

KCC

...from Page 1

rearview mirror.

If you have ever donated in the past, used our programs for your kids, plan to use KASEP in the future, or value the important information that you find in the *Outlook*, please make a generous donation to the KCC. In times like this, we're reminded

of how interconnected we all are. Thank you for being part of our community. Without you, none of it is possible.

Please use the green KCC Annual Fund Drive envelope in this edition of the *Outlook* and make checks payable to the KCC. Or you can donate online through the donor button at the top of our webpage: kensingtoncommunitycouncil.org

Above all, stay safe and well.

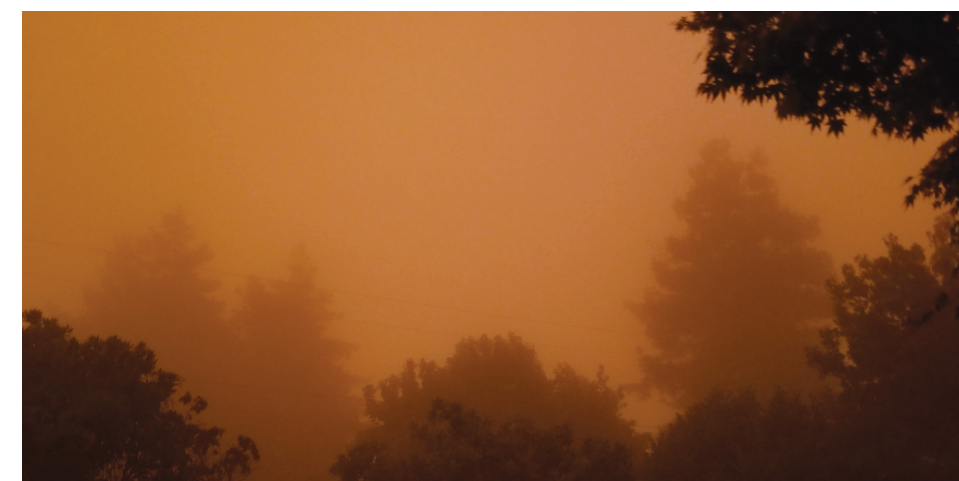


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VOLUME 78 NUMBER 7



September 9 looked like *End Days* in Kensington—and everywhere else in Northern California. Smoke held high in the atmosphere turned the sky a bruised dark orange. Photo by Ford Whitefield Brewer.

KCC—and Our Community—Need Your Help

By Becky Stephens, president, KCC

As COVID-19 continues to spread, the future has never felt so unpredictable. These are challenging times for us all, and we hope the community of Kensington is in good spirits and good health! Right now, the Kensington Community Council (KCC) is doing everything possible to sustain daily operations and provide services to our community.

But we have never needed your help more! Because of the pandemic lockdown, we canceled the May issue of the Outlook, Spring KASEP classes, and our summer day camp. The KCC relies heavily on community members to sustain its programs and the Outlook through advertising in the Outlook, classes that are paid for by families, and generous donations from gracious neighbors and small local founda-

tions. We are reminded daily that in these precarious times, every dollar matters to keep our beloved KCC operational.

Cancelling our classes and summer camp was a very hard decision, but with our limited space and facilities, we felt that safety was our first priority. As you can imagine, this was a devastating blow to our staff, to the kids, and to our bottom line.

While there's a lot of uncertainty, we know that we need to adapt fast to our changing reality. That's why we pivoted and put over 30 of our favorite classes online. Kim, our tennis coach, is stepping up to offer tennis camp to ten lucky kids. But this all comes with a heavy price, and we need your help to keep the doors open while we wait to put this pandemic in the

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Tune in to a Virtual Candidate Forum

By Melissa Holmes Snyder, KIC

In this year of Covid-19, the Kensington Improvement Club (KIC) and the Kensington Property Owners Association (KPOA) had to rethink how we reach out to bring our community together. In September, we had the Town Hall meeting; now we thank goodness for Internet options as we present the Candidates' Forum. When handed lemons, KPOA and KIC made lemonade.

