

OUTLOOK

Bringing the Community Together

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JULY-AUGUST 2024

A PUBLICATION OF THE KENSINGTON COMMUNITY COUNCIL

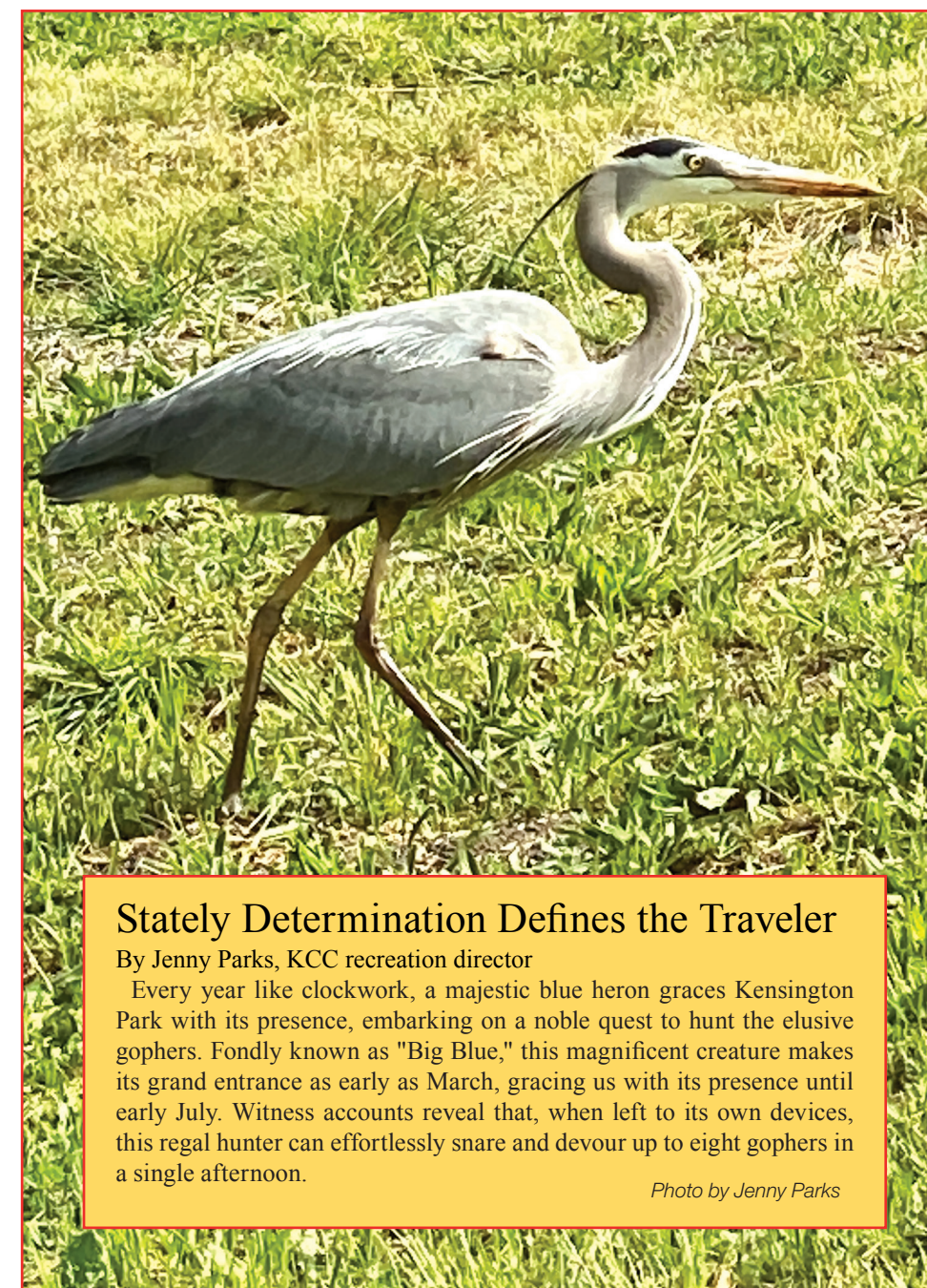
VOLUME 82 NUMBER 7

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Stately Determination Defines the Traveler

By Jenny Parks, KCC recreation director

Every year like clockwork, a majestic blue heron graces Kensington Park with its presence, embarking on a noble quest to hunt the elusive gophers. Fondly known as "Big Blue," this magnificent creature makes its grand entrance as early as March, gracing us with its presence until early July. Witness accounts reveal that, when left to its own devices, this regal hunter can effortlessly snare and devour up to eight gophers in a single afternoon.

Photo by Jenny Parks

District Boards Join Forces to Discuss Hypotheticals

By Linnea Due

On June 5, directors from the Kensington Fire Protection District (KFPD) and the Kensington Police Protection and Community Services District (KPPCSD) got together to talk about what an administrative structure might look like in the event of a merger of the two districts. In this process, usually called consolidation, the boards would reorganize, with KPPCSD adding fire and medical emergency services to its portfolio of delivering police services, managing Kensington Park, and negotiating the solid waste contract with Bay View. The KFPD, which exists solely to provide fire and EMT, would be absorbed by the KPPCSD; a Community Services District can provide a multitude of services.

