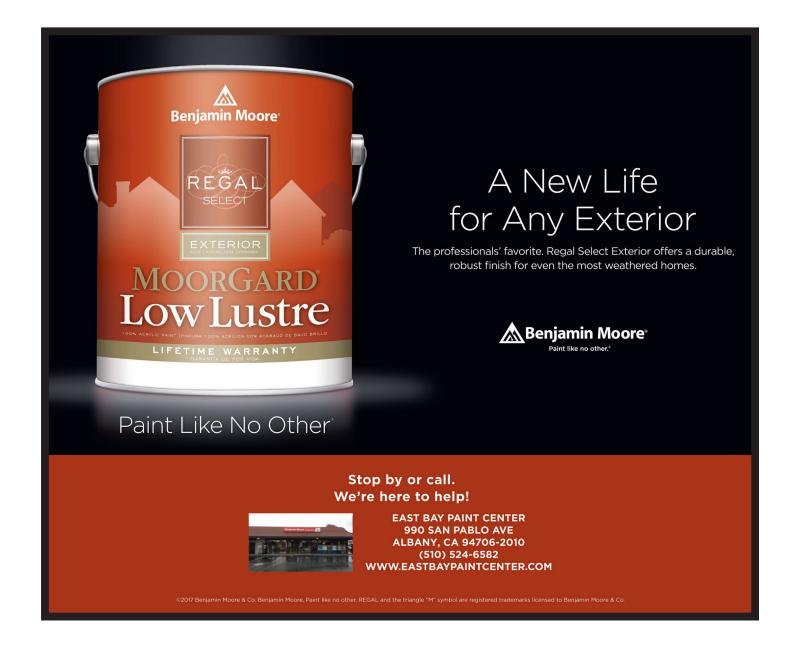
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JULY-AUGUST 2022

PUBLICATION OF THE KENSINGTON COMMUNITY COUNCIL

VOLUME 80 NUMBER 6

Kensington Gives Big for Ukraine



Billy Prusinowski, cofounder of the local Zoloti Maky Ukrainian Dancers, jumps for joy at the Kensington benefit for Ukraine. Photo by Tetiana Redko-tetiana_phx

By Byron Kawaichi

What can one person do about the upsetting state of the world? Michael Baar asked himself this question—and came up with the Kensington Benefit for Ukraine. Held on June 12, the event attracted around 80 people and so far has raised a much-needed \$51,500.

The money will go to four charities laboring on the ground in Ukraine. Representatives from each charity came to the Community Center to talk about their work and educate Kensington residents about the grim situation they're trying to address. A young woman from the Ukrainian diaspora told a moving story about meeting families fleeing the war. One family had twenty minutes to leave their home before it was destroyed by Russian soldiers.

Attendees got a colorful sampling of Ukrainian culture, with exciting dance, food, and artwork. If you missed the event, you can still donate to any or all of the charities at www.kensington4ukraine.com until July 12.

Q&A with Departing Interim KPPCSD GM Rick Benson

By Linnea Due

Rick Benson gained kudos for his professionalism from a variety of sources: the directors of the Kensington Police Protection and Community Services District, police chief Mike Gancasz, staffers at the district, and community members. He left the district at the end of May and now serves as a short-term consultant to new (and past) interim GM Tony Constantouros. The interview was conducted on June 6.

Why did you decide to take the interim job?

I noticed [the job listing] initially because the district managed both waste and parks and recreation, and those are areas in which I had a great deal of experience. I really wasn't looking for a position—I had retired. But I was not really busy, and I thought it sounded interesting.

Did you leave because of CalPERS requirements? (CalPERS allows retirees to work 960 hours per year, a limitation that also applies to Constantouros.)

Eventually I would have had to leave. But I hadn't planned on staying past the first of January. We thought we could find a permanent GM by that time. I have three cruises planned this year, with the first leaving on June 17. I had to leave in May.

What did you expect to find when you came on?

Well, really when I came on, I didn't know what to expect. Kensington is a

See Benson, Page 11

Elsie Neilson Park gets a makeover, page 6 Explaining the petitions, page 12

Kensington | Market Update

May 2022 to present



Detached

Single Family

New Listings

Median List Price \$1,250,000

Median Sq. Ft.

10

Median List Price \$1,395,000

Pending Sales

Median Sq. Ft. 2,227

Closed Sales

12

Median List Price \$1,362,000 Median Sq. Ft.

Median Sales Price \$1,805,000

Inner East Bay Market Cooling, But Less Than Most Bay Area Regions

Sales have been declining a bit, and active listings ticking up. But, on average, homes are still selling very quickly for well over asking, and median sales prices and year-over-year appreciation rates remain high. When an overheated marketing cools, which it must sooner or later, the change is typically gradual (absent a disaster event), and does not mean the market is week by any normal standard. As an analogy, if traffic is going 120 miles per hour and drops to 90, it feels a lot slower, but cannot reasonably be described as slow. After 2 years of scorching demand, it may be difficult to remember what a more normal market feels like

As of late spring, across the Bay Area, less expensive home sales have generally been impacted by rising interest rates, and this has occurred to a lesser degree in the Inner East Bay. Bay Area sales of higher-price homes have help up much better, but cooling demand is beginning to show up ion pending-sale data. (Affluent buyers tend to me more affected by financial markets, which became very volatile in May.) However, higher-price home sales in the Inner East Bay are bucking the general trend: So far, they remain very strong.

Market changes are often uneven in the early months of a transition, with one home selling in days way over listing price, while next door, the seller has to reduce their price to get an offer. As markets cool – and markets are cooling across the country – buyers become more discriminating; negative



conditional previously ignored are noticed; more negotiation occurs; multiple offers and overbidding decline. Listings that are well prepared, show we, and priced right will have an increasing advantage.

In the Inner East Bay, after peaking in spring, activity typically slows through summer. Autumn usually sees another spike in activity prior to the big mid-winter slowdown. These are common seasonal dynamics, though other factors can come into play.

am happy to discuss my thoughts on the current market. Feel free to reach out to me. If you are considering selling or just want to know the value of your home call me the appointment is complimentary.

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

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Kensington and Beyond Update

June 2022



SOLD | 55 Arlington Ct. Kensington | 4+ BR | 3 BA Paul Hammarberg design, classic East Coast feel. Gorgeous grounds.

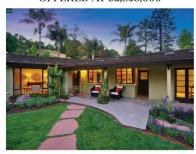
LP: \$1,898,000 | SP: \$2,061,000



NEW LISTING | 233 Yale Ave. Kensington | 4 BR | 2 BA Monterey Colonial Style with a beautifully terraced garden and Golden Gate views. OFFERED AT \$1,685,000



NEW LISTING | 13 Marchant Ct. Kensington | 4 BR | 3 BA 1936 Spanish Revival Architecture sited on an expansive parcel with stunning Bay views! OFFERED AT \$2,858,000



SOLD | 91 Lombardi Ln. **Orinda** | 4 BR | 3 BA Spanish Hacienda on a spectacular site with a garden oasis, pool, bocce and outdoor kitchen. LP: \$2,750,000 | SP: \$3,225,000

If you are considering selling or just wish to discuss real estate consider me your real estate resource. As an active full time real estate consultant for over 25+++ years I have navigated my clients through numerous market shifts skillfully, strategically and artfully providing my clients with the highest and best results. I specialize in residential real estate and trusts, it would be my pleasure to speak with you.



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The Outlook wishes everyone a good summer. See you in September.

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Kensington's first Red Flag Warning (RFW) of 2022 was declared April 8, the day before the evacuation drill. Residents were made aware of the RFW through Nextdoor, Nixle, and email. Fewer than 500 Kensington residents subscribe to the email notification. More than 90 percent of residents will depend on social media or other communications when an RFW is declared. The National Weather Service issues RFWs in advance of events that may result in extreme fire behavior. We can no longer depend on our traditional interpretation of seasonal conditions to determine wildfire risk. Don't miss a critical communication; subscribe to the Kensington Fire Protection District's Red Flag & Emergency Preparedness email notifications: www.kensingtonfire.org/ subscribe

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 ages and by publishing th 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.

