Lori Hess

Join Way to Glow Kids Yoga for some family yoga time where parents and kids will playfully explore yoga poses, breathing exercises, and mindfulness activities together. Family Yoga will take place on Sundays @ 10:00-10:45 (kids aged 2 to 5) on the grassy lawn outside the KCC Office/Recreation Building (past the tennis courts). If possible, please bring a waterproof blanket/tarp, two yoga mats (we will have extra mats available), warm layers, and a water bottle. Summer dates: 11/24, 12/8, 12/15, 12/22 Suggested cost: \$25 per class; discounted tuition and scholarships are available. Class will be run on a drop-in basis. Please complete a registration form at <https://bit.ly/38Sq91k> and contact Lori Hess wayto-glowkidsyoga@gmail.com with questions about the class.



The Kensington Outlook can now be found at: KensingtonOutlook.com Archive copies can also be found on our website dating back to 2003.

KCC/KASEP Office: 59 Arlington Ave., Recreation Building Kensington CA 94707
E-mail: Info@KensingtonCommunityCouncil.org, or call 510-525-0292.
Our website is: www.kensingtoncommunitycouncil.org.



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Yoga with Anja Borgstrom

Strength & Balance Yoga -Tuesdays at 8:30am

Gentle Yoga - Thursdays at 11:30

Cost is \$20 drop in or register online Register at KensingtonCommunityCouncil.org/adult-and-family-classes

Contra Costa Chorale Welcomes New Artistic Director with Its December 6 Concert

By Kate Sibley

On December 6 at 7:30pm, the Contra Costa Chorale will present its fall concert, Viennese Influence(r)s at the Unitarian Universalist Church of Berkeley (UUCB), 1 Lawson Road, Kensington.



Photo by Matthew Schultz

This is the inaugural concert under the direction of the chorale's new artistic director, Dr. Brad Schultz, who was hired with the unanimous consent of the board and singers after a rigorous summertime search following the sudden death of former director Cindy Beitmen.

A native of Minnesota, Schultz' musical background includes vocal and instrumental performance and conducting, church and community music-making, university teaching and public musicology. Schultz is also the director of music at St. Stephen's Episcopal Church in Belvedere, where he is organist, choir director, and artistic director of that church's concert series.

Schultz came to the Bay Area just over a year ago from Oregon, where he had recently earned a Ph.D. in musicology and performance practice from the University of Oregon. He also holds an MM in organ performance from Emory University and a BA in Music from Luther College.

After working with Schultz for the past four months, chorale singers are excited to present this concert featuring works of some of the great Viennese musicians. Yes, you'll hear Brahms, Mozart, Beethoven, and Bruckner (some of those pieces may be quite familiar and some not so much).

You'll also hear a wonderful piece by Marianna von Martines, a composer from the late 18th century who studied as a child with Joseph Haydn and grew to heady stature among her musical colleagues, even performing multiple times before Austria's Empress Maria Theresa. Martines was quite favored in her day, but for decades lost her place in history because the historians... well, let's just say they forgot that women also made music in those days. This seven-movement work, *Dixit Dominus*, based on Psalm 110, will delight the audience and help to rewrite history so that the general public will finally begin learning about so many more musicians.

But let's not forget our new composers. The chorale will present a powerful musical experience with *A Silence Haunts Me*, a work by Jake Runestad, a contemporary composer who collaborated with poet Todd Boss to give us a glimpse into Beethoven's anguish upon knowing that he was losing his hearing. Boss' poem is a creative adaptation of Beethoven's famous and devastating Heiligenstadt Testament, written to his brothers in the dark days as he was facing his growing deafness and questioning his strength to continue living, knowing that he was losing the most important sense for the continuation of his work.

Schultz is looking forward to taking the chorale into the next chapter of its 58-year history in Contra Costa County. He reminds us that "My predecessor, Cindy Beitmen, spent many formative years in Vienna, soaking up the rich musical culture established by so many musicians before her who found their life's work there. In this concert, I look forward to exploring that blend of the familiar and surprising, with singers and audience alike."