Although several residents felt an organizational chart was premature given that it was undecided whether consolidation made sense as a governance model, creating an organizational model was explained by Mary Morris-Mayorga, past general manager of the fire district, and David Aranda, interim general manager of the police district, as necessary to Ridgeline's fiscal analysis of the impacts of continuing as two separate districts or combining to form one district. Ridgeline principal Dmitry Semenov said earlier that his company's analysis of each district was nearing a conclusion so they were now turning to an analysis of a combined district.

See Joint Meeting, Page 4

Kensington and Beyond Update

June 2024



NEW LISTING | 1036 Leneve Place | El Cerrito Hills
Main House 3 BR | 2.5 BA | 1755 sqft.(+/-)
Legal ADU 2 BR | 1 BA | 1000 sqft. (+/-) & Separate Studio (+/-)
Family Compound? Incredible Wildcat Canyon views, complete renovation from the foundation up!
OFFERED AT: \$1,795,000
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SOLD: \$1,465,000
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Architect designed- Extraordinary, beautifully maintained original Mid-Century residence.
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Kensington Market Update

MAY - JUNE 2024

9 Closed Sales
Median List Price: \$1,098,000
Median Sales Price: \$1,550,000
Median Sq. Ft.: 1,611
Median Cost Per Sq. Ft.:
List Price: \$702
Sales Price: \$923
Average Days on Market: 14

MAY - JUNE 2023

19 Closed Sales
Median List Price: \$1,295,000
Median Sales Price: \$1,295,000
Median Sq. Ft.: 1,607
Median Cost Per Sq. Ft.:
List Price: \$756
Sales Price: \$937
Average Days on Market: 13

Rubbish vs Reality

Gauging public sentiment these days can reveal alarming differences between fact and reality. If you followed the media, and/or public 'sentiment' or perceptions of truth, you'd think hundreds of people are attacked by sharks weekly....in reality, in 2023 there were 36 shark bites in the US, 52% of the world's total.... for the entire year! You might think hundreds died in plane crashes in 2023 with over 71 million people flying in that year....yet ZERO people died from a commercial flight crash in 2023.

Did you know that US inflation has been 2% or lower for only 13 of the past 50 years? Did you know the 30-year fixed rate mortgage has been 6% or lower for only 17 of the past 50 years? Yes. Most of the headlines these days imply both these data points are almost ENTIRELY something new and rarely seen in history. Over the past 12 months probably a majority in the US think real estate agents earn 6% commission for every sale they do. Simply not true. Did you know the buyers have always paid the commission? Reality- No sale, no proceeds, no commission. Who gets the full benefit of the tax deduction of the commission? The seller, it is a tax-deductible selling expense. In the listing agreement, the seller determines the commissions to be paid and then allocates a portion to the buyer's agent. The change that occurred is that now the amount be paid to the buyers broker can not be posted in the Multiple Listing Service as it is considered steering agents to show the properties with the highest commissions ...In my experience, commissions have been relatively consistent and always negotiable. So sellers still have a choice as to how the commission is paid and how it is allocated. Smart sellers will realize that offering a buyer broker commission is an incentive and will result in more showings, more buyers and a higher sales price. A buyer paying a commission on top of their offering price is a double whammy if they have to come up with it in addition to their down payment and purchasing costs. This new legislation may push prices down...Just something to ponder.

It is important to verify the facts and sift through the rubbish. Headlines sell the news and there is a lot of misinformation out there.



If you are interested in knowing the value of your home or what is required to sell a home in this market, call me. The appointment is confidential and complimentary.

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Doubters who think Big Blue can't catch a gopher should check out this photo by Jenny Parks.

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.

SEPTEMBER - 2024
DEADLINES
Advertising Deadline ❖ AUG. 8
Editorial Deadline ❖ AUG. 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 all periods.

KENSINGTON
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Letters to the Editor

Editor's Note: The following letter, including a petition, was sent to the Outlook as a letter to the editor. It was forwarded to the directors and interim general manager of the Kensington Police Protection and Community Services District (KPPCSD), which manages the park. The area referred to in the letter is above the bathrooms, between the large meadow and the basketball courts. KCC recreation director Jenny Parks noted that area is off-limits to KCC Summer Camp and KASEP students. See Parks' photo below. Update: by June 17, KPPCSD had installed a temporary fence that blocks access to the bottom of the wall.

Fence Off the Hillside

Dear Editor,

We are rising third grade students at Kensington Hilltop and have a concern about the cliff near the basketball courts at Kensington Park. Kids of all ages play and sit on the cliff and they could fall or get scraped by roots and rocks! This area is dangerous. Kensington Park is the perfect place to have an afterschool play date, a picnic, field trip, and Kensington Hilltop's Girl Scout troop often meets there. We think something needs to be done to make this area of the park a safe place to play. And we need adults' help to keep us safe!