SEPTEMBER 2022 DEADLINES

Advertising Deadline * AUGUST 8 Editorial Deadline AUGUST 10

Opinions expressed in Letters to the Editor are those of the writers and do not reflect the opinion of the Outlook, its editor, or the Kensington Community Council. Letters must be signed and include the resident's phone number and address (which will not be printed). Letters 350 words or under will appear in the print edition (space permitting). Any letter over 350 words will be printed in the online edition only. Publication of letters and articles is subject to space and the editor's discretion. Obituaries of Kensington residents are printed without charge. All material must be received by the 10th of the month preceding issue date; submit by email to editor@kensingtonoutlook.com. No press releases or PDFs; Word documents or text in the body of an email are acceptable. Use one space, not two, after

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LINNEA DUE

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Letters to the Editor

KPOA Needs to Rethink

Dear Editor,

There's a lot happening in these tumultuous times. Unresolved issues of rising inequity, housing affordability, and accelerating global warming are just the tip of the iceberg of the many challenges facing us. Locally, Kensington has been making big decisions of late, generally in silos, as our unique structure seems to inhibit sound planning and decision-making.

The Kensington Property Owners Association (KPOA) is usually a source of sound reason in times like these (I was privileged to have been a past board member). But unfortunately, the KPOA has been insistent in speaking loudly for the status quo: expensive, inefficient parking spaces at the BART stations at the expense of desperately needed housing (directly accessible to public transit). Has the KPOA initiated analysis or robust discussions about electric bike stands, carpooling, or enhanced public transit connections from Kensington? No. Cars and parking, it seems, is the preferred answer.

Our state's housing crisis has been due to a lack of supply: not enough units are built. And communities like ours have often been the impediments through overt and subtle ways, whether through the use of prohibitively expensive or complicated building codes, restrictive zoning, or planning processes intended to grind building housing units to a halt. All of these hae been employed by most affluent communities.

As a property owner of Kensington, I recognize that the health of our region will ultimately impact my home value and my community's health (and my children). Relieving our housing crisis offers us a more vibrant, healthy, and dynamic community for all, while supporting our overheated planet. I wish the KPOA would rethink its position on this critical topic. In my humble opinion, its analysis on this is simply wrong.

Garen Corbett

"Press Pause" and Lose the Fire Station?

Dear Editor:

Some residents are circulating a petition to ask the fire and police districts to "pause" the necessary process of seismically retrofitting the Public Safety Building and "reconsider" whether both fire and police departments can fit in the renovated building. The petition only requests signatures; unfortunately it provides no information about the process or its rationale.

This process has been discussed openly for five years; a whole section of the fire district's website (kensingtonfire.org/public-safety-building) is devoted to explaining why it's necessary

Let's consider what happens if we "press pause." First, we cancel contracts in force, forfeit deposits, abandon work already done, and probably lose the firms for future work. Not good business or good fiscal management.

Second, interest rates are scheduled to climb at least another half-point soon, and construction costs are rising at about eight percent. Orders would need to be canceled and would face supply-chain delays when reinstituted, raising costs more. Again, not prudent.

Third, the Alquist-Priolo Act restricts the renovation of existing public buildings adjacent to a fault line to fifty percent of their assessed values. We are currently near that limit

If a "pause" were to cause any of these consequences, putting us over the fifty percent limit (and there is no process for "exemptions" to state laws), the building can't be renovated. We cannot simply do the seismic work; its costs trigger recent building code regulations (federal and state) that mandate interior remodeling standards (and the PSB could be nearly fifty percent demolished by the seismic work). We are required by law to follow these codes.

We can't legally or morally house firefighters in a building we know is unsafe. If the PSB can't be renovated, it would likely be red-tagged and abandoned. Then Kensington would not have a fire station. Emergency response times would increase unacceptably. Other more distant stations would have to respond. And we'd lose our top insurance rating, which would increase other costs.

Have petitioners thought out these consequences? Rather than "press pause," let's focus on getting a good permanent location for the police, and make the PSB safe for fire personnel.

Kevin Padian, Director, Kensington Fire Protection District

More for Less

Dear Editor:

Unlike in most towns, where fire and police services are managed by a city council, two separate boards primarily funded by property tax revenues manage our fire and police. For 75 years this relationship has worked, including the last 52 years that fire and police shared the Public Safety Building (PSB).

The fire district, which owns the PSB, decided about a year ago that fire needs the entire 5,700SF building plus a 400SF expansion. This "Taj Mahal" renovation includes



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510.524.8058 www.lronwoodEngineering.com License B444427 2,800SF of upstairs living area for three firefighters and about 900SF downstairs for a conference room and office space for the general manager and his staff. Costs, including relocation, are estimated at \$9.5 million, requiring a \$3.5 million loan with additional debt service over 30 years of \$4.1 million. That's \$13.6 million paid for by taxpayers.

These construction costs will deplete the cash surplus the fire district has built over the years. More troubling is that the 2022-23 budget estimates a year-end deficit due to the debt service, rising costs, and property tax restrictions. Annual deficits leave little, if any, revenue for fire prevention or warning systems. Expect to hear the need for a property tax increase.

Taxpayer woe is magnified by the

unknown costs of finding a location for police services. After a year of trying to locate the police next to Ace Hardware, the district turned its focus to Kensington Park. I believe community opposition will eliminate the park as a location.

So where can they go? There aren't locations in Kensington for a police department with parking, and with about \$1 million of funds and the need for land acquisition and construction, the police board will need its own \$3.5 million loan.

We need to locate fire and police in the PSB. As Yogi Berra would say, "We've made too many wrong mistakes." All agree the PSB needs a seismic upgrade, but this shouldn't require expelling the police. We must do more for less, or to quote Yogi again, "You've got to be very careful if you don't know where you're going, because you might not get there."

Jim Watt

We Need New Board Majorities

Dear Editor:

As I follow the choices both boards are making for this community, I see little willingness from either board to take community participation into consideration, so I can never be sure how much the vanity or stubbornness of the board directors or their general managers and legal counsel accounts for the impasse at which we find ourselves both in terms of the Public Safety Building and the future of recreation programs in Kensington Park, or indeed the continued existence of the park!

These boards have convinced me that they don't want to hear from us, the citizenry, beyond the merest pro forma moments of public comment required by law.

In order to achieve more community-centered solutions to the challenges we face, we need to vote in new board majorities. Without new majorities, we are ceding all decisions about the future of our community to people who define our community in terms of the future of their particular agencies and pet projects, as if the community life we value is an anachronism, which we should relinquish in favor of their sense of the community's future, created in their own images. I think not.

For all these reasons, I ask us all to think about how we can actively participate in our civic life. For some that will mean thinking quite seriously about running for office. Should you decide to do that, there is a filing period, this year from July 18 through August 12, during which time you can take out papers to file for elective office. Papers, including campaign statements must be submitted by the end of the business day, on August 12. Three seats on each board are up for election this cycle. This is hugely important to the future of our community, so please think about it. Cheers!

Ciara Wood

Practice Saves Lives

Dear Editor,

As fire season approaches, it is good to know that there is a group of local volunteers who are practicing every week so that they will be able to provide communication services for their neighbors in a disaster situation. Kensington Amateur Radio Operators and El Cerrito Ham Operators (KARO-ECHO) is a group of about 50 amateur radio operators, who are licensed by the Federal Communications Commission to send and receive messages on designated radio frequencies. Their battery-operated radios will work even when the power is out or when cell phone towers and the Internet are down or overloaded. Amateur radio operators have a long history of helping people in disaster situations around the world, and we are lucky to have them in Kensington. KARO-ECHO often offers events to educate the public such as their recent National Field Day on June 25 at Upper Canyon Trail Park. You can learn more about amateur radio and KARO-ECHO at www.karoecho.net .

Hal Graboske

Save Water the Easy Way

Dear Editor,

Americans purchase roughly 42 billion individual one-liter bottles of water every year. Given the fact that the West suffers reoccurring drought, it is astonishing that consumers are not aware of the impacts bottled water has on the environment.

Drinking tap water instead of bottled water is an easy choice to make to help conserve water. Whether bottled in plastic, recycled plastic or glass containers, manufacturing these containers is a high water-use process. It takes approximately 1.5 gallons of water to manufacture a single recycled plastic bottle. Combine this with the fact that most plastic slated for recycling is shipped to China, exacerbating the global impact from global warming as well as the initial manufacturing impact from the water usage creating these bottles.