On October 10, KIC/KPOA will host the candidates running for our two special district boards, the Kensington Police Protection and Community Services District (KPPCSD) and the Kensington Fire Protection District (KFPD). There are four candidates running for two seats on KPPCSD and three candidates running for two seats on KFPD.

Questions specific to each board will be asked of each candidate for that board. Please email your questions to KICpost@gmail.com. Questions will be formulated based upon those received from the community.

Please join us for an informative meeting with the candidates. This is the Zoom link for the 2020 candidates' Forum on October 10 at 10am. No password is required for this Zoom meeting. <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82221122748>

KIC is the oldest of the K-Groups, having been formed in 1921, almost a century ago, to promote and foster the

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SPECIAL ELECTION COVERAGE STARTS PAGE FOUR

no question that local police and firefighter unions have the legal right to participate in local politics. But in Kensington’s two small special districts devoted primarily to police and fire, the only way to maintain un-conflicted administration is for all candidates to set the standard and reject monetary or in-kind donations.

Rob Firmin, President, KPOA

Jim Watt Earns My Trust

Dear Editor:

Kensington, like the rest of the world, faces very challenging times. We should elect Jim Watt to the fire board to help lead us through them. Jim, a retired financial analyst and consultant who has lived in Kensington for decades, cares deeply about our future. For many years, he's been actively involved in our community's financial decisions through his thoughtful proposals in public meetings, membership of the KPPCSD Finance Committee, and appointment to the Parks Building Committee (tasked with the Community Center renovation).

There is a reason why the East Bay Times calls Jim a "fiscal watchdog,” and why the *Outlook* asked him to explain Kensington's finances in a 2016 front page article. He knows what he’s talking about.

I’ve been fortunate to serve alongside Jim on both the Finance Committee and the Community Center renovation. He’s collaborative; he’s willing to change his mind, and he uses his energy and expertise to find solutions, not just to identify problems. His kids and grandkids live here: he’s engaged because he cares about the Kensington he’s helped build and that they will inherit.

Fire safety is of essential importance to Kensington. This terrible fire season in California has reminded us all what is at stake. A COVID-caused economic crisis and accelerating impacts of climate change likely mean increasing fire prevention costs set against decreased revenue for our community. We also need to fund a new public safety building.

Every dollar counts. It’s essential that our taxpayer dollars go as far as they can to keep us secure now, and in the future. I trust Jim to do that.

Paula Black

Jim Watt Would Not Help Our Fire Board

Dear Editor:

This is my personal opinion. If Jim Watt is elected to Kensington’s fire board he will displace one of two directors that we desperately need for the next four years. Incumbent Don Dommer has led the effort to renovate the Public Safety Building. He is an architect with intimate knowledge of construction, county and state regulations, and is the only person who can deal effectively and economically with the contractors and agencies we’ll encounter. He is doing all he can to craft a workable solution for both police and fire in the PSB.

Incumbent Larry Nagel is a respected engineer, a thirty-year veteran firefighter and battalion chief who has been instrumental in Kensington’s renewed effort to improve public safety and emergency preparedness. As a CERT captain and longtime board representative to local public safety agencies and districts, Larry is uniquely positioned to lead the district’s effort to organize our neighborhoods and educate the public about preparing for fires and earthquakes. Now more than ever we need both these incumbents to continue on the board.

In my experience, Jim Watt brings nothing to the board. His financial expertise is debated, he seldom attends board meetings, and his candidate statement shows that he doesn’t understand the issues that face us. Besides, the district is in terrific financial shape, with recent administrative crisis behind us, and no problems foreseen in funding the renovation. So Watt would be of little fiduciary help. Kensington is at a crossroads. We need the expertise of our incumbents. Please re-elect directors Dommer and Nagel.

Kevin Padian

Advocate for Fiscal Constraint

Dear Editor,

Jim Watt and I have had numerous discussions over the years regarding the KPPCSD and its issues. And over the years, he educated me on the rising costs of pension liabilities. He always advocates for fiscal constraint.