One idea is to build a barrier so kids could play up there but be safe without a risk of falling down the cliff. We could also block the entrances to this area. There are a few ways kids can get onto the cliff. One way is climbing right onto it and the other is a small hole near the stairs. We have already asked around and have a list of people who support this idea (see below). We hope to get more support from people of Kensington and El Cerrito!

Emilia Giovenco and Leo Slevin

Signatures for the petition to fence off the hill/cliff area in Kensington Park:

Adults: Katie Brohawn, Maya Greenfield, Charlee Martin, Iris Korovesi, Steven Cooper, Patrick Marasco, Zoe Melczor, Dara Slevin, Matt Slevin, Evelina Kitainik, Adrian Giovenco, Madele Limpahan, Sasha Kitainik, Garri Kitainik, Carlos Rodriguez, Thuy Vo, Karen Nguyen. **Children:** Beatrice Cinquegrana, Taylor Brohawn, Hazel Rodriguez, Frances Rodriguez, Luisa Cinquegrana



To Be Blunt...

Dear Editor:

Change is difficult, and sometimes agonizingly slow. We experience both. While I've loved living in Kensington with my family for the past 12+ years, it is remarkable how we still do not have our arms around how to structure our local special districts in the best way possible to meet our community's evolving needs. I fear that our slow pace will rapidly diminish the choices available to our community in making proactive choices and investments. This is increasingly worrisome.

While governance and management have mercifully improved (and our police is much more professional), we continue to struggle in setting priorities, paying for our critical infrastructure needs, and finding, much less realizing, desperately needed economies of scale. To be blunt: we're going broke.

While more people are open-minded and less wedded to political stances and the feuds of yesterday, much work remains to be done. We need to actually meaningfully engage our community members, set sound strategic priorities responsive to our community's desire to meet the threats of our increasingly fire-prone area and other natural disasters. Alas, these needs are directly at odds with the crushing fiscal and oversight needs of constructing/rebuilding public safety buildings, finding money for rising pension costs, and dealing with high inflation.

More residents need to get meaningfully engaged in these decisions, and I hope both boards, as they struggle with consolidation and building costs, do more to meaningfully engage our community. With transparency, robust and inclusive debate of options, and a push to make decisions, I am confident that we can finally move forward with the urgency befitting our safety, financial well-being, and wonderful community members.

Garen Corbett

One Town, One District

Dear Editor:

I write to urge consolidation of Kensington's two governing districts, the fire district (KFPD) and the police district (KPPCSD). As a 47-year resident who served a four-year term on the KPPCSD board, I have long been an advocate of district consolidation. This is about philosophy and the policy that flows from it: we are One Town! Were we to have just one board of directors of a consolidated district, which has as its charge the comprehensive public safety of our community, we would have a much greater chance to avoid sacrificing one set of public safety concerns, such as police services, for another set of safety concerns, e.g., fire services. Consolidating those public safety objectives under one board will impose a fiduciary duty on the directors of that consolidated board to consider all of Kensington's safety needs when making decisions. With our separate districts of fire and police, we have suffered what was the unthinkable: the eviction of our much

admired and critically needed police from the new Public Safety Building, which is now turned into a fire station-only building.

But I'm not the only one who thinks our two districts should be consolidated. LAFCO, the Local Agency Formation Commission, has recommended consolidation since at least its 2009 Municipal Service Review (MSR). In reviewing Kensington's separate public safety districts, the 2009 MSR stated that: "Consolidation could offer opportunities to the community in exercising greater control over the share of local property tax dollars spent on fire, emergency medical services, law enforcement, and other services. Consolidation of KFPD with KPPCSD could streamline local government, and possibly offer more options on allocating public safety funds within the community." Call or write to the boards and urge them to begin the LAFCO process in order to consolidate our two districts into one well-functioning whole! Kensington deserves no less!

Linda Lipscomb

What Kind of Consolidation?

Dear Editor:

Across California, including Contra Costa and Marin counties, fire agencies are consolidating with other fire agencies. They leverage local expertise and strengths to enhance delivery of fire and emergency medical services while controlling costs. Similarly, police departments are contracting with neighboring police departments or with the sheriff and even with the CHP to build more effective, versatile, and resilient police forces.

But in Kensington, unfortunately, the boards are considering only an antiquated model of "consolidation," one that would combine police with fire services. In a recent joint board meeting, an organization chart was presented to show how a consolidated district under this apples-and-oranges model might be staffed, but it lacked any analysis or cost projections.

Preliminary conclusions: More employees will be required in this outdated view of a consolidated district. And, because the police district is a CalPERS agency, the consolidated district would likely need to pay CalPERS benefits to its administrative employees. CalPERS benefits can add 40 percent or more to the cost of salaries. The costs to taxpayers could rise substantially with no improvement in fire or police services.