This program focusing on Viennese composers represents the chorale's farewell to Cindy Beitmen, who died just before the May 2024 concert, and a rousing welcome to Brad Schultz, who looks forward to introducing the chorale singers and audiences alike to many new works and new interpretations of the classics in years to come.

In addition to the December 6 live concert at UUCB, tickets are also available for a livestream of the December 6 concert and another live concert on December 8 at Walnut Creek Presbyterian Church, 1801 Lacassie Avenue, Walnut Creek. Tickets for all three events are available online at <https://ticketstripe.com/cocochorale>. Further information can be found on the chorale website, www.ccchorale.org, or by calling 510-730-0202.

Christmas Cantata Stirs UUCB Choir

By Bryan Baker

San Francisco composer Kirke Mechem penned a 40-minute-long cantata based on an old Italian Christmas fable. The cantata, "La Befana," will be performed by the choir of the Unitarian Universalist Church of Berkeley, 1 Lawson Road, Kensington, on Sunday, December 22, 2pm.

Mechem describes the fable as follows: Befana is an old woman in a small village. Her compulsive sweeping brings mocking from the children of the villagers. Long ago she lost her baby in miscarriage but believes that she must keep her house spotless for the miraculous return of her child. She is visited by the Magi on their way to Bethlehem to deliver gifts to the newborn Baby King. They invite her to join them, but she declares that she is too busy with her housework and promises to join them later.

But when she sees the enormous, magical star in the Eastern sky, she realizes her mistake and is sure that the miracle of her baby's rebirth has come to pass. But it is too late. Every year on Epiphany night Befana is doomed to fly on her broom, searching for the baby, giving gifts and candy to the children in every home. Finally, she sings with the choruses, "Put off your toiling and let love in."

Says UUCB's Director of Music Bryan Baker, "Kirke Mechem is in his nineties, actively living in San Francisco, and is long considered the dean of American choral composers."

Tickets are \$20, \$15 for students. No one is turned away for lack of funds.



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Sewing Circle, Candle Craft, Fun for Kids

By Jenny Rockwell
Enjoy free programs at the Kensington Library, 61 Arlington Avenue. Call 510-524-3043 with questions. Thanks to the Friends of Kensington Library for making library programs possible.

Tues, Dec 3, 6:30pm Friends of the Kensington Library Friends of the Kensington Library, a 501c (3) nonprofit organization, has worked to improve and financially support library services in Kensington since 1959. Open to all Kensington residents.

Tues, Dec 3, 6:30pm Castoff's Knitting Club Meets on the 1st Tuesday of each month. Open to all levels of knitters. Bring your own yarn!

Tuesdays, Dec 3, 10, 17, 6:30pm Family Storytime Lots of picture books, songs, rhymes, and fun! Stuffed animals & pajamas welcome.

Tuesdays, Dec 3, 17, Read to a Dog Join us and a licensed therapy dog for a 15-minute reading session every first and third Tuesday afternoon. December sessions will be from 4-5pm. Same day, drop in signup starts 15 minutes before the read session.

Sat, Dec 14, 2pm Solstice Candle Craft Make a beautiful tissue paper & Mod Podge candleholder to light on winter solstice. All ages.

Wed, Dec 18, 2-5pm Cloth Produce Bag Sewing Circle Join the Kensington Seamsters Union, local 94707, in transforming donated natural fiber fabric into bags, which will be given out for free at the Kensington Farmers Market. We need you to help measure, cut, iron sew and thread drawstrings, and create community.

Mon, Dec 30, 6:30-8pm Kensington Library Book Club The club meets online via Zoom, this month will meet on the fifth Monday. The selection for December is *Dead Souls* by Nikolai Gogol.

December Art Exhibit: Quilts by Claire Sherman: www.ClaireShermanArt.com
Seed library The Kensington Library seed library is always being restocked with free seeds of seasonal varieties.

Tues, Jan 7, 6:30pm Friends of the Kensington Library Friends of the Kensington Library, a 501c (3) nonprofit organization, has worked to improve and financially support library services in Kensington since 1959. Open to all Kensington residents.

Tues, Jan 7, 6:30pm Castoff's Knitting Club Meets on the 1st Tuesday of each month. Open to all levels of knitters. Bring your own yarn!