Now Jim is running for director on the Kensington Fire Protection District board. He wants to bring that same informed, thoughtful analysis to the issues and decisions that need to be made with the Fire Protection District. Jim is familiar with both boards, attends most meetings and will bring his expertise, and collegial spirit to the KFPD board. His platform is for fiscal responsibility and he will no doubt be consistent in his stand for this.

A vote for Jim Watt is a vote for Kensington's best interests.

John Gaccione

One and the Same

Dear Editor:

Mr. Jim Watt is running for Kensington Fire Protection District to offer it his self-professed financial management skills. This is the same Jim Watt who lectured the KPPCSD for years on the need to use financial restraint to cover pensions and maintain adequate reserves. His straining at the gnat might seem impressive at first, but his efforts failed miserably despite his familial ties to a sitting director.

As a years-long member of the KPPCSD Finance Committee he went strangely silent as the board has approved significantly higher operating expenses, thrown monies at consultants like a band of drunken sailors, drastically reduced reserve monies, and is now discussing increasing taxes to cover its financial incompetence.

Do the people of Kensington deserve to suffer Mr. Watt’s gifts yet again? Not unless we have money to burn.

Khoi Dang & Kevin Fitzsimmons

Progress or Return to the Past?

Dear Editor:

Kensington residents have a stark choice in the upcoming election for KPPCSD board director: we can either continue with progress, or go back to the expensive, litigious and frankly dishonest ways of the past.

Today’s KPPCSD board has begun to address its fiscal responsibility and correct the excessive benefits granted by the board that was led by current candidate Lynn Wolter. She approved lifetime benefits for employees and all their dependents after just five years of service with the district! That huge expense is the root of many of the fiscal

problems KPPCSD has contended with for decades.

During her term in the ‘90s, she led the board to a vindictive and losing lawsuit that cost the district \$100,000 in legal fees against Bay View Refuse. Then five years ago, she lobbied the board to deny a six percent rate increase for Bay View which was stipulated in their contract. A court supervised settlement of that fracas resulted in saddling residents with a far worse 21+ percent rate increase. That Bay View contract will be up for renewal during the next term, and the last thing we need is another fiasco like that.

Wolter sat on the search committee that led to the disastrous hire of our former police chief Greg Harman. Harman fired five district secretaries in short order as each discovered his misdeeds. Ultimately, he hired his friend and supporter Lynn Wolter for the position. After the notorious Reno-gate scandal and subsequent cover-up, Harman was fired by the board. On his way out, Harman upgraded Wolter’s position and nearly doubled her hourly pay. According to openpayroll.com, her annual pay was 34.1 percent higher than the national average for government employees. When the district redefined her position, she sued and settled costing the district \$43,000.

I think her election would be very unfortunate and could take us back to a time when Kensington made headlines for all the wrong reasons. I don’t think her motivation for seeking this office is public service. Rather, it seems more like retribution. Re-elect incumbents Hacaj and Nottoli. Please!!

Cathie Kosel

A Critical Kensington Issue

Dear Editor:

As we approach the November election for the KPPCSD board, I reflect that not much has changed regarding the advisability of contracting out for police services since the time of my participation on the KPPCSD Ad Hoc Committee that extensively evaluated this subject. The cost of contracting out police services would be notably higher than managing our own independent department. A decision to contract out would also be, in effect, an abdication of the board's responsibilities to another jurisdiction over whom they would have limited control. As is now the case with our contract for fire services with El Cerrito, Kensington would have no control over personnel compensation and benefits, which are the main drivers of the total contract cost. A decision to contract out would be akin to writing a blank check for police services and giving up direct control of the quality and extent of police services provided. It would be a perfect model for zero accountability.

It is a mystery to me why someone would run for the KPPCSD board with the goal of handing off the board's responsibilities to another jurisdiction. Yet, this appears to be the case for the two incumbents running for re-election. I believe it is critical that we elect individuals who are clearly committed to accepting and executing the responsibilities of the board and representing the best interests of Kensington.