Nestle Co. has many labels under its parent brand and has faced over the years many cease and desist orders for over-pumping ground water. California water officials have moved to stop Nestle from siphoning water from the San Bernardino Forest (selling this water under the Arrowhead label). A loophole in our state laws allows Nestle to pump water from Mount Shasta. Since Mount Shasta does not have a defined "head water," Nestle is allowed to pump millions of gallons of water from this region, taking a precious resource for profit.

Nestle is not the only company that bottles water and helps to deplete this precious resource. With housing construction booming, periodic drought, global warming, and many other environmental issues, please leave the bottled water on the shelf and drink tap water instead.

Julia Lojo



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May 11 proved the day for traffic accidents. In addition to a morning hit-and-run on Coventry (see below), KPD responded to a three-car collision at 7:53pm at the intersection of Yale and Rugby avenues. No parties were injured. By the time tow trucks arrived to carry off the cars, darkness had fallen. Nighttime photo by Nancy Rubin.

May Police Log

May 3, a homeowner in the 100 block of Purdue Avenue discovered that somebody tried unsuccessfully to steal his vehicle overnight.

May 5, 9:43am, KPD conducted a traffic enforcement stop in the 100 block of Arlington Avenue that resulted in the arrest and cite-release of the driver for wrong plates attached to the vehicle.

May 6, somebody broke into the garage overnight in the 700 block of Wellesley Avenue and stole three bicycles valued at over \$20,000.

May 10, somebody overnight smashed five car windows around Richardson Road, Marchant Court, and Ocean View Avenue.

May 11 at about 8:45am, a Hit & Run collision took place in the 800 block of Coventry Road. KPD responded and gathered evidence that linked a suspect vehicle to the scene. The next night, officers contacted the owner of the Hit & Run vehicle and he admitted to the incident and was cited.

May 17 at about 7:55pm, KPD conducted a traffic enforcement stop around Colusa Avenue and Valley Road that resulted in the driver being cited and released from the scene for violation of CVC 12500(a)—Unlicensed Driver.

May 18 at about 3:45pm, a vehicle was broken into in the parking lot of the Sunset View Cemetery. A purse with credit cards was stolen while the owner was visiting the mausoleum.

May 19, the Exxon gas station was burglarized, and lottery tickets and cigarettes were stolen. The investigation was turned over to the federal authorities. According to Lieutenant Brad Harms, the Arlington station was one of between 29-31 other businesses hit. The State Lottery Commission, state AG's office, and the FBI are now investigating.

May 24, an unknown trailer knocked over the Emergency Evacuation Route sign at Sunset Drive and Arlington Avenue and fled the scene without stopping.

May 25 at about 1:07pm, KPD was dispatched to a cold burglary in the 400 block of Coventry Road. Officers began the investigation and conducted a neighborhood canvass for additional evidence or suspect information. While investigating the incident, a neighbor was located who advised the officers that somebody had just tried to enter

the backdoor to his residence. Following the new evidence, officers located the suspect in another house on Coventry Road that linked the suspect to all three houses. The subject was arrested and booked into the county jail on multiple burglary charges, Possession of Drug Paraphernalia, Possession of the Stolen Property, Trespassing, Prowling, and Felony Vandalism. Along with solving three burglaries, the KPD returned over \$3,000 of stolen property to one victim. Prior to the person getting out of jail, KPD investigations filed the case with the District Attorney who in turn issued a \$165,000 warrant for their arrest. The person was booked into county jail, then transported to another county for a separate







Our favorite turkey was the first visitor to the FKL sale. Photos by Jim Fisher

Book Sale a Winner

By Linnea Due

It will be no surprise to anyone that Kensington residents like to read. Through the library, we support a popular and long-running book club—albeit virtual for the past couple years. Some of those busy Amazon trucks are no doubt delivering reading material for the duration of this pandemic that seems never to end. But the town was out in force May 15 for the Friends of the Kensington Library's annual spring book sale.

In a congratulatory email to volunteers, board president Jim Fisher relayed the news that in terms of gross revenue, the 2022 sale rivaled the record-breaking 2016 spring book sale. Gross proceeds came to \$2,363 (2016 brought in \$2,482). The net proceeds were \$2,040 (renting the Community Center came to \$125, a discounted rate for community organizations serving residents, plus one-day event insurance at \$120). The estimated number of attendees was over 200 people, served by 36 hardy volunteers.

Speaking of volunteers, Fisher and past Eagle Scout Jon Bashor issued a special thankyou to Boy Scout Troop 100. Said Fisher, "We're only able to put these sales on thanks to the support and coordination of the whole community, and in particular the rock-solid and reliable scouts of Troop 100. Without their help with setup and breakdown, there'd be no tables and no books." The Boy Scouts carried heavy tables from the Community Center, set them up on the lawn, carried boxes of books from the storage shed in back of the library and the rented truck (374 boxes!), and then took it all down again at the end.

Bashor noted, "It's really inspiring to see the Scouts making such a great contribution to their community. As a former Scout, we also did our share of community projects, but I don't remember [projects] being quite this intense and deadline-driven."

Fisher says the FKL's fall sale will be on October 16. Inveterate readers will be reminded again in the October issue.



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The FKL funds many of the library's programs for children and adults, while also providing funds for book purchases, periodical subscriptions, and upgrades such as shelving, painting, and long-term improvements to the library's interior.

Contributions to the FKL are tax deductible and eligible for corporate matching gifts. Donation envelopes can be found at the FKL's ongoing book sale in the library (by the hold shelves). Or to contribute via PayPal, visit https://tinyurl.com/FKLdonate.

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"Kensington Eats" Its Last Meal

We're a foodie family. Instead of sports, we watch Top Chef. Instead of water slides, our vacations revolve around tapas and tacos. As the world coped with the pandemic, our family worried about the impact on the restaurant industry. This ignited our kids' desire to do something about it, which turned into a modest community program we named Kensington Eats.

It was a simple concept proposed by my wife Margaret—crowdsource orders to local restaurants while volunteering promotional and logistical support. With a website haphazardly managed



by our son Cole and a logo and blog created by our daughter Audrey, we offered families the luxury of a restaurant meal with the convenience of delivery or pickup close to home. Most importantly, Kensington Eats provided a little relief for restaurants trying to survive during challenging times.

Two years in, why stop now? Well, Kensington Eats was most popular when times were darkest, when restaurants were closing everywhere and families were going stircrazy locked down in their homes. From the beginning, we knew that we'd retire the program—a positive development because it would mean that things were looking up. After feeding 500 families and generating \$35,000 in revenue for the local economy, specifically family-owned restaurants, we held the last Kensington Eats event on June 6.

What began as a "what if" idea over a family dinner to help others, paid back in ways we didn't anticipate—we made new friends, bonded as a community, had great meals, and learned a lot. Some lessons we learned may come in handy for others.

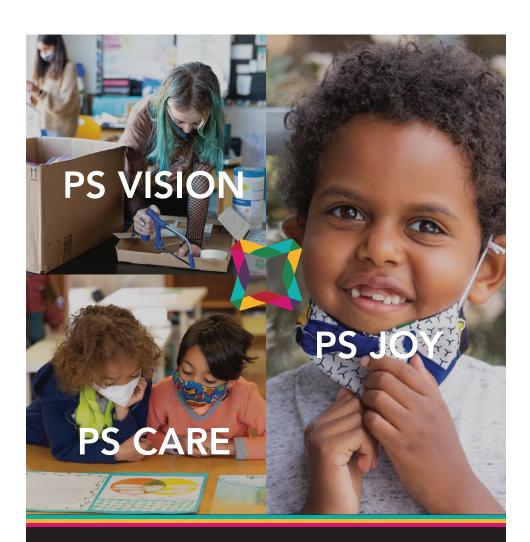
Communicating with busy restaurant owners was sometimes challenging, and we had to be very direct about the value our program would create. Despite our giving as much notice as possible, restaurants were often understaffed, behind schedule and had to hustle to fulfill our large orders.

A typical take-out order easily fits in a car's passenger seat, but take-out orders for thirty families pushed the limits of our SUV's storage capacity, especially since both kids were needed to help load and deliver. Also, navi-



gating Kensington's winding, hilly roads made us appreciate quality take-out packaging and develop a serious animosity towards leaky Styrofoam containers.

