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OUTLOOK

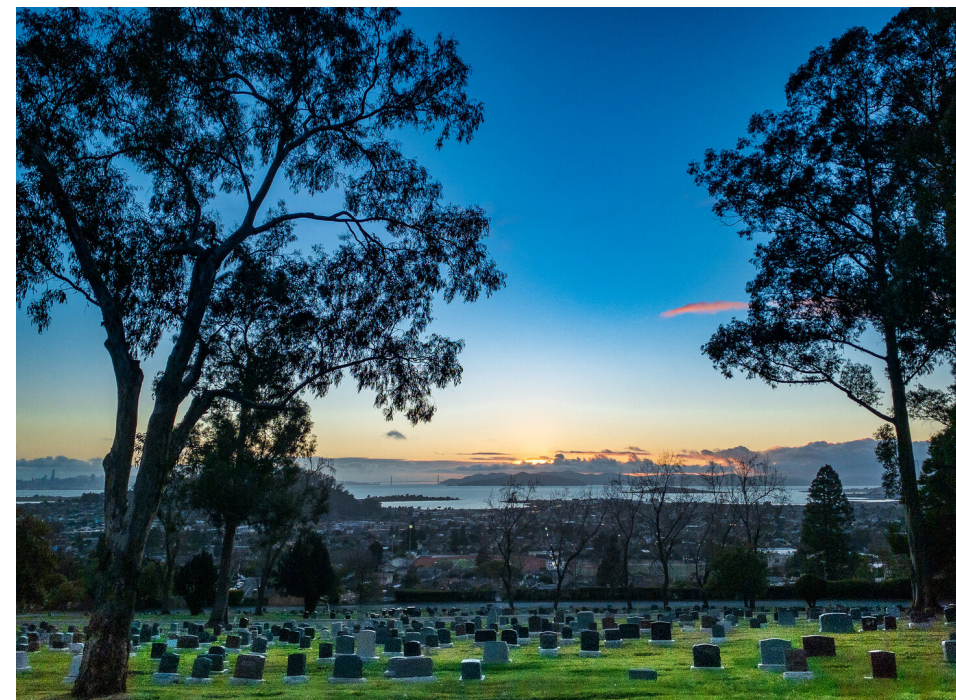
Bringing the Community Together

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JUNE 2021

PUBLICATION OF THE KENSINGTON COMMUNITY COUNCIL

VOLUME 79 NUMBER 5



Left: **Day's End.** I was so moved by the beauty and solemnity of Sunset View Cemetery.
Above: **Wondrous Window.** My daughter spotted this picturesque circular cutout in the fence at 54 Stratford Road. All photos by Robert Becker.

Walking Through COVID

By Robert Becker

“You’re on mute.” “Can you hear me now?” “Sorry, you’re frozen.” Ugh! Just another typical eight-hour marathon of exhausting Zoom calls.

As has been the case on most weekdays for more than a year, I’m hunkered down in what my wife likes to call my “studio apartment.” My butt’s been planted in my chair since 8am, and my fair skin hasn’t seen the light of day yet. But now it’s 4pm. Time to lace up my Sauconys and head out on what’s become my COVID ritual—a daily walk throughout Kensington’s charming neighborhoods. After having to make one too many decisions over Zoom calls, I barely have it in me to make one last decision as I head out of my house on Amherst Avenue. But as I hit the sidewalk in front of our house, I need to make one more decision...do I turn left or turn right?

Today I’ll turn left and head up the hills to Kensington Hilltop Elementary where I’ll walk the Olde School Trail. While passing dog walkers and dodging mountain bikers, I’ll take in the vistas

of Tilden Park, and wait just long enough for others to leave so I can find a moment of solitude. That’s when I’ll snap a “timeless” photo with no one else around.

On another day, I’ll leave my house and walk down the hill, north on Arlington to the delightful Norwood Avenue, one of my favorite “country roads” in Kensington. I’ll follow that along to Highgate to Franciscan and then into the wondrous, peaceful, and panoramic Sunset Cemetery. Before COVID, I had never set foot inside the cemetery. Now, I’ve already told my wife I want to be buried there! That may sound dark, but if you’ve ever strolled through this cemetery, you’ve probably thought about being laid to rest there too.