Tim Snyder

Colossal Mistakes Were Made

Dear Editor:

This was the succinct observation of former chief Steve Simpkins after taking over the Kensington Police Department in October 2019. Captain Simpkins came from the Contra Costa Sheriff’s Department; he had seven years experience as the chief in Danville while on loan from the sheriff. He left in May 2020, as he was promoted to Assistant Sheriff. He was hired to bring his considerable expertise to KPD with the hope that he could help reform and modernize the department.

He updated the Policy Manual and Use of Force Policy, introduced body cameras, and brought the system of progressive discipline to the department, enabling tracking the nature and number of disciplinary actions against an officer , and the discipline imposed in each incident. This allows the department to observe patterns of behavior and to have the punishment fit the crime, up to termination.

Simpkins introduced creative recruitment practices, using his large network of contacts, to bring on Officer Brad Harms, a traffic specialist, and current Chief Walt Schuld. Harms introduced a documented warning system for traffic offenders, giving an officer the opportunity to exercise discretion when issuing citations. He also works with the Fire Department on evacuation routes.

Chief Schuld, an experienced chief and city administrator, has brought his own unique perspective to the job. Simpkins recommended that the department contract, if I may use that word, for Internal Affairs investigations involving serious misconduct, and major crime investigations, because these rarely occur in Kensington and require specific skill sets and experience. He prohibited officers from attending board and public meetings, stating it was the chief’s responsibility to represent the department. Mission accomplished.

Simpkins lauded the split of the GM/COP position, noting the obvious conflict and the different skills involved. Kensington is now operating in a best practices environment. As we approach the November election, I ask residents to consider that these long overdue changes are the result of the current board majority splitting the GM/COP position, which presented the opportunity for the good governance practices that have followed. We need to re-elect Eileen Nottoli and Sylvia Hacaj.

Thomas Dean

See Letters, Page 9

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2020 Election Issue

Seven Candidates, Four Seats

by Linnea Due

Kensington hosts two special districts, one governing the police, parks and recreation including the Community Center, and the solid waste contract (Kensington Police Protection and Community Services District or KPPCSD); the other district manages emergency medical and fire prevention and suppression services as well as education surrounding all types of emergencies (Kensington Fire Protection District or KFPD). Two directorships are up for grabs in each district. KPPCSD has fielded four candidates: incumbents Eileen Nottoli and Sylvia Hacaj and challengers Elaine Stelton and Lynn Wolter. The fire district has three vying for the two seats: incumbents Don Dommer and Larry Nagel and challenger Jim Watt.

The *Outlook* election coverage is divided into several sections. In the first, starting on this page, candidates have written their own statements on issues facing the districts. In the second, on pages 6-7, readers will find a personal look at each candidate. Interviews were conducted and written by myself during the last week of August and first week of September.

The third element is a Q&A, with each candidate answering questions pertinent to the two districts. Unfortunately, space did not allow us to print the entire Q&A. Please turn to the *Outlook's* site at www.kensingtonoutlook.com to read the full Q&A.

To learn more, be sure to attend the virtual candidates' forum put on by KPOA and KIC on October 10. See story on page 1.

KFPD Candidates' Statements

Don Dommer: I am an architect who has lived in Kensington since 1985 and served on the KFPD for twenty years from 1995 to present with a five-year gap. 1995 marked when KFPD contracted to provide fire service, fire staffing, and fire chief services from El Cerrito fire to replace the failed Kensington fire department.

With one other KFPD board member, a new business plan was developed over the next ten years with a balanced and healthy condition. This included replacing two old fire engines, two building renovations we undertook, a limited fire water improvement project with EBMUD to supply more fire water. Other administrative work included review and negotiating portions of the El Cerrito contract. I am a current member of the Finance Committee.

In 1996 a structural engineering firm determined that the Public Safety Building was not safe, requiring a major seismic upgrade and modernization of operational and functional facilities. There are many decisions to discuss and approve for the board process. One important project is the Public Safety project underway.