In May 2022, the police board concluded, based on recommendations from its GM and executive search firm, that: 1) CalPERS benefits for its GM are essential to recruit a long-term executive; 2) the GM's staff would also receive CalPERS benefits. Adding employees to the police district because of consolidation could substantially increase the long-term CalPERS pension obligations for Kensington.

In addition to the higher cost of adding administrative staff, consider the cost obligations of the fire services contract with El Cerrito and the restrictions on how Kensington's special tax revenues may be spent. Budgeting in a consolidated district may not be as flexible as some claim.

The boards will continue to weigh potential benefits and pitfalls of the Kensington version of consolidation. At the heart of the matter, the crucial question should be: Will consolidation improve fire and police services as we look to the future? Or is it the wrong kind of consolidation, the kind that brings increased cost without increased benefits?

Julie Stein

Director, Kensington Fire Protection District

A Few Good Board Members

A narrative is circulating in Kensington's political maelstrom that goes like this: we cannot count on there being 10 people, in Kensington's population of 5,300, willing to serve capably as directors on the boards of the fire district and the police/community services district.

Incredibly, the narrative originated with one or more directors currently serving on the board of the KPPCSD. We know this because it was fed to a consultant, who listed it among the potential "threats to Kensington's future" identified by current KPPCSD board members, when they met in public to discuss consolidation.

Board members are unpaid. They volunteer for the work and for the monthly meetings, amid political pressures and with the understanding that their service is vital to the quality of life and safety of their fellow Kensington residents. The notion that Kensington cannot field 10 such people, reliably, is not only very insulting to current and past members of both boards, the KFPD and the KPPCSD, it is also resoundingly contradicted by our history. Kensington's elections are noteworthy, and often notorious, for their liveliness. Seats on the boards do not go uncontested; may I offer you a yard sign or two, or three?

I for one do not want to hear it said again that Kensington can't count on two hands full of qualified volunteers, to run for office and serve our community, now and in the future. **Sylvia Elsbury**

The Insurance Debacle

Dear Editor:

After 50 years of home insurance coverage, AAA is giving me an FFF (Forget Fire Funding). The rationale for termination is ambiguous at best, but the reason is obvious. Insurance companies want to reduce their exposure in high fire risk areas, a designation that Kensington unfortunately holds.

All of Kensington is a red zone, presumably because during the peak fire season of Sept/Oct strong easterly winds coming from east Contra Costa could push a fire through Tilden Park and into Kensington. Even our shared El Cerrito fire department is concerned they will not be able to control such a fire because of the likely intensity, limited fire hydrants and restricted park access.

Because of Kensington's red zone designation, few insurance companies are willing to insure these homes, and the few who might charge exorbitantly high rates. It is likely that more and more homes will lose insurance while the government debates solutions for this insurance crisis.

Even though Kensington has not experienced a fire from Tilden Park in more than 100 years we need to take steps to reduce the threat of fire. This includes getting Tilden Park to undertake the studies that will enable us to reduce the density of foliage on the hillside. We also need Park approval and funding for thinning out existing shrubs and trees. This is a lengthy process as is obtaining grants to cover the costs to undertake the work. In the meantime we should be trying to get Park approval to remove dead wood and excessive brush on the Tilden Park hillside. Fortunately the Kensington Fire Protection District has available funds, and as a board member I'm hopeful the board will allow some of these excess funds to be used to reduce fire risk. Like charity, getting started begins at home.

Jim Watt

Community Potluck Picnic at ACC

By Anita Baker

What kind of weather will August bring? Fog, wind, heat, rain, or just comfortable? We never know, and so Arlington Community Church is inviting the community to an indoor potluck picnic and games on Thursday, August 1, from 6-8:30pm.

You are invited to bring your favorite picnic dish (salad, main dish, or side dish). Cookies will be provided for dessert. Please bring some of your favorite indoor games such as Jenga, Connect 4, cards, Scrabble, whatever you enjoy. We'll also have Ladder Ball, Bean-bag Toss, and Ring Toss.

We will share food and fun, avoid insects, and be free of dinner dishwashing at home. ACC is set up to recycle, compost and reuse when possible. Please join us on Thursday, August 1. We look forward to seeing you.



Fun at an ACC games night. From left, Faith Abel, Roger Abel, Nick Crump, Eleanor Crump, Susan Yourd, and Ron Yourd. Photo by Jen Chapman.

Passings

Cathie Elaine Kosel, a true force of nature who lit up every room she entered, passed away on Easter Sunday, March 31, following a courageous battle with leukemia. Surrounded by her loved ones, Cathie left behind a legacy that will continue to inspire those who knew her.

Born on April 4, 1946, in Berkeley to Otto Kosel and Elsie Neilson Kosel, Cathie exhibited a zest for life from an early age. Her insatiable curiosity, thirst for learning, and adventurous spirit set her apart. Throughout her life, Cathie embraced diverse roles that showcased her versatility and tenacity. As a Bay Area native and Cal alum, she cared deeply about her community. She served as the esteemed mayor of El Cerrito from 1989 to 1997, where her leadership and dedication left an indelible mark. Her involvement in various civic roles, including as retired commissioner and vice-chair of the Contra Costa Transportation Authority and co-Chair of the Solano County/Contra Costa County Transportation Advisory Committee highlighted her commitment to improving the region's infrastructure.