On other days, I’ll walk out and turn right, heading up Yale Avenue and across Rugby Road. Here, I’ll often bump into neighborhood cats who can’t wait to meow hello and pose for pictures. And when I’m feeling adventurous, I’ll head down our quaint Kensington walking paths—Ardmore to Coventry to Stratford to

See Walking, page 8

State of the Market

April 2021 - May 12, 2021

Listings

Number of listings	1
Avg. List Price	\$1,476,000
Avg. Square footage	2,557
Avg. List Price Cost Per Sq. Ft.	\$581.00
Avg. Days on the market	6

Pending Sales

Number of Pending Sales	6
Avg. List Price	\$1,214,000
Avg. Square footage	1,517
Avg. List Price Cost Per Sq. Ft.	\$813.00
Avg. Days on the Market	14

Sales April 2021 to present

Number of Solds	5 (Per MLS)	Avg. Square footage	2,073
Avg. List Price	\$1,202,000	Avg. Sales Price Cost Per Sq. Ft.	\$792.00
Avg. List Price Cost Per Sq. Ft.	\$596.00	Avg. Days on the market	11
Avg. Sales Price	\$1,608,000		

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Kensington Update

NEW LISTINGS



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1505 Arlington Boulevard, El Cerrito

All level living and level into the handsome mid-century Rancher. Mount Tamalpais sunset view. Beautifully updated! Three bedrooms and two baths. Spacious deck leads to a wonderful garden.
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8547 Terrace Drive, El Cerrito

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1201 Brickyard Way #210, Point Richmond

Two bedroom and two baths. Excellent floor plan and stunning panoramic Bay views.
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1630 Julian Court, El Cerrito

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Offered at \$1,488,000; Sold for \$1,720,000 with 3 offers

If you are considering selling or simply wish to know the value of your home in today's market, call me. The conversation is confidential and complementary.



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PUBLIC SAFETY REMINDER



What's In Your Wildfire Plan?

Does your family have an emergency plan for an evacuation? Does your plan include a designated meeting location outside the danger zone? What's Plan B? How about your pets? Do you have a pre-packed go-bag(s)? Your plan should include a check-in with someone out of the affected area (text messages may be most reliable). Does your neighborhood have a plan with backups to assist neighbors with mobility or health issues? Have a plan and stay prepared! —Paul Moss

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.

JULY-AUGUST DEADLINES

Advertising Deadline ❖ JUNE 8
Editorial Deadline ❖ JUNE 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.

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Letters to the Editor

The Public Safety Building Belongs to Kensington

Dear Editor:

Lost in the recent discussion over the decision by the KFPD to unilaterally plan to eject the police from their joint home was the decades-long effort by citizens of Kensington—and the boards of both districts—that gave us the PSB in the first place.

According to *Outlook* archives, the story starts almost 75 years ago, in October 1947, when at a joint meeting, members of both boards agreed that “both fire and police should be housed at the new site,” and the land was purchased. Then, as now, the problem faced was how to pay for the new building. It would take another twenty years to find a solution.

Through most of this time, each district was funded by setting a separate yearly tax-rate-per-\$100-assessed-value, and reserves were small. Each was housed in separate, very suboptimal quarters—with the fire department a mostly-volunteer force. In 1957, both districts collaborated on funding the architectural survey and planning of the PSB, but other pressing financial needs stopped it from continuing at that time.

In the mid-1960s, the districts collaboratively restarted the project with strong support from the community. This time, Kensington was aided by the passage of a state law enabling financing of construction of the PSB through a low-cost mechanism available specifically to fire departments (the main reason the KFPD has title today).

In late 1970, an all-caps headline in the *Outlook* trumpeted “NEW FIRE-POLICE BUILDING OPENS,” the article noting that the ribbon-cutting ceremony was done jointly by Charles Bower and Lee Silvera, fire and police directors from the time when the original lots were purchased. It also lauded the many who contributed to the project “in order that a facility best serving Kensington could be built at the most reasonable cost.”

These values have served us well in the past, and our KFPD and KPPCSD board members should be epitomizing them, not fighting them. Decisions regarding the PSB should not be rushed in opposition to the interests of the citizens of Kensington. After all, the PSB belongs to all of us—and it was built for both our districts.