Over the last five years we, as an Ad Hoc Committee, have undertaken extensive studies to renovate or replace the existing building with a new fire and police facility. We quickly found out that there is not a one-acre suitable piece of land.

With KPPCSD's four years of delays we are closing in to determine if the police will be continuing to operate in the renovated Public Safety building. To date they do not have an alternate location.

As soon as possible we will be gearing up, starting with an architect, developing final design and beginning construction and hopefully going out to bid in May 2021 and occupancy about a year later. I ask you to re-elect me so I can continue work started and other important KFPD issues.

Laurence Nagel: I have been a director of the Kensington Fire Protection District for nine years now, and I have thoroughly enjoyed working with both firefighters and board members. I have been involved in firefighting for my entire life, first as a suppression crewman fighting mountain fires in Kern County during my college summers, and then as a volunteer firefighter in New Jersey, where I rose through the ranks and served three years as battalion chief. In my day job I am an electrical engineer involved in the design of integrated circuits. I earned all three degrees at my beloved alma mater, UC Berkeley, and I had a twenty-year career at Bell Laboratories in New Jersey. At present, I have my own consulting firm where I work as an expert witness in patent litigation cases and trade secret misappropriation cases. I am also very active in my church, the Unitarian Universalist Church in Kensington, where I currently serve as the treasurer. My wife, Jean Gleason, and I also find time to travel to visit our seven grandchildren as well as numerous vacation locations.

I think my experience as an engineer and a firefighter makes me uniquely qualified to be a director of the KFPD. I bring a passion for firefighting to my job as director. We have one of the finest fire departments in Contra Costa County, and I am proud to be a part of it. During my tenure as director, we have accomplished a great deal, but there is still much to do. The threat of wildfire has become much more severe, and we are actively working on establishing evacuation routes as well as home-hardening and fuel reduction. We also have an aging firehouse in bad need of refurbishment so that it will be able to withstand an earthquake. We also need to continue to provide the superb response to medical emergencies that the citizens of Kensington rely on. There is much to do, and I am looking forward to helping get it done.

Jim Watt My wife and I moved from Berkeley to Kensington in 1968. I was local scout-master for five years and led week-long backpacking trips in the Sierras for 25 years. I have an MBA degree and a career developing major projects involving legal documentation, design and construction. I've served on the KPPCSD finance committee for six years and attended most police/fire board meetings. I understand the needs and finances of both boards and believe there is a solution to the upgrade of the Public Safety Building (PSB) that will benefit both fire and police and limit costs to Kensington taxpayers.

The fire board has submitted plans to the county to bring the PSB up to current seismic safety codes and enlarge the living quarters of three firefighters on duty 24/7. This plan will expand the upstairs living space from 1,900 square feet to 2,800 square feet, and eliminate about 500 square feet currently used by the police department. This will not add any new rooms to the current space consisting of: 3 bedrooms, 2-1/2 baths, kitchen, dining, TV, and fitness areas. The proposed plan will rearrange and enlarge these functions at an extra cost of perhaps \$2.5 million and use the upstairs police space, thereby leaving the police with just 927 square feet on the first floor.

This upgrade of the PSB is estimated to cost \$5 million, plus an additional \$2 million in temporary relocation costs and administrative space requirements. This will absorb all the available cash reserves of both the fire and police districts and require debt financing or a property tax increase. With depleted resources, the fire district will have limited available funds to cover important projects that will reduce threats to the community from wildfires and earthquakes.

The enlargement of the upstairs firefighter living space is unnecessary and very expensive. It's time to pursue a plan that meets seismic requirements, works for both fire and police and is economical. A vote for Jim Watt will signal that taxpayers want a plan that works for both fire and police districts at an affordable cost.

KPPCSD Candidates' Statements

Sylvia Hacaj: For four years I have served Kensington as a volunteer director on the KPPCSD board to make our town a safe, fiscally sustainable, and an enjoyable place to raise a family and age at home. I stand on my record of accomplishments.