Tuesdays, Jan 7, 14, 21, 6:30pm Family Storytime Lots of picture books, songs, rhymes, and fun! Stuffed animals & pajamas welcome.

Tues, Jan 14, 6:30pm I Found My Family at the Library: Genealogy Resources Learn about the genealogy resources available from the library and how to find your ancestors using your home computer. Professional genealogist Melanie Proctor will provide information about the resources available onsite, remotely from home, and at other libraries.

Sat, Jan 18, 3pm, Gardening Conversation Circle: Propagation Join in a conversation with Tilu, who has lots of experience with propagation. Learn all about duplicating plants for free with cuttings.

Tues, Jan 28, 6:30pm Bats at the Library! Let's learn about bats! Join us at the library for a discussion about the harmful myths that surround bats and the importance of these amazing creatures in our environment. Kids and their families will see live California native bats.

Kensington Library Book Club The club meets online via Zoom. The selection for January is *Horse* by Geraldine Brooks. Please contact library about date, start/end time.

Tues, Jan 28, 3-4pm Read to a Dog Join us and a licensed therapy dog for a 15-minute reading session every fourth Tuesday afternoon, 3-4pm. Same day, drop in sign up starts 15 minutes before the read session.

Art Exhibit First half of January: Quilts by Claire Sherman: claireshermanart.com/
Second half of January: Paintings by Amy Zheng: www.amyzheng.net/
Seed library The Kensington Library seed library is always being restocked with free seeds of seasonal varieties.

Quick KPPCSD Survey: We want to hear from you!

By Sarah Gough, KPPCSD Board Director

The Kensington Police Protection and Community Services District (KPPCSD) will conduct a brief community survey, which is designed to take fewer than 15 minutes and can be completed online or by hard copy. The goals of this simple survey are to connect with residents, provide an accessible platform to express residents' general sentiments of the work of the KPPCSD, and to bolster future community participation and input. As of now, the district plans to administer this type of survey annually, with other more issue-specific surveys likely to be conducted by a professional firm.

The fact is, very few residents engage with the KPPCSD. Regular meeting attendance is frequently in the single digits and only about 80 of over 5,000 residents have signed up for the district's email distribution list. With so many critical issues facing the district, including the final determination of the permanent district and police offices, it is crucial that the board hear from a larger percentage of the Kensington population more regularly. Good policy decisions cannot be made in a vacuum, and your voice matters.

By administering this short survey annually, the district hopes to get a yearly temperature check of resident satisfaction with KPPCSD services and to prompt community members to opt-in to the district's email notifications.

Beginning in early January, information on how to access the survey will be distributed in multiple ways. Please look for a postcard mailer, details in the KPPCSD newsletter distributed by Bay View Refuse, in fliers displayed at community kiosks, on the district website homepage, and at the Kensington Library's front desk. Residents will have approximately six weeks to complete the survey, and results will be shared with the community at April's regular board meeting and in the *Outlook*.

Lobster Fundraiser for Women's Scholarships

By Candy Capogrossi

Soropti.....what??? As president of the Soroptimist International Organization of El Cerrito, I am often asked to repeat the name and asked what it means.

The organization is over 100 years old and means "for the good of women." The local organization includes Kensington, Berkeley, El Cerrito and Albany. Monies are raised to present annual scholarships for girls and women. Our annual lobster fundraiser sale is happening again in December with whole lobsters fresh and frozen and lobster tails being flown from the East Coast for pickup December 14 at the Contra Costa Civic Theatre from 10am-noon. Lobsters must be pre-ordered by December 11 at 510-604-2133 (Sheila Conn). The average weight is 6 to 8 ounces. The tails are \$30 and whole lobsters \$35. Proceeds after cost goes to scholarships for women and girls. Check out sielcerrito.org to learn more about the organization. Orders can be placed using the QR code at the website.

Consolidation

...from Page Four

Then followed a discussion about pay raises for the police, which became complicated as it involved each employee receiving a five percent boost until he or she reached the top step, after which the increase drops to 1.7 percent annually. This topic became heated as the police board's Sylvia Hacaj reminded everyone that the negotiations are done in private and it was inappropriate to talk about outside of a closed meeting.