Moreover, Cathie's tenure as an English Teacher at El Cerrito High and passion for education led her to serve as the former director of the West Contra Costa Education Fund, where she advocated tirelessly for the betterment of educational opportunities for all. In recognition of her philanthropic endeavors and community leadership, Cathie was honored with the Women's Council of Realtors Entrepreneur of the Year award in 2011, a testament to her resilience, ingenuity, and dedication to service.

Beyond her professional accomplishments, Cathie was beloved for her warm heart and infectious laughter. Her passion for gardening, particularly her cherished roses and Japanese maples, brought joy and vibrant beauty to those around her.

In her passing, Cathie is reunited with her parents, her brother Roger, and cherished friends. She leaves behind her son Andrew Kosel, her sister Janice Kosel, and her nieces Melea Koselson, Arianna Kosel, and Alison Kosel, as well as a diverse and remarkable community of extended family, friends, and loved ones who miss her dearly.

Britt Ingrid Maria Höglund Schultheis, mother, grandmother and friend, passed away on Sunday, May 26 at home surrounded by her family. Ingrid was born on December 3, 1932, in the small northern town of Dorotea, Sweden to Elsie and Jakob, the second child of three. A lover of skiing and languages, she did well in school and graduated from Uppsala University. She worked as a teacher and as a translator. In 1953, at a Quaker summer work camp near Stockholm, she met her future husband, Ralph Schultheis. After only three months, they became engaged and were married in Long Island, New York, the next year. They moved to Philadelphia, PA for Ralph to finish dental school and eventually made it out to California with two young children in hand, Eric and Carla. They finally settled in Kensington, where Ingrid lived for over 30 years. While caring for her family, Ingrid was involved in the Kensington Women's Group and was a lifelong Scandinavian folk dancer and member of Berkeley Folk Dancers. An author and a photographer, she published *Slimming with Weights* (1977), one of the first weightlifting books for women and self-published two memoirs: *A Grandmother Remembers* (2007) and *Bumps on the Road with Unconventional Spouse* (2013). After her husband's death, she moved to El



Cerrito and returned to school, graduating Magna Cum Laude from California State University, Hayward with a degree in sociology. She went on to serve as the executive director for the Berkeley Dental Association until she retired. Ingrid was an expert knitter and sewer; she even had her own small sweater business. An adventurous and loving grandmother, she spent her time exercising, camping, hiking and traveling. She is remembered by her children, Eric Schultheis and Carla Schultheis-Gerry, their spouses: Colleen Schultheis and Saul Schultheis-Gerry and her grandchildren, Emma Schultheis-Gerry, Hanna Schultheis-Gerry and Nick Schultheis. In lieu of flowers, please send donations to the Sierra Club or Operation Smile. For information about Ingrid's celebration of life in September please email her daughter Carla at casg62@gmail.com

Joint Meeting

...from Front Page

Morris-Mayorga and Aranda went through a description of each district's current structure and then turned to an organizational chart of what the new district's administration might look like. (These charts are included in the agenda packets for both districts' June 5 meeting.) The main differences seemed to be increasing the hours of the general manager to full-time, hiring a full-time finance manager, and having a full-time public safety coordinator. The board clerk would be at .75 full-time equivalent (FTE), an administrative assistant at half-time FTE, and a half-time park worker. Morris-Mayorga and Aranda envisioned the public safety coordinator as a second-in-command with the GM, which was challenged by several directors, who felt the finance manager should be that second authority.

Employee and contractor hours were roughly similar for the combined district and the two separate districts. Some outside consultants were eliminated while some roles increased, such as the board clerk's hours. Aranda and Morris-Mayorga took pains to reiterate that nothing was set in stone and the plan was advanced to gain feedback and give Ridgeline guidance. Public comment was mostly supportive, while offering a tweak or two. Gail Feldman wondered why the park worker and public safety coordinator would become staff positions, Paul Dorroh noted that just focusing on dollars ignored the fact that a full-time general manager might attract "a real star," David Fike said that the key to an efficient staff was to have clear priorities: "Two boards perpetuate a lack of clear priorities." Dmitry Semenov, in the Zoom audience, reminded everyone that "We're not trying to compare today to the future, but the future of the individual districts to the future of a combined district."

That future is clouded by the question of CalPERS costs. KFPD's Julie Stein and Jim Watt twice brought up the looming issue of CalPERS and its costs as well as its restrictions. Aranda, as a CalPERS retiree working at a CalPERS agency, is restricted to working 960 hours per year, while Morris-Mayorga, also a CalPERS retiree, is not restricted, because the fire district is not a CalPERS district and thus not bound by its rules.