Rick Artis

Why You Should Care about Fire-Only PSB Decisions

Dear Editor:

Despite recent joint-district board discussions, the fire board has decided to occupy the entire Public Safety Building, a decision that took several KPPCSD (police) board members by surprise. Kensington needs a thorough plan incorporating not just costs to upgrade the PSB, but a model of all critical fundamentals: relocating and housing the police long-term, uncertainties regarding inflation for construction, design, rents, and future revenues, among other variables. This integrated analysis must include realistic ranges for required tax or bond funding in the short- and long-term for both districts, even if it is accurate that the fire district can pay for the building. The KPPCSD has increased its special tax every year and still runs barely above break-even—the district’s tax allocation from the state is inadequate.

The May 12 fire board documentation states they “have expressed possible financial assistance to the KPPCSD ... but nothing specific has been proposed or voted on.” Both temporary and permanent relocation are seriously expensive. Both districts are funded by precisely the same citizens primarily through taxes, yet the fire board has presented nothing meeting even elementary financial planning standards to convince constituents they know the likely ranges of financial consequences for Kensington. What will Kensington end up paying in total? We insist it is only responsible that a comprehensive joint-district plan, including required tax or bond burdens, be presented publicly before, not after, decisions are made on these expensive actions: the minimal requirement for competent management of public funds. We oppose any final decision unless consequences for both districts can be fully justified financially.

We urge all Kensington residents who care about community issues, including fire and police funding, to attend the Kensington Property Owners Association (KPOA) Annual Meeting on Saturday June 5, from 10-11:30am by Zoom, at <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86019636291>. Speakers include the two district general managers, a home safety-hardening expert, regional parks fire officials, our county supervisor on rezoning and the view ordinance and paths, and the two department chiefs on evacuation planning. You will have opportunities to ask questions. Also, join or renew KPOA membership on our new website: www.kpoa.net.

Rob Firmin, KPOA President

Ed. Note: Jim Watt’s Citizen Forum on page 6 also addresses this issue.

Out with the Bad, Let the Good Grow

Dear Editor:

A year ago I wrote to the *Outlook* urging residents to harden our neighborhoods against wildfire by removing and replacing the “worst” plants and trees. I am writing again now to thank those who stepped up and made changes, and as a reminder to everyone who hasn’t yet acted.

Eucalyptus isn’t the only “bad” tree in fire country. Fir, spruce, palm, and yew trees are also especially prone to igniting and spreading fire. Please act now to remove these plants, along with juniper and cypress.

Walking around Kensington I see many properties where the removal of these nuisance plants would not even require replacement with anything new. In many cases, safer plants are already growing among the most dangerous ones, and will have room to spread nicely once the “bad guys” are removed.

When Kensington properties are prepared for sale, the old, dated juniper is ripped out. Why not do it now and enjoy the new look while you still live here? You also get the satisfaction of having taken action to help yourself and your neighbors prepare for wild-fire. If you’re hesitating because you don’t know how to replace what you need to take out, track me down, and I will brainstorm with you. I have ideas and am easy to find.

If you need financial assistance with removal, visit diablofiresafe.org and click on “Vegetation Removal” (far left column, under Programs) and submit an application to the Diablo Fire Safe Council. Their website also offers lists of favorable and unfavorable plants. Email them at DFSCMiller@comcast.net or call (510) 282-1265. The Kensington Fire Protection District (KFPD) matches funds raised by Diablo Fire Safe Council, to support this critically important program.

Sylvia Elsbury

Traffic Etiquette in the Hills

Dear Editor:

Are you tired of having people almost sideswipe you as you’re making your way up

Kensington’s cluttered streets? Concerned that your insurance will skyrocket because someone could dent you as they’re racing downhill?

Here’s what the traffic laws say (California Vehicle Code 21661): “Whenever upon any grade the width of the roadway is insufficient to permit the passing of vehicles approaching from opposite directions at the point of meeting, the driver of the vehicle descending the grade shall yield the right-of-way to the vehicle ascending the grade and shall, if necessary, back his vehicle to a place in the highway where it is possible for the vehicles to pass.”

That means that if you’re going downhill, you yield right-of way to the person going uphill, so you have to pull into a driveway space or whatever area will take you off the main track. This information also appears in the California Driver’s License Manual, and I checked the information with our Traffic Safety Officer Brad Harms (please contact him with questions).

As for people who race downhill on narrow congested streets (such as on Amherst between Princeton and Arlington), please remember that there are children and pets in these residences and people with limited mobility crossing the streets. We often don’t realize how fast we’re driving downhill! Drive defensively. And stay safe.