Police board director Cass Duggan felt there are reasons other than financial to consider consolidation. "We will have much less dysfunctional government," she said.

"Politically we can hope for less infighting and avoid turf wars. I am in favor of working on emergency preparedness now rather than a \$10M building. Any money here is not fire board money or police board money, it's taxpayers' money. We've got warring boards. We put them together and the buck stops here."

Gough pointed out that no one challenged the incumbents, several of whom were appointed, to serve on either board. "We have many qualified people in Kensington, but they are not raising their hands." She felt a five-person board would be easier to fill.

To a question about borrowing capacity, Semenov repeated that the KPPCSD currently has no borrowing capacity. "If there are no capital projects, the fire board has a good borrowing capacity. That capacity will be slightly reduced with consolidation. The new district will be absorbing the slight deficit of the KPPCSD." He estimated that the fire district has a borrowing capacity of \$11M while the consolidated district's capacity would be \$9M.

The police board's Alex Aquino-Fike said, "The problems we're facing on a federal level are insurmountable. In Kensington, they're fixable. These are all things that we can control and we can plan for, especially as a consolidated board. I'm very inspired to get involved and move this forward. At the federal level, I'm very scared. The sooner that we can solve this on this level, the sooner we can get to fighting for democracy and our daughters' rights."

During public comment, Gail Feldman noted that a consolidated district could borrow money that was not passed along to taxpayers on their property taxes. Linda Lipscomb said, "It's not going to cost more money to do it this way. It will combine the ability to do more."

Spath called for a vote of the KPPCSD directors to accept the report, which passed 5-0. The fire board had a split vote, with Danielle Madugo, Rick Artis, and Levine voting yes and Watt and Stein voting no. An ad hoc committee was quickly set up by the fire board, with Levine and Artis pledging to look at next steps. Spath said he would serve on the police board's ad hoc but no other director volunteered. The talk then turned to the Town Hall meeting for the public to hear Semenov's presentation. The meeting will be held on January 11 at 10am in the Community Center. Residents can come in person or via Zoom. Look for more information after the holidays on the district websites.

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KENSINGTON K-9s
A Heartwarming Holiday Tradition -Santa and Mrs. Claus on Solano Ave
By Winston Churchill, Bulldog

Every year, Mama puts me in my new holiday finery, gets my fur fluffed up just right, and takes me for my annual photo with Santa and Mrs. Claus. For all good kids -- both furry and non-furry -- the Clauses provide warm smiles, generous laps, and priceless memories!

Santa on Solano embodies the spirit of the season. Mark your calendars for the first three weekends of December and head over to District Homes on Solano Avenue for fun, free holiday photos!

This seasonal tradition is sponsored by District Homes and takes place inside their office at 1758 Solano Ave in Berkeley. From 12-3pm on December 7, 8, 14, 15, 21, and 22, you can capture magical moments with Santa while doing holiday shopping, enjoying food and drinks, and supporting our local businesses.

Since 2007, the Solano Avenue Association has hosted Santa on Solano. Amazingly, the same Santa and Mrs. Claus have returned every year to greet local families, pose for photos, and spread holiday cheer. A generation of local children has grown up eagerly visiting the Clauses, sharing their Christmas wish lists, and reveling in the spirit of the season.

In our immediate area, this is the only Santa photo opportunity that is free of charge! Plus, Santa and Mrs. Claus love children and pets! Please bring your own camera and snap as many photos as you'd like. It's a jolly sprinkling of holiday happiness in our small town.

I am so excited to see Santa and Mrs. Claus again and hope to see you all at Santa on Solano! Wishing you the happiest of holidays! For more details, see www.solanoavenue-assn.org/events/winter-season/

Passings
Glenna Jean Seely (June 1933-October 2024) was born into God's world to Helen and Glenn Hanks in Peoria, Illinois. As she grew, Glenna developed a passion for the arts. She played the violin, sang in many productions, and loved to dance. Glenna met the love of her life, David Americus Seely, when she was dancing with her troupe. They married a few years later and moved to California to start their new life together. They lived in Kensington for 57 years, and were married for almost 70.