KPPCSD board president Dave Spath tried to explain how it might work, saying that if a GM oversees people who have CalPERS and is also a retired annuitant, that person is subject to the 960 hour limit. But, "if a new GM was hired in a new combined district, it does not mandate the GM to contract with CalPERS. If we decided to contract for a GM with CalPERS, then we would have to offer CalPERS to the entire staff."

Stein said, "This is a crucial costing issue. When you're in CalPERS they're using a factor of 1.6 [pay to employee versus cost of employee]. At the university it's 1.49. It's not insignificant. It's something the fire district would be losing. It's an important tradeoff."

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KENSINGTON K-9s

Mondale and Rex: From Pandemic Puppies to Lifelong Besties

By Winston Churchill, Bulldog

Mondale and Rex are possibly the two sweetest, friendliest dogs at Kensington Park. I met them when they were both pups, eager to wrestle and play, sharing sticks and balls with all their neighbors.

Now three years old, Rex and Mondale were both pandemic puppies. They were brought home when the world was in lockdown and meeting neighbors at the park was one of the few safe opportunities for socializing.

Coincidentally, Mondale and Rex were each the last pups picked from their litters. Although they were the last chosen, they're now the favored children in their empty nest households. Mondale is an 85-pound yellow Lab. He is the pampered child of Dave and Sarah. His siblings, Bennett and Jane, are both away at college. Rex is an 82-pound black Lab. He keeps his parents, Derek and Judy, active and happy since his siblings, Will and Lindsey, left for college.

Labrador Retrievers were the most popular dog breed for over thirty years. This is understandable because they are notoriously friendly, affectionate, intelligent, and trainable. And they usually have sweet faces and happy tails.



American Lab. American Labs are bred to be agile and athletic, while their English cousins are sweet and sleepy.

Although there is no official distinction between English and American Labs, these two strains of Labradors evolved from specialized breeding. The English Lab was bred for the show ring with a focus on appearance, while the American Lab was bred for field trials with a focus on agility and speed. Thus, American Labs are taller and more slender with a hunting dog's body and a thinner coat. English Labs have a fuller face and shorter snout; their bodies are shorter and stockier with a thicker coat. English Labs usually have a noble show dog appearance. American Labs typically have an athletic appearance for fieldwork.

Rex and Mondale's personalities and passions follow the characteristics of American and English Labs. Rex loves chasing the ball and looks forward to active sessions of fetch in the park every day. Mondale is relaxed and loves to just watch Rex chasing the ball! When they aren't at the park, they both love snoozing at home, catching treats in the air, and playing with their stuffed animals. And for special adventures, they love running on the beach, splashing in the waves, and swimming.

Since they met as three-month-old pandemic puppies at the park, they still get together nearly every day to socialize with their neighbors and play in the park before sunset. Mondale and Rex have grown into lifelong Kensington neighbors and best friends.

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Meet Up In the Park with Good Guest Kensington July 28

By Laura Callen

Good Guest Kensington (GGK) is now three years old! We are a group of Kensington residents who support our town to live as good guests on Lisjan Nation land. By living in reciprocity with the Indigenous people of this place, and the land itself, we believe that all life can flourish. GGK offers educational programs, encourages residents to give Shuumi (a voluntary land tax), and hosts Kensington's annual Indigenous People's Day event. The heart of our work is collaborating with community members to figure out what this work means for them, including the concrete actions they can take. From individuals to community groups including KPPCSD, KCC, Hilltop Elementary School and Blake Garden, we are weaving a tapestry of relationships.

Would you like to learn more about Good Guest Kensington and how you can participate? We'll be in the park on Sunday, July 28, 3:30-5:pm. Look for the "Good Guest Kensington" sign at the picnic tables nearest to the basketball court. Whether you stay for five minutes or an hour, please stop by! Watch for details about Fall programs: Lunch and Learn In September, and the third annual Indigenous People's Day event in October. Learn more at www.goodguestkensington.org, goodguestkensington@gmail.com

Take the Night Out

By Johnny Valenzuela

On Tuesday, August 6, the Kensington Police Department and Kensington Fire Protection District join forces for National Night Out 2024. This is an excellent opportunity to build stronger positive relationships with your public safety personnel and first responders and get to know your neighbors to prepare for emergencies together.

National Night Out happens every year on the first Tuesday of August. Neighborhoods throughout Kensington will have block parties where residents can gather, share food, and get to know each other better. These gatherings are more than just a chance to enjoy good food and company; they're a vital part of fostering a sense of community, making Kensington a safer place to live.

As part of the annual tradition, members of the Kensington Police Department and the El Cerrito-Kensington Fire Department will tour the town, visiting as many block parties as they can. This is a unique opportunity to meet the dedicated first responders who work to keep Kensington safe. They will distribute vital safety preparedness information, answer questions, and offer tips on how to stay safe and prepared for emergencies.

Find a block party at www.kensingtonfire.org/nationalnightout. National Night Out block party hosts must register by July 6 to help public safety agencies prepare resources to support this event.