I led a private-public partnership that completed a beautiful renovation of our 65-year-old community center \$80,000 under budget, and brought it up to today's seismic safety, accessibility, and energy-efficiency standards.

I've worked hard over my term to hold the police accountable to higher standards of professionalism. I was a key vote in hiring a turn-around expert police chief who helped shift the culture of our police department. Over the past year, the KPD has refocused on residents' top concerns: traffic safety, crime prevention, community engagement, and emergency evacuation. I strengthened police accountability by voting for body-worn cameras and pushing for revised use-of-force policies.

I have made tough but smart choices to stabilize our finances for the long haul. I've established a "rainy day" fund, reined in medical inflation costs with our new police contract, and refinanced our police pension debt, saving taxpayers nearly \$2 million. I pushed to restructure our district's administration so it operates professionally and efficiently.

For the first time in its 70-plus year history, Kensington has an experienced, civilian general manager who executes on the town's priorities with no conflict of interest. I fulfilled my promise to separate the role of GM from the Chief of Police just three months into my term.

We've made great strides over the last four years, and we can't go backward. If re-elected, I will ensure the continued safety of our community with essential law enforcement services and will invest in Kensington Park, the jewel of our town; make food composting a reality; ensure our police and fire departments are housed in a single Public Safety Building; improve KPPCSD-sponsored programming to help older adults lead vital and connected lives as their needs change.

You can count on my experience and judgment for a well-operated, resilient, and responsive Kensington. Join my campaign: www.Sylvia4Kensington.com

Eileen Nottoli: I am proud of the accomplishments during my term on the KPPCSD board, beginning with separating the combined General Manager/Chief of Police position into two positions and hiring an experienced general manager. I worked with the GM to onboard an interim chief of police who stabilized the department. I managed moving dispatch services to a less expensive and more reliable provider. I approved the purchase of new desktop and mobile computers, body cameras, and three new hybrid police vehicles.

I oversaw the district's first comprehensive two-year and projected five-year budgets. I championed the use of Nixle, an emergency alert system, to keep residents safe in an emergency and supported revamping our website to be searchable and ADA-compliant.

I voted to renovate the Community Center into a beautiful, structurally safe space for Kensington recreation and programs for children and adults, began the removal of poison oak and dead trees in Kensington Park, and added new recycling and garbage cans to commercial spaces. After a detailed study, I helped hire new employees to add professional financial oversight and modernize our payroll system. I led the revision of the district's Policy and Procedure Manual.

Following the Ad Hoc Committee's recommendations, we hired a consultant to study our police department and recommend improvements; several have been implemented including a three-year salary deal that saves the district money. We issued a request for proposals to obtain estimates for full or partial police services, but none of the four law enforcement agencies responded.

My professional life as a chemist began after obtaining my PhD from Northwestern University. After obtaining my JD from the University of San Francisco, I worked as an environmental attorney advising clients on compliance with federal, state, and local laws. I've volunteered for fourteen years at Guide Dogs for the Blind as a puppy socializer, docent, and foster care provider. I coordinate the Chemistry Olympiad for high school students and chair the Outstanding Chemistry High School Teacher award committee. I have made over seventy-five quilt tops and quilts for the Children's Quilt Project, which gives quilts to children in hospitals and foster care.

Elaine Stelton: I had the good fortune of growing up in this community, attending Hilltop Elementary School, and returning to Kensington after many years living out of state. It is now my desire to give back to the community that has given so much to me.

I understand the value of public safety. My own children grew up in a community where they had to be escorted everywhere, day or night, because of safety concerns. The peace of mind we and our children enjoy in Kensington is unique.

Kensington's autonomy rests on maintaining an independent police department. Outsourcing our police services makes us vulnerable to being annexed by El Cerrito. In a recent candidates' forum, both incumbents were questioned about this risk, and neither

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said “No” to annexation by El Cerrito. I want Kensington to maintain its self-governance that has served our community well for over 70 years.