Promising a specific delivery window caused an immense amount of stress. Luckily our masks hid our expressions of panic and exhaustion. It took practice, but we got the hang of it by pre-mapping destinations. Finding the optimal delivery routes beforehand became an absolute lifesaver.



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The Restaurant Business Is Ruthless

As we inch towards normalcy in 2022, several trends born out of the shutdown, such as reduced party size and more take-out (meaning less alcohol revenue), are likely here to stay. Combined with rising costs, labor shortages, and unpredictable variants, those who rely on the restaurant industry for their livelihood will continue to face hardships.

Consider that under normal circumstances, most restaurants fail. A global pandemic makes those odds infinitely worse. According to the National Restaurant Association, ten percent of the nation's restaurants closed permanently due to Covid with that number expected to rise as some fail to reach profit-

Restaurants that embraced technology and had an agile operation could more easily work with a program like Kensington Eats. There are plenty of services like Doordash and UberEats that connect kitchens to appetites while also creating opportunities for gig workers. Companies like Zerocater and MobyDish make it easy to cater large events and parties.

Food Is More Than a Meal

Conversations, prayers, stories, laughter, arguments, and bonds old & new-it all happens around meals. These are priceless moments of connection that through the isolation of the pandemic we understood we could not live without. Food is a bright spot in the polarized, stressful world we live in and, like music or art, there have never been fewer barriers to access. Share a culinary adventure, learn about different cultures, experience experiencing new things with the people you love. For my family, Kensington Eats was an amazing learning experience which we gratefully leave behind us. We know that food will continue to provide us with teaching moments for the rest of our lives.

Several local and national charities make it their mission to help such as One Fair Wage, Children of Restaurant Employees, and James Beard's Open for Good Foundation. Consider making a donation.

Feast Your Eyes on the Fruits of Kensington Eats' Take-Out Tour

During the pandemic, the community group Kensington mountains of take-out food from local restaurants to bring to neighbors and friends. Their choices, partially influenced by how receptive the restaurants were to large take-out orders, spanned the gamut from Thai to Mexican, Indian to Japanese—all in the interest of good eating and keeping our restaurants in business. Here is the list of eateries the group patronized over the months,

Gather Kitchen, Bar & Market A vibrant community nub of organic comfort food, craft cocktails, organic

- Voted Most likely to visit in Person and Best Overall
- Kensington Eats Favorite Dish Take-Home/Do-it-

- Voted Best Salad Papaya Salad and Most Likely to
- Kensington Eats Favorite Dish Kabocha Pumpkin

Noodle Fresh A place to enjoy freshly prepared gluten-free, meat, vegan, or vegetarian Chinese

- Kensington Eats Favorite Dish Velvet Fish

Café Raj Casual Indian Dining for the Sophisticated

- Kensington Eats Favorite Dish Lamb Korma 1158 Solano Ave. Albany

Troy Greek Cuisine Locally made, globally inspired

Kensington Eats Favorite Dish - Meza Platter

1843 Solano Ave, Berkeley Pollara Pizzeria Top 25 restaurant by SF Chronicle

Kensington Eats Favorite Dish – Cacio e Pepe with

1788 Fourth St., Berkeley

Zomsa Traditional Nepalese Cuisine

10558 San Pablo Ave., El Cerrito

Luca Cucina Italiana Specialty is homemade foods prepared through a long and artisan process Kensington Eats Favorite Dish - Pasta Cabonara 2057 San Pablo Ave., Berkeley

Benchmark Pizzeria All cheese, sausage, pies pasta, and condiments are made in-house

Kensington Eats Favorite Dish – Strozzapreti

1568 Oak View Ave., Kensington Da Lian Restaurant Northern Chinese Cuisine

1674 Shattuck Ave, Berkeley Tagueria Talavera Fresh, locally sourced Mexican

Kensington Eats Favorite Dish – Chile Relleno

1561 Solano Ave., Berkeley

Khana Peena Elegant Indian Cuisine Kensington Eats Favorite Dish – Warm Kale Salad

1889 Solano Ave., Berkeley

Kensington Eats Favorite Dish – Ton Katsu

Gangnam Tofu Authentic Korean cuisine with side dishes for everyone to enjoy!

• Kensington Eats Favorite Dish - Korean Fried

11740 San Pablo Ave., El Cerrito

Treats by the Bay Vietnamese dishes and desserts Kensington Eats Favorite Dish - Dole Whip Soft



The El Cerrito Recycling Center in the early '70s, likely '72 or '73. Photo courtesy of El Cerrito Historic

El Cerrito Recycling Celebrates Its Golden Anniversary

By Dave Weinstein

Save the first Friday in August to help celebrate our local recycling center's anniversary. August 5 will be fifty years to the day the El Cerrito Recycling Center, 7501 Schmidt Lane, first accepted donations. At the event at 5:30pm, the late Joel Witherell, who oversaw the center from 1973-1993, will be honored.

Speakers will include two of the founders, Gregg Cook and Ken Little; the engineer who built the original glass crusher, Allan Gardiner; former center manager, Becky Dowdakin; longtime operations manager Mario Gonzalez, and Witherell's daughter, Sarah Steele.

Enjoy live music using upcycled instruments by current El Cerrito Creative Reuse artist-in-residence Steve Zwetsch. Hands-on art-making for all ages will be hosted by former recycling center resident artists Kloe Chan and Risa Dye. And of course expect snacks and beverages. For more information, contact Dave Weinstein at 510-524-1737 or by email at davidsweinstein@yahoo.com.





Photos by Sarah Gough

Find a Need, Make It Beautiful

By Sarah Gough, Kensington Improvement Club Vice President

The Kensington Improvement Club is pleased to announce the completion of its year-long effort to improve the little park on Coventry Road at Arlington Avenue, re-named Elsie Neilson Park by the KPPCSD board. Thanks to the partnership with the district board, which owns the land and Interim General Manager Rick Benson, the KIC was able to initiate much-needed repairs and improvements to the little park during the month of May

The entire lot was weeded and excess dirt and old roots removed. New benches and retaining walls were constructed to provide more seating and prevent run-off and erosion. The existing irrigation was repaired and extended, and decomposed granite was added to provide an attractive semi-porous ground cover that would keep mud and weeds at bay. The district provided a new railing and curbs to the stairs and replaced and relocated one of the badly damaged oak trees.

Several new plantings now grace the corner lot, all carefully selected for their drought tolerance, deer resistance, and low-maintenance year-round beauty. Maori flax adds a rainbow of earthy colors while the dwarf butterfly bushes and fortnight lilies provide dramatic pops of purple flowers. Westringia will offer an attractive frame to the bus stop with its greenery and tiny white blooms. Two orange pincushion plants were added for their contrasting gorgeous orange flowers.

Fragrant sweetbox and Tasman flax lilies were placed in the shaded area to screen the irrigation cage. Along the sidewalk, a short row of ginkgo trees were chosen for their spectacular golden fall color, drought tolerance, strong performance in clay soils, and good root behavior near sidewalks. And, finally, Mexican feather grass was added near the gingkos as a subtle accent that will re-seed and multiply over time.

Since the improvements were made, feedback from community members has been overwhelmingly positive, with many expressing gratitude and amazement that the long-neglected corner lot has been so dramatically transformed. Of course, none of it would have been possible without a strong partnership with the KPPCSD board and staff. Likewise, the two labor teams deserve recognition for the quality of their work and timeliness. FJ+I Engineering created the railing and benches, and Fernando Herrera and his team installed the landscaping. We thoroughly enjoyed working with both contractors and cannot thank them enough for their hard work.

Most importantly, the KIC would like to acknowledge and thank the many generous financial contributors from our Kensington community, who funded a hundred percent of the project costs. The KIC membership deserves special recognition as the single largest funder through annual dues and supplemental individual donations. Ruth Frassetto was also a significant contributor, as were Ellen Venton, DDS, C. Allison McClean, Mechanics Bank, and Bee Renovated. Nearly a hundred other community members donated as well.

Finally, the KIC sincerely hopes that everyone in the Kensington community will enjoy and care for this newly beautified green space for many years to come, and that others are inspired to improve this place we are all so fortunate to call home. Please stay tuned for a little park dedication sometime this fall!