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July and August Events at the Library

By Jenny Rockwell

Enjoy free programs offered by the Kensington Library at 61 Arlington Avenue. Call 510-524-3043 with questions. Thank you to the Friends of Kensington Library for making library programs possible.

Tues, July 2, 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, July 2, 9, 16, 23, 30 6:30pm Family Storytime Lots of picture books, songs, rhymes, and fun! Stuffed animals & pajamas welcome.

Tuesdays, July 2 and 16 Read to a Dog Join us and a licensed therapy dog for a 15-minute reading session every first and third Tuesday afternoon. 3-4pm.

Tues, July 9, 6pm Wildfire Awareness and Preparation Panel Local, county, and state experts will discuss wildfire prevention and preparation, and how property owners can apply for and receive support in projects designed to reduce wildfire risk. After a Q&A, participants can take home a complimentary emergency kit.

Thurs, July 11, 2pm DIY Super Soakers Come in and build your own super soaker. Parent help gladly welcomed. After everyone has built their soakers, we will go outside and test them by soaking everyone EXCEPT the librarian. (Okay, maybe you can squirt him too.)

Mon, July 22, 6:30-8pm Kensington Library Book Club The club meets online via Zoom, usually on the fourth Monday of each month. The selection for July is *Heaven and Earth Grocery Store* by James McBride.

Thurs, July 18, 2pm Guided Drawing and Read Aloud with Jen de Oliveira Join Jen de Oliveira, author-illustrator of the Reggie graphic novel series, for a guided drawing session and a read-aloud from her latest book *Reggie: Penguin in Charge*.

Sat, July 27, 3pm Gardening Conversation Circle: topic TBD Join a monthly conversation about growing plants. Open to new and experienced gardeners. Each meeting will have a topic to start the discussion, but participants are free to get into the weeds about whatever they would like to share or ask. The library will provide books and other resources to explore.

For Teens by Teens: Calling all high-schoolers. Design and offer your own library program at Kensington Library. Fill out an interest form: <https://tinyurl.com/>

Ongoing to August 3, Summer Reading This year Summer Reading is celebrating all things nature. The Contra Costa County Library's summer literacy program focuses on conservation, animals, and getting invested in protecting the ecosystems we cherish. Summer Reading runs from June 1 to August 3 and includes a diverse and exciting mix of activities and events. Readers of all ages can visit ccclib.org/summer for fun projects and challenges to help keep our planet thriving. Every completed entry is eligible for a free book and a chance to win prizes.

July-August, Art Exhibit, Herstory 2: the Legal History of Chinese American Women

Herstory 2 documents the Supreme Court history of Chinese American women who fought for their rights and helped shape a new America for all.

Tuesdays, Aug 6, 13, 20, 27 6:30pm Family Storytime Lots of picture books, songs, rhymes, and fun! Stuffed animals & pajamas welcome.

Tues, Aug 6, 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, Aug 6 and 20 Read to a Dog Join us and a licensed therapy dog for a 15-minute reading session every first and third Tuesday afternoon. 3:00-4:00pm

Tues, Aug 20, 6:30pm Firewise Landscaping Join UC Master Gardener Hedwig Van Den Broeck to learn strategies on how you can reduce your risks in fire-prone California by protecting and hardening your home and creating beautiful firewise landscapes with careful selection, placement, and maintenance of plants in your garden.

Sat, Aug 31, 3pm Gardening Conversation Circle: topic TBD Join a monthly conversation about growing plants. Open to new and experienced gardeners. Each meeting will have a topic to start the discussion, but participants are free to get into the weeds about whatever they would like to share or ask. The library will provide books and other resources to explore.

All summer: Seed library

While supplies last, the Kensington Library seed library is always being restocked with free seeds of seasonal varieties. We also accept seed donations!



Wildfire Awareness Panel at Library

By Johnny Valenzuela

Residents are invited to attend the Wildfire Awareness Preparation Panel on Tuesday, July 9, from 6-7:30pm at the Kensington Library, 61 Arlington Avenue. Local, county, and state officials will discuss how to prevent and prepare for wildfires. Panelists are Michelle Rinehart from Contra Costa County Fire Protection District, Johnny Valenzuela from Kensington Fire Protection District, Alan Siegel from the Wildcat Firewise Community, and Mary Beth Bykowski from the California Department of Insurance.

The panel will address essential topics such as the importance of community cooperation in fire prevention and the necessary preparations for a safe and efficient evacuation. Participants can take home a complimentary emergency kit, which is available while supplies last.

This event is open to the public, and there is no need for registration. For more information, please visit www.kensingtonfire.org/wildfire-awareness-preparation-panel.

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KASEP offers more than 65 enrichment classes each week, afterschool for grades K-6. Our small class sizes are a great opportunity for kids to learn and explore in a friendly and safe environment and are conveniently located just down the hill from Kensington Hilltop School. Our next session of classes begins September 9th and Registration is August 27th at 7pm for Kindergarten and 7:30 for grades 1-6. A brochure with a full list of classes will be available online after August 15th and will be sent to the school etree the first week of school.