In California, Glenna went back to school to get her teaching credential and helped to establish the Thousand Oaks Preschool in Berkeley. She taught for 26 years; her greatest love was nurturing young children. She felt that giving them a good head start in life was fundamental to their future. She adored her students, as they did her.

She and David were blessed with three children: Lisa, Brent, and Cynthia. They were devoted parents and grandparents. As their family grew, they went on to have five grandchildren and three great-grandchildren.

Glenna was a longtime member and a deacon of Arlington Community Church. Glenna had many friends, and they became like family to her. David would say Glenna had never met a stranger. Glenna always said that she was blessed with a wonderful life and she was grateful for every day. She always looked for the best in others, and loved to brighten their days and lives. She was beautiful, inside and out, and saw beauty everywhere. She will be missed by her loved ones, friends, and her community. Glenna and David will be laid to eternal rest together at Sunset View Cemetery in El Cerrito, CA in their family plot.

HAPPY HOLIDAYS!
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KENSINGTON EATS OUT
 Kensington Eats at Lizzy's Cajun Cafe
 By Ittai Shiu



On the historic corner of Solano and Masonic sits Lizzy's Cajun Cafe, a cozy brick storefront with a welcoming dine-in entrance at the corner and a small side door for takeout orders. Inside, the dining room walls are adorned with photos that tell the story of the establishment's history and its deep ties to family and community.



In the 1970s, after completing culinary school, Chef Curtis Evans nearly accepted a groundbreaking position as the first person of color to work at the iconic Cliff House in San Francisco, but an entrepreneurial opportunity changed his path. Also, a trained barber, he purchased the space at 902 Masonic Ave and opened Mr. C's, one of Albany's first Black-owned hair salons.

A beloved figure in Albany for 50 years, he brought a lifetime of experience and warmth to the community. As Solano Avenue recovered from the pandemic, Chef Curtis teamed up with

his daughter, Elizabeth Evans, to create something fresh and vibrant while honoring the past.

Elizabeth, known to her patrons as Liz, grew up with a love for Southern cuisine from family gatherings. Today, she is the owner and operator of Lizzy's Cajun Cafe, where traditional American dishes meet Southern flair.

Chef Curtis, affectionately called "The Whistling Chef" by regulars, is often found in the background, letting his daughter's vision shine. The result is a menu filled with love and tradition: Lizzy's Jambalaya, BBQ Ribs, and Flora's Famous Peach Cobbler are some of the house favorites.

At Lizzy's, spice is all about balance. My family has a range of tolerances—my daughter and I prefer a subtle, warming heat, while my wife and son go for what I call "kissing the sun." Lizzy's offers a great foundational spice level that is perfect for most, and for those who crave more heat, there's hot sauce on the side to "turn it up a notch." Their embrace of bold flavors is evident right from the start, as each meal begins with a large

pitcher of ice water and toasted, generously buttered wheat bread.

The crab cakes at Lizzy's are hearty, meal-sized portions—far from the small appetizer-sized versions you find at most other restaurants. Each bite is packed with tender, fresh crab meat, lightly seasoned to highlight the seafood's natural flavor.

The jambalaya is a well-crafted classic, offering an ideal balance of savory and smoky with a hint of spice. With just enough rice to enhance the rich, tomato-based sauce, this dish manages to be hearty without feeling too heavy.

Another specialty is their ribs, which are slow-cooked until tender. They have a deep, smoky flavor with a touch of sweetness and are finished with crispy edges that add a satisfying crunch.

A fun twist is the fried cabbage with jalapenos, which adds a spicy flair as a side dish. This creative alternative to collard greens has just the right amount of heat from the jalapenos, making it a refreshing, slightly spicy side that complements the richness of the other dishes perfectly.

In December, Lizzy's will add seafood gumbo to the menu and explore partnerships with other local chefs. Ever the entrepreneur, Liz has also created a beautifully designed entertainment venue within the cafe, featuring live music by local artists.

Check out Lizzy's website or Instagram page for upcoming events and experience the warmth and flavors of Lizzy's Cajun Cafe for yourself!



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AS WE LOOK FORWARD TO 2025, we're excited to keep working with you to achieve your real estate goals. Here's to another year of growth and community!

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