The Kensington Improvement Club (KIC) would like to acknowledge and thank the many generous financial contributors who, together, funded 100% of the project costs to improve the little park at Coventry Road and Arlington Avenue. The KIC membership deserves special recognition as the single largest funder through annual dues and supplemental individual donations.

Ruth Frassetto was a significant contributor, as were Ellen Venton, DDS, C. Allison McClean, Mechanics Bank, and Bee Renovated. Finally, we would like to show our appreciation for the many other community contributions from: June Cheit, Sunny Patpatia, Kim Morimoto, Beverly French, Dave Colton, Eileen Kramer, Carmen and Randall Cook, Beth Burnside, Susan Brenner and Greg Syren, Sarah and John Gough, Heather Bloch, Danielle Verdugo, Carol Thomlinson, Barbara Tapp, Amy Resner, Gillian Reierson, Nancy Pryer, Lisa Caronna, Anneliese Miller, Dan McGarry, Cynthia and John McAfee, Susanna Marshland, Sara Mann, Bonnie Macbride, Jane Kaplan, Caroline Kane, Dale Hagen, Carolyn Grote, Pat and Dane Gillette, Victoria Galland, Joanne DePhillips, Thomas Dean, Tracy Clay, Jamie Carlson, John Bronsen, Maggie Beretz, Michael Barr, Mike Logan, Sally Fraser and Allen Meacham, Caroline Blankenburg, Martha and Sheldon Zeoleck, Linda Yaven, Shoshana Wechsler, Betty and Bill Webster, Melissa and Tim Snyder, Steve Simrin, Anne Shay, Patrick Schlesinger, Jennifer Ritter, David Pyle, Sarah and Rodney Paul, Dan McGarry, Michelle Koo, Thomas Hibdon, Randall Hamilton, John Gaccione, Anne Forrest, Knute Fisher, Pierre-Em, Delforge, Garen Corbett, Ruth and Michael Botchan, Teiko Ayers, James Stevenson, Meldan Heaslip and Tara Shaw, Rick Benson, Gary and Denis Van Kuiken, Dale and Daniel Power, Cecilia Mayer, Allan Zalkin, Jamie Whitaker, Mark Wegner, Robert Rogers, Catherine Rauch, Jon Ferreira and Mary Nelson, Candace Capogrossi, Bernard Brackman, Patricia Bortman, Karen and Edward Blonz, Betty and Ray Barraza, Cassidy Wright, Beverly Thiele, Valerie and Jeffrey Meyers, Dorothy Kaplan, Marian Bar-Din, Gina Moreland and Jack Miller, Lita Fries, Ann Sullivan, Dagnija Peterson, Khushali Narechania, Iva and Richard Jones, Nina Harmon, Laurie Frieman, and John Card.

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Photos by Cathy Garza

A Delight for Everyone

By Linnea Due

Cathy Garza was surprised to receive a call from KPPCSD board director Eileen Nottoli, phoning from her other persona as the program chair for the Berkeley Garden Club. Nottoli suggested that the club give out annual awards to top gardens—and include Kensington and Albany, as those residents are well represented in the Berkeley club. It turns out that the club used to give awards but had not for years. Nottoli was calling Garza to tell her that her garden on Edwin Drive has received 2022's Beautiful Garden—Gift to the Neighborhood award, likely the first time a Kensington garden has gotten the nod.

Garza and her husband Robert Doty came to their new home at 15 Edwin Drive in 2000 after living on Ardmore Road for nine years. "When we bought the house, we did a big remodel, including the yard, about twenty years ago," she said. "We hired Lazar Landscaping to help us at that time." Lazar is known for hardscaping, including brick, stone, pavers, as well as decks and gardens. "The person who worked on the design at that time was Pam Cosce," Garza said. "Then during the pandemic, we were home all the time, and the attention the house and garden needed were in my face. There was a problem with the porch, and fixing that was going to impact the garden. So I called Lazar again, explaining that this was a smaller job, as they mostly do large projects."

To her surprise, Lazar had been sold—to Pam Cosce. "She helped us out. I worked with her to do this version. I wanted to attract butterflies and bees. There are certain plants I love, that I had to have. And they needed to be water-efficient, so I wanted sages and succulents. We worked within those priorities."

The garden is quite new. "The plants were put in this December. And then we got all that rain over Christmas, so it just sunk in." The Lazar team replaced the porch and updated twenty-year-old irrigation lines. Another task was reorienting boxes in the fenced-in backyard vegetable garden to get more sun. "From working in it over the

years," Garza said, "I knew the boxes weren't ideally placed."

Since the garden is only seven months old, Garza hasn't experienced fall, when East Bay gardens often turn dusty and exhausted. "It's going to take a lot of pruning," she said. "A lot of stuff is in bloom now. Because it's a mix, the ornamental stuff will look tired. The sages and succulents will soldier through." Garza does all her own maintenance and upkeep.



The garden faces a four-

legged challenge familiar to most Kensington residents. "I was trying to grow a Meyer



lemon in front," Garza said. "I figured the deer would not bother citrus. But they either like the new shoots or they're desperate." The lemon tree was relocated to the back veggie garden, where it can grow unmolested. Garza said in the past, hooves of battling bucks have uprooted her irrigation lines, and fawns often take a few nips before deciding that yuck—that sage is icky! "It is a struggle," she admitted.

She was thrilled to get Nottoli's call. Winning the award comes with a free year-long membership to the Berkeley Garden Club. "I'm

really looking forward to being a member and experiencing their programs. I do love puttering in the yard, that's my therapy. I love garden club stuff. I get a lot of my starts from the Contra Costa Master Gardeners sales."

Nottoli said that the awards used to be given out to gardens in four quadrants of Berkeley before the program halted. Now Albany and Kensington have been added to the mix. The El Cerrito Garden Club has long given awards to outstanding gardens. "I love the idea of giving awards," Nottoli said. "We took nominations, and we saw a lot of beautiful gardens." Including one worthy of being called "A Gift to the Neighborhood."



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KENSINGTON

Community Education



KCC Summer Camp

Summer Camp is in full swing! We have a wonderful and talented staff of counselors and CITs to entertain and engage campers grades 1 through 6 each week this summer. Camp life is full of activities—we have a serious group of baseball players, some talented tennis players and many craft enthusiasts and a really nice bunch of campers. There is still space in Week 4: July 5th-July 8th. The week includes group tennis lessons and of course weekly craft project and cooking with Vicky and ending with a camp BBQ on Friday. Camp hours are 9:00-5:00 and extended hours available 8:00am-9:00am and 5:00pm-6:00pm. Register online at KennsingtonCommunityCouncil.org.



KASEP- Kensington After School Enrichment Program

We are busy planning for a full fall 2022 KASEP schedule. Skyhawk Sports will be back to coach Sports Medley on Tuesdays and Basketball on Fridays. Elaine Chu will be returning to teach crafty creations and many of our regular classes will be back this fall including Circus, Yoga, Coding, Sewing, Carpentry and Cooking with Vicky. KASEP Fall brochure will be sent home in the Hilltop Thursday packet and will be available on our website mid-August.

We will also be adding a Spanish class with Viva el Español Monday-Thursday before school.

Fall KASEP registration is scheduled for **Tuesday, August 30th at** 7:00pm for kindergarten and 7:30pm for grades 1-6. Classes begin on **Monday, September 12th, 2022.**

Tennis Court Reservations: For weekends and holidays only. Call the KCC office to book your reservations 510-525-0292

KPPCSD Court Fees:

1 hour reservations- residents: \$7 non-residents \$10 Rental info: Please call Rosa at KPPCSD (510)526-4141

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 (Across the grassy field above the tennis courts in Kensington Park), Kensington CA 94707. E-mail: kccrec@yahoo.com, or call 510-525-0292. Our website is:www.kensingtoncommunitycouncil.org.

NEW Parent-Toddler class

Family yoga (for parent/caregiver plus kids aged 2 to 5) July 5th, 12th & 19th @ 10:00am

Come join Lori Hess with Way to Glow Kids Yoga for some family yoga time where parents or caregivers guide and support their little ones as we use our imaginations and songs to explore yoga poses, breathing exercises, and mindfulness activities. In this class, we learn how to pay attention to our bodies and our feelings, and practice taking turns and sharing our voices.

We have fun breathing, stretching, moving, dancing, and playing together! The class is centered around the little ones but parents/caregivers will get some breathing and stretching in too. Class will be held on the grassy lawn outside the Kensington Community Center.