New this year:

Coming this fall KASEP will offer year round Spanish for grades K-6, Legos with Off the Block Stem and Griffin Judo.

KASEP after school camp

April Schlanger will be offering an afterschool camp from 2:30-5:00 the week of August 25th and the week of September 3rd prior to KASEP classes beginning.

More information will be available on our website beginning July 15th.

KCC Summer Camp



Camp. Each week, we welcome 60 campers to enjoy camp games, sing songs, create art projects, and participate in tennis classes. Our Fridays feature BBQs and a variety of other engaging activities throughout the week.

Limited spots are still available for several weeks of camp. Register now on our website at kensingtoncommunitycouncil.org/summer-camp.



Summer Schedule for Adult and Family Classes

April Schlanger Summer Cooking Series

June 18th: Pickling Veggies and Fruit:
Learn how to make a basic pickle brine that works great with vegetables and fruits, and learn how to use these pickles in recipes.

July 9th: Upcycle Your Excess Summer Fruits
Too much fruit? Learn how to make sauces, compote and beverages with all that summer fruit.

July 23rd: Basic Fermentation and Pickling:
Learn the basics of kimchi and pickles.

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: 7/7, 8/4, 8/11, 8/25 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 waytoglowkidsyoga@gmail.com with questions about the class.

Cardio Dance with Karma Smart

Thursdays 10am-11am Cost \$15 drop in or register online

Yoga with Anja Borgstrom

Strength & Balance Yoga -Tuesdays at 8:30am

Cost is \$20 drop in or register online

Tai Chi with Nobuo Nishi

Wednesdays & Fridays from 9:30-11:00am

Drop-in fee is \$15


Register at KensingtonCommunityCouncil.org/adult-and-family-classes

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



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KENSINGTON EATS OUT

At a Thai Haven

By Ittai Shiu



My brother-in-law is Thai and very particular about the exotic spices that accompany the foods he grew up with. Over the years, he’s enjoyed many great Thai options when he visits us in the Bay Area, as we are blessed with a strong Thai community and several excellent restaurants.

There’s a modest business park in El Cerrito that my brother-in-law helped me discover and appreciate as a local haven of Thai culture and cuisine. I’m referring to the Peppermint Tree Plaza at 10170 San Pablo Avenue in El Cerrito, which features two standout businesses.


The first is Larb Thai Food and Tapas, a frequent participant and supporter of the Kensington Eats program during the pandemic. You’ll find familiar Thai dishes like Pad Thai, Tom Yum Soup, and my personal favorite, Pumpkin Curry—flavorful and aromatic, combining the rich sweetness of pumpkin with the savory depth of traditional Thai curry.

This restaurant specializes in the cuisine of the Isaan region of Northeastern Thailand, known for flavors that are sometimes sour and often incredibly spicy. One can’t ignore their namesake dish, Larb. Pronounced “laap” and not “larb” (as my brother-in-law consistently corrects me), it’s a Thai salad usually made with ground meat, fresh herbs (mint, Thai basil, or cilantro), garlic, chilies, onions, and lime juice. Served cold, it’s refreshing and full-flavored, perfect for hot summer days.

It should be no surprise that an entire section of their menu is dedicated to larb, offering several varieties. The ground-meat version is standard, but a fun option would be the beef or duck larb, which adds depth and a fatty element that complements the acid, herbs, and spices. Larb Thai does not hold back on the spice, so ordering your larb “spicy” means it will be very spicy. I will tap out with anything greater than “medium,”

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but for those who are daring enough, Larb Thai can test the limits of your palate.

The second business is directly next door. Another Thai establishment called Roong Jing Jing advertises gifts, groceries, and spices. It typically doesn’t get a second look; however, don’t be fooled—it’s a local treasure chest if you know what you’re looking for. Unless you grew up Thai, many of these products might be a mystery, but you can find specialty snacks and seasonings that are truly unique.

Culinary secret #1: On Saturday mornings, an ever-changing selection of freshly prepared curries, salads, and entrees are available for sale. These affordable meals are easy to take home and enjoy the same day or supplemented with other ingredients (additional meats, vegetables, spices) to add variety and/or elevate family dinners at home throughout the week. Locals know and appreciate the value, as demonstrated by the line that forms before opening. If you’re curious, join the queue, because by midday, most of the food is gone.

Culinary secret #2: Usually in stock but only available upon request in the back of the store are homemade Thai sausages made with pork, lemongrass, and Thai chilies. Dispensed frozen and in Ziploc bags, these can sit in your freezer until ready to eat. Thawed and tossed onto a grill or pan-fried, these add a fiery kick to any meal or make you a hit at any BBQ event this summer.

So whether you’re indulging in the spicy dishes of the Isaan region or discovering hidden culinary treasures, the Peppermint Tree Plaza is a gem for anyone looking to explore the diverse flavors and traditions of Thailand.

Larb Thai Food and Tapas, Roong Jing Jing, Peppermint Plaza, 10170 San Pablo Avenue, El Cerrito

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