At the same meeting, the incumbents introduced their plan to use the park to house the KPPCSD administration. I want to protect the park and park buildings, and preserve them for recreation and open space.

I have substantial experience with local government from serving on a board that advocates for property owners’ rights, from running community enrichment programs for children and seniors, and as a property owner who has managed several buildings. These roles taught me the importance of receiving input from all residents and the need to protect our most vulnerable citizens.

I will address the KPPCSD’s financial challenges and spend taxpayer dollars responsibly by leveraging my experience in management and local governance. This includes working hand-in-hand with our fire district to secure housing for our police department and fulfilling joint public safety objectives: evacuation planning and training and coordinating closely with the town’s CERT groups. After four years, the incumbents have not lived up to their responsibility to prepare the community for natural disasters and emergencies.

If elected, I will work hard to protect your safety and your biggest investments: the value of your home and your quality of life in Kensington.

Lynn Wolter: I’m running for the Kensington Police Protection and Community Services District (KPPCSD) to preserve Kensington’s long tradition of locally controlled public safety services provided by our independent Kensington Police Department and continued stewardship over Kensington’s park and recreation facilities. Local control means Kensington taxpayers control costs and services.

I grew up in San Francisco and learned about Kensington while attending UC Berkeley. My husband and I purchased our first home here in 1978. Soon thereafter, I joined the Kensington Property Owners Association and organized the community’s first agency-wide emergency preparedness meeting to inform the community about how federal, state, and Kensington agencies would respond following an earthquake.

Later, I joined the Kensington Community Council and served as its treasurer and then president. While president, the board initiated the effort to buy Kensington Park. Then, when KPPCSD assumed responsibility for this process, I ran for, and was elected to, KPPCSD’s board. I was instrumental in Kensington purchasing this parkland.

I began my career as a financial analyst for ITEL and for Wells Fargo. Throughout my life, I’ve chaired committees, run fundraisers, served as treasurer and president, applied for grants, overseen about \$2 million of construction projects, and served as Kensington Boy Scout Troop 100’s treasurer and parent committee chairman for over ten years. Supervisor John Gioia appointed me to serve on the committee that developed the ordinance that protects residents’ views.

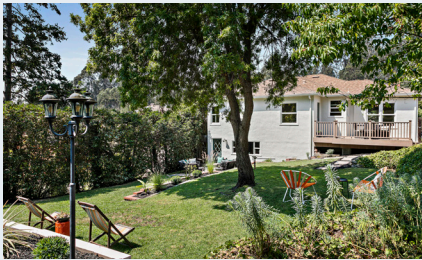
Recently, I served as KPPCSD administrator. In August 2020, KPPCSD General Manager Bill Lindsay reported that work I’d completed in this role resulted in the KPPCSD being awarded a \$176,000 grant.

The KPPCSD now faces critical challenges: ensuring office space for the police department and district staff during, and after, the impending Public Safety Building renovation and wisely managing the district’s limited resources.

All must be done with utmost transparency, accountability, and fiscal responsibility. To accomplish these goals and to deliver essential public safety services, I’ll use my knowledge and experience about the community, finance, and KPPCSD and will work cooperatively with the fire district. I’m running again to work effectively and enthusiastically on residents’ behalf.

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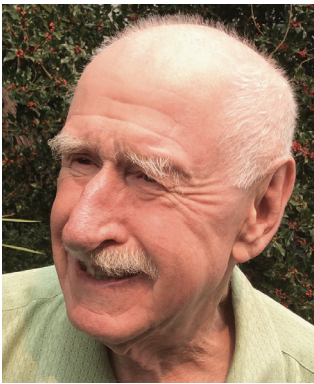
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Candidate Profiles

Kensington Fire Protection District Candidates

Minnesotan **Don Dommer** grew up in Moorhead, across the Red River from Fargo, North Dakota. He got degrees in architecture from the University of Minnesota, then trekked out to California to work for a firm in LA. “I was interested in urban design,” he says, “and this firm worked on large development projects around the country.”