If possible, please bring a waterproof blanket/tarp, two yoga mats (we will have extra mats available if you need), warm layers in case it is chilly, and a water bottle. Masks are optional. Suggested cost: \$25 per parent/child pair, each class plus \$5 for each additional family member. Sign up for the 3 week session or drop in as you are able. Class is 45 minutes.

NEW Adult Yoga Class starting July 12th at the Community Center

Tuesdays 8:30am Teacher Anja Borgstrom Cost is \$20 drop in or register online

Tai Chi with Nobuo Nishi

NEW ADDED CLASS: Wednesdays 9:30-11:00am Friday class continues: 9:30-11:00am

Drop-in fee is \$15

Class teaches Tai Chi for better health, improving students' strength, balance, flexibility, and dexterity. A gentle martial art, Tai Chi is a safe, rewarding activity for people of all ages and levels of health. Tai chi emphasizes the mind and body working in harmony. Relaxing the body and calming the mind help reduce stress and increase the flow of energy.

Register at KensingtonCommunityCouncil.org/adult-classes





SAVE KENSINGTON'S FUTURE



Petition to KFPD and KPPCSD Boards:

- PAUSE AND LISTEN TO THE COMMUNITY
- PRESERVE OUR PARK FOR YOUTH PROGRAMS AND COMMUNITY USE
- PROTECT OUR TAX DOLLARS



I am a Kensington voter and I request our two special district boards, the **Kensington Fire Protection District (KFPD)** board and the **Kensington Police Protection and Community Services District (KPPCSD)** board, to pause their planning processes and address the concerns of many residents about the retrofit of **Kensington's Public Safety Building (PSB)** and the potential plan to house our police department in Kensington Park.

The fire board's position that the police must permanently move out of the PSB has created a ripple effect that threatens the community's use and enjoyment of Kensington Park for recreation, Kensington After School Enrichment Program (KASEP) classes, the Kensington Community Council (KCC) Summer Camp, and many other uses of OUR park. **Neither board has said what the total cost will be for the building retrofit, temporary housing, and a permanent home for the police—or how it will be paid.**



I WANT...the KFPD and KPPCSD Boards to engage the community and rethink options, including revisiting creative ways to house the Kensington Fire and Police Department together in a seismically retrofitted and renovated PSB.



I WANT...Kensington Park to be protected for community recreational uses only.

I WANT...to know the total cost of combined plans for protecting Kensington Park, youth programs, and police services BEFORE the KFPD Board triggers far-reaching ramifications by committing our tax dollars to remodel the Public Safety Building.

Sarah Abt Ron Alen Suzanne Algarva Barb Altenberg Veronica Altschul Chris Anderson David Anderson Jesse Andrews Alexandra Aguino-Fike Steve Aramia Megan Arganbright Debora Armstrong Lori Aultman Ida Baldonado-Teshima Barbara Banks Tanya Banks Primilla Banwait Ray Barraza Mike Barry Nette Barry Kelly Barry Steven Bates Nicholas Baue Gloria Bayne Ingrid Behrsin Pete Benton Robert Bergman Wendy Bergman Ann Bettelheim Derek Blevins Lindsey Blevins Alix Bockelman Thomas Bollier Michael Borbridge Sophie Boroditsky Patti Bortman Ion Boshard Yasmin Bouzai Casey Bowden Iulia Bradley Earle Bradsha Susan Brenner Randy Brewer Will Bright Carl Brodsky Lisa Brodsky Katie Brohawi Steve Brohawi John Brorsen Diane Brown Cherilyn Brunetti Penny Bryan

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CITIZENAFORUM

Master Plan and Land Use Permit Preclude Police from Park

By Bart Jones, architect and volunteer architect for Phase 1 of Kensington Park The current community-wide controversial discussions regarding the future of our Public Safety Building [PSB], our police and fire departments, our Kensington Park with its excellent Kensington Community Council (KCC) educational and recreational programs for our kids, is worrisome, disheartening, but hopefully solvable. As philosopher Pogo said, "I have seen the enemy, and he is us."

Our town is unique in its small one-mile-square size, its unincorporated status, and its governance by two special districts, the Kensington Fire District (KFD) and the Kensington Police Protection and Community Services District (KPPCSD). The two boards, five members each, are elected members of our community.

During the last 52 years, the fire and police departments have jointly occupied our existing public safety building (PSB) constructed in 1970 at 217 Arlington Avenue. The building is good-looking, sits well on the site, is of appropriate scale, and has been well maintained by the KFD. Its midtown location provides quick and safe north-south Arlington access as well as to the town's east-west more challenging curlicue roads. The PSB building is located very well for both fire and police emergency responses.

The building has had two or three structural and non-structural renovations since the mid-'90s. It is now scheduled for major functional, structural, and accessibility renovations. It is imperative that the renovated PSB can also accommodate the Kensington police department personnel and provide accessible and safe storage for its four or five equipped vehicles. We know that such joint occupancy worked well for many years in the 6,000 square foot building and now need that it work as well in the newly expanded 6,300 SF building.

We also know that in our fully built-up one-mile-square town there is no vacant, appropriate, or available space to house our police department and its required vehicles. Kensington's demographics of population and numbers of structures have remained very stable over the last 52 years, and so has the number of fire and police personnel occupying the PSB. The obvious question here is why evict the KPD? Kensington residents have always been provided with excellent service from the police and fire personnel of this building.

The building is to be vacated during the renovation. The police and fire departments will temporarily operate out from other locations.

However, the KPPCSD announced at its May Zoom board meeting that it has hired an architectural firm to provide a feasibility study regarding the possible permanent relocation of our police department into Building E in Kensington Park. KCC's office and classrooms that are now in Building E would be relocated into a renovated Annex building. It is assumed that the police department's equipped police vehicles will also be relocated somewhere nearby in the park.

Regarding Kensington Park, the term "our park" here not only includes the 9.3 acres of park land with its open hillsides, bay vistas, ball courts, picnic areas, the central grass meadow, tot lots, Community Center, Building E, and the Annex, but also includes the daily interaction between Kensington's parents and kids, Kensington Hilltop Elementary School, and the Kensington library—these all function together as part of our park. On school days, the kids use the park's various pathways going and returning from school, going to Building E for KCC's after-school classes (KASEP), and all summer long for KCC's various summer camp activities throughout

Considering moving the Kensington Police Department to Building E is a very bad idea, born in desperation yet ideal in its capacity to ruin a beautifully functioning park.

However, subsequent to its required public hearing in 1999, the Contra Costa County Planning Division approved the Kensington Park Master Plan and the park's Land Use Permit Plan. As such, note the following: A police department is not allowed in the park. Windsor Avenue is not allowed to be used for vehicle access to the park.

Citizen Forums are guest editorials written by Kensington residents. To submit a Citizen Forum for consideration, email editor@kensingtonoutlook.com

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Images from Kensington's Benefit for Ukraine









Michael Baar (in hat), put his heart into creating a benefit so residents could help people in Ukraine. Photos: Tetiana Redko

Classes During COVID—KCC Stays Flexible to Keep Everyone Safe

By Sylvia Elsbury, Kensington Community Council board president

With KCC's 2022 summer camp in full swing and over 500 spots filled, it's almost hard to believe that two years ago the program was shuttered. Yet for KCC recreation director Jenny Parks, those memories are still fresh even as the battle for pandemic equilibrium appears mostly won. "The loss of momentum to our programs was a blow, but it has been minimized by community support," says Parks. "It's wonderful to see people returning to community life after the public health emergency forced us to retreat."

In the Outlook's October 2020 issue, KCC board president Becky Stephens described that year's unprecedented program cancellations, as well as the pivot needed "to adapt to our changing reality." Even while Kensington Elementary School remained totally remote in fall 2020, KCC restored some in-person youth classes such as tennis, dance fitness, and environmental science. Art and coding classes were offered via Zoom. By spring 2021, judo and more had resumed outdoors.

The California Parks and Recreation Society proved a valuable resource for safety guidelines, and KCC implemented masking, PPE, and increased janitorial services. KCC's summer camp came back last year, with campers grouped into "pods," essential for contact tracing. The pods concept proved beneficial for other reasons, and it continues this summer. "Smaller groups rotating through activities: that's great for teachers and students alike," notes Parks.