Kevin Padian

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To the Cla

Last year’s seniors had it rough. This year’s graduates had it rougher. With COVID-19, ACTs, and complicating a two-year college application process. Theater and music classes were cancelled. As many of us have found, enrollment was a challenge. But juniors and seniors are on a quest, social and intellectual and emotional. It’s a time of our lives. We salute each of you who have persisted and gained wisdom that this experience

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#613099, 2021710 · 510.381.2101



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Ratoosh Group
#1820096, 901536 · 510.919.5499



1142 EVELYN AVENUE, ALBANY
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County Starts Homebound Vaccinations

From the Office of Supervisor John Gioia

We know that some people are unable to leave their homes to get vaccinated. To meet this need, Contra Costa Health Services is offering COVID-19 vaccines for people who are homebound.

Perhaps you are bed-bound and need a gurney for transportation. Or you have an illness or condition that restricts your ability to leave home. Or you have another kind of restriction that you describe on the appointment request form.

Getting that appointment is easy. The county has a simple online form, which can be submitted by an individual or by his or her caregiver. You can also call to make an appointment at 1-833-829-2626.

Scheduling for home vaccines started May 17, so call or go online now to make your appointment. The homebound vaccination program is another example of how hard our health department is working to vaccinate as many people as possible, knowing that individuals have different needs and face different barriers to healthcare.

Please tell those it might help about the homebound vaccination service. And for those who haven't gotten their shot, it's easy! West County has multiple clinics, including walk-up options, with no appointment required.

Check the county Health Services vaccination website for locations and details. The county is vaccinating anyone age 16 and over from anywhere. You don't need to live or work in the county to get vaccinated here.

Minors need permission from a parent or guardian. Vaccination helps all of us stay healthy. Thanks for doing your part!



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Class of 2021

...gher. Their junior year was cut short in March, disrupting SATs, This past year was spent in front of computer screens. Sports, art, forced quiet time uncoupled from distractions has unseen benefits. spiritual; apart from freshman year in college, it's the least quiet grown during these past fourteen months. We need the unique experience has gifted you.



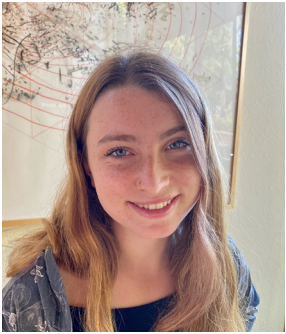
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KPOA Meeting to Address Challenges

By Rob Firmin, President, KPOA

The Kensington Property Owners Association (KPOA) annual community issues meeting addresses challenges that affect our community, your property and your safety. KPOA invites all Kensington residents, members or not, to attend Saturday June 5, from 10-11:30am on Zoom: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86019636291>. Most prominent are the Public Safety Building (PSB) upgrade/location of the police department and wildfire safety. KPOA continues to advocate fire district and police district boards' collaboration to investigate alternatives and develop an affordable joint plan to house both departments. Despite recent efforts, the boards of both districts have not developed a clear path forward. The district general managers will speak. There will be public Q&A for them and all speakers.

Sheryl Drinkwater, Oakland Fire Safe Council member, will present effective home-hardening practices to protect homes from wildfire damage. Two East Bay Regional Park District (EBRPD) fire officials will address the Tilden Park fuel load that threatens Kensington. Our new Police Chief Michael Gancasz and Fire Chief Michael Pigoni will discuss evacuation planning.

KPOA is also concerned about the proposed County General Plan that could increase housing density, which could decrease wildfire safety—especially to adjacent homes, and hinder evacuation along our narrow streets. Supervisor John Gioia will speak about the proposed modification and more, including the tree ordinance, paths and COVID. Support us by renewing your membership or joining on our new website: www.kpoa.net.

No Room! April's police log and much more will find a home in the July/August issue.



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The Fire Board’s Expensive Heist

By Jim Watt

The May fire board (KFPD) packet contains eight pages covering 24 bullet point questions or reasons justifying the board’s convoluted rationale for hijacking the Public Safety Building (PSB). After such extensive verbiage it’s hard to believe that so many important items were either overlooked or conveniently ignored. Here are some important ones.

Ownership: Just because the fire board has legal ownership of the PSB does not mean it can expel the police. The PBS was built for joint use by fire and police, and the police have as much right to its space as fire does to theirs. The financing arrangement between fire and police contains no termination clause that would allow the police adequate time to find a replacement location—because expulsion was never contemplated.