By last fall KCC had restored a full KASEP schedule, with small class sizes and good ventilation allowing indoor gathering for the enormously popular carpentry and cook-

ing classes, to name just two. KCC staff worked closely with Kensington Hilltop, where students were COVID-tested in regular rotation.

The arrival of vaccines, first for teachers and then for youth, promised improvement. But increased contagiousness has kept the situation challenging. KCC encourages indoor masking of all participants, including teachers, and asks parents to test campers before each week of camp. The pandemic is still affecting recreation programs; contractors struggle to stay fully staffed, and some activities, such as drama, don't work well with masked participants.

Even so, "where kids are concerned there's no question we'll carry on, even if it's never really over," says Parks. Indeed, filling classes with children has proven easier than restoring KCC's programs for adults.

The loss of space in the Community Center during its remodel had already reduced adult programming even before the pandemic hit. In late 2020, KCC introduced Zumba and yoga classes for adults. But the rising and falling of COVID case counts undermined the public's confidence in the safety of gathering together, making attendance too irregular for teachers. "Some of our longtime teachers converted classes to Zoom, and have stayed there because of safety concerns," notes Parks, who is engaging new instructors to renew the program and expand its reach.

At present, Tai Chi is offered in the Community Center, and more adult classes will begin later this summer. Visit kensingtoncommunitycouncil.org for the latest on all KCC programs.

Organize Your Neighborhood Emergency Preparedness Block Party Today

By Kevin Padian

Many residents are familiar with annual "National Night Out" events, when neighborhoods get together to renew acquaintances and discuss safety issues, often with police and fire personnel. Kensington National Night Out will be Tuesday, August 2. Residents planning to host a National Night Out block party are encouraged to register as hosts before July 7 at www.kensingtonfire.org/nationalnightout. Kensington's NNOs have been very successful, and now our fire district (KFPD) has taken it to the next level.

KFPD emergency preparedness coordinator Johnny Valenzuela spent the last COVID year preparing and posting materials on the website (kensingtonfire.org) and developing community mailings. With the lifting of some meeting restrictions and the nice outdoor weather, we can now go to neighborhoods to raise awareness of how to prepare for disasters and evacuations and how to organize to take care of everyone when needed.

In case of disaster, it's important to remember that we are on our own. Emergency services will be overwhelmed. You must be prepared to evacuate when fire season begins, know your routes, and organize your neighborhood to care for the less mobile.

This is the purpose of Johnny's Neighborhood Block Party meetings. We provide the information, the QR links, the Q&A, the swag for the kids. All you need to do is lend us your backyard and bring in the neighbors! We've had great parties so far on Highland Ave., Kensington Ct., Lake Dr., and Rugby Ave. Gourmet food and wine, bubble machines, bouncy houses, and firefighter hats for the kids—you bring it, we'll rock it! Big fun and some life-saving information. You might even get a surprise visit from a fully equipped Kensington fire truck!

So get with the program! Think about how you'll evacuate in an emergency. Think about your less mobile neighbors who will need help. Think about pre-evacuation. And think about getting all your neighbors together to celebrate the pandemic release and plan how to cope with disasters.

We're here for you. Isn't it time for a party? Pick a nice summer evening, and let's go for it! Visit the district website to see what other blocks are doing in Kensington to prepare together. If you're interested in hosting a Neighborhood Emergency Preparedness Block Party, visit www.kensingtonfire.org/prepare or email Johnny Valenzuela at prepare@kensingtonfire.org.

Summer Outdoor Mini Concert Series

By Pastor Celestine Fields

Come to the Arlington Community Church for a midday Sunday concert series. Music starts at 1pm. Bring a blanket and a picnic lunch for ACC's first concert series since before the pandemic. The concerts are held outside, with on-the-ground seating and a few conventional seats under a canopy. We will raffle a picnic basket at the end of each 45-minute set. And there will be ice cream for children of all ages...

July 10 - Joe Pratt and the Blues Daddies

July 31 - Kensington's own, the Two of Hearts' Elena Caruthers and Anthony Knight, singing folk accompanied by acoustic guitar.

August 28 - Javier Naverrete and the Socially Distant Trio will perform Cuban dance, Latin jazz standards, and a mix of Brazilian jazz.

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Benson

...from front page



much smaller entity than I had worked for before. I expected to be more of a caretaker until a new manager was found. Of course, once I got here, the whole thing of trying to find a new location for the police was the biggest time-consumer. I just intended to use my experience to keep [the board] going in the right direction until they found a permanent manager.

What surprised you?

The challenge involved in finding a new home for the police. There aren't a lot of options. We really thought that 303 Arlington was going to work out. And unfortunately that didn't. The other surprise is that the waste hauler here in Kensington was so easy to work with. I worked as business manager for Kern County Waste and also oversaw waste for Inyo County as well as parks and rec there. There were six or eight haulers in Kern

and two in Inyo. [Bay View's] Greg Christie made it very easy to do that transition [to food waste pickup]. We worked very well together to get Kensington in compliance. That was probably my nicest surprise.

Some directors feel that the district can't find a permanent GM without offering benefits or a full-time position. Do you think this is true?

I'm not convinced we need to make it full-time. The board has added benefits. I recommended that the position be changed to a part-time salary rather than an hourly rate. You normally don't associate a higher-level management position with punching a time clock. The job can be done on a part-time basis but as a salaried position.

Is it hard to work with the board?

No. Not particularly. There are different personalities. What took some adjusting for me is that I've worked with full-time boards. It was a lot easier to get in touch with them and suggest things. These folks [Kensington directors] have other things going on in their lives. You have to try to work around their schedules. [Before coming to Kensington, Benson worked 29 years in county governments.]

Are you in favor of consolidating the two districts into one?

I'd be fascinated to find out how there were two districts in the first place. I didn't think LAFCO would allow that to happen; LAFCO doesn't allow two different entities with contiguous boundaries to exist. I think it would make a lot of sense to have one district. The timing may not be the greatest, but ultimately it makes more sense to have one district. You only need one manager. And you make sure you're moving in the same direction

What was most challenging about the job?

I think the greatest challenge has been the fear about [the board] looking at sites in the park—people saying it's a done deal and the board is on some sort of plan to disrupt everything. The biggest challenge is to let people know that isn't the case. The board is trying to explore options because we have to find a place to go. They have to look at options. That's been the most frustrating part of my job. Also, the finance manager gave me her letter of resignation a week after I came on. That caused me to have some heart-burn right at the start. I got very lucky to find someone good quickly.

If you could come in knowing what you now know, what would you do?

I think I would have tackled renegotiating the contract with KCC. I thought that would be a better thing for a permanent manager to do, and I thought that we'd be able to find someone quickly. So that would have been the one thing, to initiate that. You don't have a crystal ball. Also, we didn't know that 303 wouldn't come to fruition.

Do you think the police could fit into the PSB if the space were adjusted?

No. They really couldn't. We're on top of each other right now. There just isn't the space in there. I would come in once every two weeks and spend time in the office. The finance manager [Lisa Mundis] had to pick up her computer and move over to the conference room when I was there. The police just have a little bit of space upstairs. Everyone's on top of each other. It's not a good work environment.

Marti Brown worked in the Community Center when she was GM.

That wasn't offered as a possibility. But you don't want to be spread out all over. You don't have the interaction with your coworkers if you're not in the same location. If I were in the Community Center, I might as well have stayed in Bakersfield [Benson lives in Bakersfield]. It was important to be able to walk down the hall, chat with the chief, sit down and discuss something and solve a problem rather than work remotely.

If you could give one piece of advice to the board, what would it be?

I felt sometimes that I had to convince them of too many things. Maybe they don't need to micro-manage as much as they do. With my predecessor [Brown], there was some of that [micro-managing]. When you hire a professional, you have to let that person do their job, let that person work, give them free rein. It's tough because everything [the board] is doing is near and dear to their hearts. No one has a hidden agenda. They're all there for the right reasons. They're great, they know the community, they come from different backgrounds, so they have different ways of contributing. And really, because of the turnover they have in managers, this board has an institutional memory. There've been things that I've brought up, and Eileen [Nottoli] would say, Well, we did that four years ago.

Did you spend much time working with new interim GM Tony Constantouros?

We are working hand in hand right now. He officially came in the middle of May, but I was still retained as a consultant. We're working very closely together. There are a couple projects that I'm trying to get wrapped up with him. He and I and the finance manager spent three hours together on Sunday trying to put together the budget. Tony and I work very well together. I left on good terms, and he can always call and pick my brain. It all might have worked out a little bit different if I were closer. That drive is not a lot of fun. But I think it's important to try to be in town as much as possible.

Is a tag-team interim GM possible with you and Tony that would satisfy CalPERS?

I don't think that would be the best thing for the district. They need someone who takes

it over, it becomes their baby. But I'm not writing it off, I could foresee the next calendar year. But there is still the distance, and I want to do other things in retirement. Some people make a whole career out of these interim positions. I enjoyed it, but I want to do my cruises!

Kensington Residents Mount Aligned Petition Drives

By Linnea Due

Two petitions, one just on the map for two months, the other a long-running effort finally gaining traction after twenty years. One is meant to convince by the power of its rapidly gathered signatures, the other is an official government document. They're related enough that some residents are part of both campaigns. And both are attracting a wide range of allies who might have snubbed each other as recently as six or eight months ago.

The baby of the pair is the petition created by a new group called Save Kensington's Future. The group began in April, and by press time had already collected over 756 signatures of Kensington residents, put up a website (savekensingtonsfuture.info), bought ads and yard signs, and debated talking points to raise at district board meetings. What engendered such passion?

Said Lynn Price, a member of the steering committee, "I really think it's the park. We live on Windsor, and we watched the use of the park during COVID increase more than it had ever been. "On April 7, the Kensington Police Protection and Community Services District (KPPCSD) voted to hire an architect to investigate three possible landing spots for the police department in lieu of that department being housed in the renovated Public Safety Building, which the fire district owns. Two of those spots—the Recreation Building (aka Building E), the home of the Kensington Community Council (KCC) and its after-school program (KASEP), as well as



a popular summer camp, and the Annex, a long vacant structure opposite the barbecue area and tot lot—are in Kensington Park. The other is the parking lot across the street from Arlington Community Church.

"That increased use was both structured and casual, exercise classes, kids playing in all parts of the park, down the side of the hill, riding their bikes, it was almost magical for us to see," Price continued. "It was our dream when we all purchased the park a couple decades ago. During COVID, the park became a centerpiece for recreation, relaxation, de-stressing. It became even more of a jewel than it ever was. People treasure the park. The idea of displacing the KASEP program and putting police in the park is tone-deaf to what's been happening the last couple years."

Price and her husband John have lived in Kensington for 28 years, and their two kids attended Kensington Hilltop. She supported buying the park in the '90s. "I was involved in the park, not the inner circle but the next layer out. We were young, full-time parents, and my job at Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory required that I travel a lot. I had limited time, but I did as much as I could. We wore the T-shirts, had the signs, came to meetings.

"And after that board meeting in April, I thought, 'Oh no, we have to organize again." Price is sympathetic to the directors of both boards. "They feel that they disclosed a lot during their meetings, but people were not paying as much attention to what was going on with boards during the Covid pandemic. People were scrambling to deal with their own lives. Monitoring kids online, putting meals on the table. Now that everybody is aware that the police might move into the park, people have gotten a lot more laser-focused on what is this all about. As a person gathering signatures, I can tell you it didn't take any convincing. People asked questions, but what I did was not lobbying, it was more explaining. I'm a scientist, I'm not a political strategist, I like to know the facts. I will be the first to admit that I don't know all the facts. But I do know that many people don't want the police to move into Building E or the park."

One of the asks of the petition is that the boards pause the PSB renovation. "We want to revisit these decisions," Price said. "If they walk us through piece by piece, a different decision might be made or we might understand the decisions that they made. But we haven't done this, at least not from the point of view of the awakening community."

Petitioners want the park used for recreation only—and that a fire-only PSB be rethought. The group notes that decision has a cascade effect, rendering the police homeless in a town that's been built-out for decades. The petition also wants costs for all the plans—not just the fire board's renovation or temporary structure, but also the price tag on the police possibly moving into a new home that will need to be adapted to police use. "We had a lot of discussion and landed on these as the key points," Price explained. "There are many more like the consolidation of the boards and the November election that many of our members support and will be involved in. But we gelled on these as the key points that we would like addressed. It's complicated. We realize that different things resonate with different people, and the issues are all connected."

The group has asked for a public meeting with both district boards. "I hope for respectful dialogue in all directions and respectful listening. I feel like what's currently proposed is unidirectional, coming from them to us. I would like them to dialogue with the community. The fire board takes no responsibility that the police are moving into the park, but it's all connected."

Price wanted to emphasize that she is not the leader of the Save Kensington's Future steering committee. "The group is very cooperative and essentially leaderless. From my work life, I've learned that when things are very clear you don't need a leader. And it's such a big issue that people who might have been opposed on past issues are now part of the steering group. I love that energy, and it comes from having a true cause that people believe in."

Unifying the Districts

Then there's the petition that is not quite ready for the grill but has been marinating for years. Rob Firmin, president of the Kensington Property Owners Association (KPOA), said that he's been thinking about consolidating the two district boards for a long time. He served on the KPPCSD's finance committee: "I was on the finance committee of the KPPCSD until they banished it to Siberia for some reason." During that time, Firmin, who has advanced degrees in financial modeling and forecasting, offered to do modeling for the police district.

"I saw terrible dysfunction on the KPPCSD board in 2015-16. It was obvious to someone who has been a CEO as I have, you never want to have two independently controlled budgets with no cooperation between them. That's when I started thinking about how it was truly unbelievable that we weren't in one district." Firmin built his model, which he says was warmly received. But he soon realized that the best model in the world couldn't solve the problems inherent in the two-district structure. "That's when KPOA voted to pursue consolidation," he said.

KPOA has been working in that direction for some time, talking to LAFCO (Local Agency Formation Commission, which oversees boundary changes, incorporations, annexations, and more) director Lou-Anne Texeira. "I'm of the view that it's time to move from analysis and advocacy to governmental action to put the two districts together into one," said Firmin.

Galvanizing that action is the threat to the park and the financial implications of the PSB renovation. "It is the conversion of the PSB into a fire station-only with the added perceived outrage of the eviction of the police with potential consequences of the raising of taxes and increase in debt on the KPPCSD side, not just on the fire board side. Particularly upsetting is the possible intrusion of governmental functions unrelated to

recreation into the park."

Firmin, like Price, is sympathetic to the board directors. "My point is that three elected officials out of ten can commit the jurisdictions of both boards to significant financial consequences. The board members are doing what they think is right for their purviews. I'm not interested in criticizing them. I'm focused on [correcting] the structure."

Although the idea of consolidating the two boards has been around for a long time, Firmin says that there has not been a real effort to do it before now. "There's been a lot of talk about it, but it hasn't happened. Institutions tend to function this way. By nature they focus on their

own duties. And in Kensington, this is exactly what's happening."

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Although KPOA is leading this process, other residents have joined in the push to consolidate the boards. This coalition is now in the stage of getting questions answered. "Our thorough research has revealed questions. We'll hold a meeting with Lou-Anne, and once we have those answers, we'll be able to complete a project plan. Project plans highlight the critical path to the end result. Once we have all the steps, we submit a notice of intent to LAFCO. LAFCO doesn't rule on it, it's simply an alert to them that we're proceeding."

At that point the petition becomes critical. "We submit a proposal along with the petition. LAFCO can hold a hearing or grant it right away. I'm confident we're going to get this through. No one knows how fast it can be. It could take a year or more, but it's possible it will take less."

Firmin points out that even if consolidation doesn't impact the current imbroglio, he considers the process vital. "The event that sparked this spur to action, namely the conversion of the PSB, is not the last critical challenge Kensington will face. Think budget crises, earthquakes, wildfires. We can anticipate a structure that will handle these challenges professionally, with a balance of issues handled by one board."

As an individual (rather than representing KPOA), FIrmin also serves on the Save Kensington's Future steering committee. "One of the items of feedback we've received is that many signers spontaneously told the signature collector that they are in favor of consolidation, though they might call it unification. The Save Kensington's Future group is going to be a powerful partner. They can go back to their signatories and get a significant proportion of those people to sign the formal petition. Collaboration among citizens of all descriptions is crucial."