Fire Costs: The 2021 cost to retrofit the PSB for fire use only is \$8.0 million, but does not include costs for an elevator, relocating an electrical room and inflation. These extra costs will push the total price tag to at least \$10.0 million.

Police Costs: At this point police costs are unknown. Is it best to find a new location or relocate to a non-conforming, vacant space next to Ace Hardware that will require providing handicap access (currently there are fifteen stairs to the premises), interior retrofitting, and parking for seven police cars plus personal daytime vehicles for up to four officers and three or more staff and visitors? All told, this will take up more than half the 25 parking spaces, which are already often in short supply, and greatly impact the current small supply of existing parking. Either a new location or one next to Ace Hardware will be costly, time-consuming, and controversial.

Administrative Costs: Both fire and police have greatly increased their administrative personnel and outside consultants (now costing over \$500,000/year). Finding space for these duplicative staffs will add additional unknown costs.

Available Cash: By start of construction, fire will have about \$5 million of available cash, far short of the \$10+ million needed. Additional funds of \$3-5 million are only available if El Cerrito agrees to restructure its contract that requires the fire district to set aside funds for services and equipment. The police are worse off, with only about \$500,000 of non-committed cash. Both agencies are likely to require additional financing requiring property owner tax increases.

So why would we move forward with this plan that does not take into account the total consequences? Why have we given up on staffing both agencies in the PSB? Since when did codes or common sense require that we enlarge the PSB upstairs living space for three firefighters to 2,700SF, roughly 800SF more than they currently have? Where are the codes that require them to have about 700SF of TV and dining area or a 325SF fitness room?

Why aren’t these enhancements reduced by 350SF so the police have essential upstairs workspace? Doesn’t it seem illogical and economically unfair that Kensington taxpayers pay all the costs to retrofit a station where 40 percent of calls go into El Cerrito? Most important, should a five-member fire board be allowed to make such an expensive decision, affecting residential property taxes plus unknown police impacts, without a vote of the public?

It astounds me that a simple fix can be so drawn out, complicated, and expensive, when accommodating both agencies in the existing PSB provides a cost-effective solution. The current proposed hijack reaffirms the need to consolidate both districts into one, thereby reducing duplicate overhead costs and creating a single board with responsibility for both fire and police and run by board members intent on reducing costs, not on building an expensive and unnecessary edifice.

Bird of the Month:Wild Turkey

More specifically, Travis the Traffic Turkey. As anyone knows who has parked near the library or Arlington Community Church, Travis is a constant, morning, noon, and night (‘til roosting time, of course). Travis enjoys regarding his strutting self in the reflection of freshly waxed cars and hubcaps. He also strolls on the Arlington, thus his name (and possibly his obituary, but we’re getting ahead of ourselves).

Travis and his brethren, along with Muscovy Ducks, are the only domesticated bird species native to the Americas. Many think that turkeys should be the national bird and not the more aggressive eagle. Despite their reputation, turkeys are intelligent, have very good memories, and are highly adaptable to many climates and habitats. Next time you’re up at the library or the park, say hey to Travis. —Linnea Due, photo by Ford Whitefield-Brewer



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K E N S I N G T O N

Community Education

KCC Summer Camp

Registration is now open

KCC is offering 9 weeks of camp beginning June 14th - August 13th



Camp is from 9:00am - 5:00pm Monday through Friday

Cost is \$350 per camper, per week

Register On-line: KensingtonCommunityCouncil.Org/kcc-day-camp

Kensington Summer Day Camp 2021

KCC Summer Camp is filled with outdoor team games, arts & crafts, dance, sports, Olympic week, cooking, tennis, and much more! We hope to be enjoying the newly renovated Kensington Community Center this summer, adding a kitchen, tennis courts, basketball courts, classrooms and large grassy areas to the camp's foot print - all in one area, no need to travel anywhere else!

Camp provides a positive and nurturing environment for students entering grades 1st through 6th in FALL 2021. Campers learn new skills, develop new friendships, and have an exciting summer!

Campers will be grouped in pods of 12 according to their age and friends (when possible). Teacher Vicky Brodt will host a craft project every week. We will be performing some cooking magic in the new community center's kitchen and with our outdoor BBQ. Each week tennis instructor, Kim Roots, will have you swinging a tennis racket to improve your back stroke and improve your tennis game. Our enthusiastic camp counselors, many of them former campers, will engage the pods in a variety of sports and games making sure there is plenty of laughter, team work, and fun!



KASEP

I am pleased to announce that online registration for the Fall 2021 classes will begin August 31st and the first week of classes will begin the week of September 13th. We have the perfect setting for small class sizes, our classroom spaces are well ventilated, and we are fortunate to have lots of beautiful outdoor space to use for our recreation classes.

Thanks again to all of the parents and the greater community who have supported KCC and KASEP during the pandemic. We look forward to supporting you in the future.



KCC Adult Classes

In-person Yoga Begins April 19th

Monday and Wednesday 9:00-10:00am - \$15 drop in fee
Community Center Lawn

If there is rain or poor air quality the class will be cancelled and not relocated inside

Zumba in the Park

Saturdays 9:00-10:00 a.m. - \$15 drop in fee
Community Center Lawn

If there is rain or poor air quality the class will be cancelled and not relocated inside

Virtual Adult Exercise Classes

Stretch & Strength Wednesdays 11:30-12:30pm

Pilates Saturdays 9:00-10am

Register at KensingtonCommunityCouncil.Org/adult-classes

Tennis Court Reservations: For weekends and holidays only, beginning at 9am.
Call the KCC office for info. Court Fees: 45-min. singles reservation: Residents: \$2

KCC/KASEP Office: 59 Arlington Ave., Bldg. E (Across the grassy field above the tennis courts in Kensington Park), Kensington CA 94707. E-mail: kccrec@yahoo.com, or call 525-0292. Our website is: www.kensingtoncommunitycouncil.org.





Walking
...from front page

quaint Kensington walking paths—Ardmore to Coventry to Stratford to Berkeley Park and down to our own Kensington Circle. In under ten minutes, I can “window shop” the entire little commercial strip and grab a latte at Semifreddi’s.

These walks are not just about my physical wellbeing and logging 10,000 steps a day. They’ve been more about finding an opportunity to disconnect from our always on, connected world. And an opportunity to be truly present, and in the moment, with what’s right there in front of you each step of the way.

I’ve been stopping to smell the roses, and every other floral decadence, throughout Kensington’s lush neighborhoods. I’ve been admiring the amazing diversity of architecture throughout our town where no two houses are alike. And I’ve been fueling my passion for photography by capturing the everyday beauty of our town in ways not often seen.

Since the start of the pandemic, I must have walked literally a thousand miles through every street in Kensington, and very likely right by your house...and I must say, it never gets old. There’s always changing light, weather, and blossoms—and new ways of looking at the same things.

I’ve seen neighbors like you walking the streets during COVID too. You’ve probably walked by the same houses a million times, but have you ever stopped to admire the artistry and precision of the gardening out front? While walking along your favorite trail, have you stopped to admire a new and different view? Ever gotten a close look inside that vintage car that’s been parked on the street for ages begging for someone to admire and photograph it?

As we get closer to the end of the pandemic, and as I consider heading back to some sense of a flexible commute to my job in the City, I will always treasure the luxury I’ve had to be able to walk our town like never before. And I encourage you to get out there too, even after the pandemic ends. Get out there and admire and appreciate, and if you so choose, photograph, all the intricacies and idiosyncrasies Kensington has to offer.

See more photos at www.robertmbecker.com/kensingtonwalks



Left: **Full Circle**. I took this with my Go-Pro and 3-way arm. Above: **Blue on Richardson Road**. Even the turkeys on the driveway couldn’t help but get a closer look at this eclectic home! Photos by Robert Becker.

Community Center Can Finally Strut Its Stuff

By Marti Brown, KPPCSD GM

If Governor Newsom’s commitment to reopen the state on June 15 stands, the KPPCSD is planning to open the renovated Community Center for use by KCC, other regular groups, and renters. We have not looked closely at the governor and/or the county’s directives for the June 15 reopening. However, we plan to follow the County Public Health Officer’s guidelines. As the date approaches, we will have more details regarding public health and safety protocol and procedure.

The plan is to open the center for all users as scheduling permits. Staff will recommend at the June KPPCSD board meeting a new fee schedule with proposed increases for park and facility rentals. An FAQ sheet about using or renting the Community Center will be posted on the KPPCSD website closer to opening. Rentals can be arranged by filling out the rental form found on the website under the Park and Recreation section.

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