He came north to work with Lawrence Halprin. Halprin developed Berkeley’s 4th Street, Sea Ranch, Ghirardelli Square and much more. “Halprin was international,” Dommer says. “It was a great place to work. I ended up in Venezuela, Curacao, a lot of big cities.”



By the late ‘70s, Halprin was ready to retire. Dommer began doing small jobs on his own and lectured at UC’s School of Architecture. When he and his partner Shelley decided to move in together, they leased a house in Kensington in 1985, eventually purchasing it. The Dommers have three children, two boys and a girl. His wife Shelley worked at UC in the office of the president; she retired five years ago.

Dommer began designing fire stations in the early ‘90s, the first in Oakland. When the recession hit, work dried up. Dommer took a marketing class in Boston, then returned to do more fire stations. “That went on until ten years ago and the next recession,” he says. “All the work went away again. I had an office of about six or eight. By that time, I was worn out on it.”

Dommer took a break from the fire board as well. “I quit mid-term, but then they called me back because they wanted to build a new station, and you know how that went.”

Sailing was Dommer’s passion for many years; he bought a third of a sailboat with friends in 1977. “We would go to the Mokelumne River and leave it there for a couple of months in the summer,” he said. “At first we docked the boat in San Francisco, but then the seals moved in, and it was time to move it to Berkeley.”

Dommer also enjoys building fine cabinets. “I was cutting things up on a table saw when I was six,” he says. “My father and I built a cottage together. And I paint watercolors. When I was in college, I did a lot of painting, and I would often do sketches for Halprin. I’ve been kicking myself weekly for not doing more painting, so I must be getting close.”

Larry Nagel was born and raised in Bakersfield. His wife Jean also was raised in Bakersfield and, like Nagel, went to UC Berkeley, but the two walked parallel paths before meeting at a church service in New Jersey. Nagel received three degrees in electrical engineering from Cal, spending ten years in the effort. Says Nagel, “I started school three weeks before the Free Speech Movement and left Berkeley for New Jersey about three months after People’s Park.”

Every summer while at Cal, Nagel worked on fire suppression in Kern County. “Back then, fire season was June through September, so it dovetailed nicely with college,” Nagel says. “I was young and in great shape, running up and down hills. I loved it.”



Nagel took a job at Bell Laboratories as an electrical engineer. At that time, Bell received one percent of AT&T’s long distance revenue. “You could research whatever you wanted,” Nagel says. “Bell engineers worked on transistors, lasers, fiber optics.... It was the crown jewel of tech. When AT&T was broken up, that revenue stopped. The last ten years we tried to satisfy the bottom line. That is not a good way to do research.”

Fire training carried over from college summers. “A lot of communities in NJ have volunteer fire departments. I mentioned to the realtor that I might volunteer. We moved in on Friday, and the chief showed up on Monday. So I became a volunteer and stayed with it 33 years. For three years I was a battalion chief. We worked house fires, car fires, brush fires. Once firefighting gets in your blood, every time you hear a fire engine your hair stands up.”

When Nagel moved here in 2008, Kensington’s firefighters encouraged him to go to district meetings. Nagel ended up taking a vacant seat and has served as a director for nine years. “I find it’s an extremely rewarding way to give back to the community. When you see that our crews managed to confine major fires to a garage or a porch—we get thank you letters at every board meeting.”

Nagel now works as a consultant on patent litigation cases as an expert witness. “I had a lot of work in California,” he says. “Jean and I argued about where to live. Kensington was the compromise between New Jersey and Stockton.”

A hometown boy, **Jim Watt** grew up in Berkeley, only a few blocks from Kensington. His first claim to fame was getting his picture in the daily rag: “Entering first grade at Thousand Oaks elementary were four sets of twins. We all got in the paper.” He attended Berkeley High and Washington’s Whitman College, then got an MBA at San Francisco State. “I wanted to go into international trade, but I never got there,” Watt reports.

Instead, he began doing opinion and market research for Safeway stores, then branched into managing commercial projects for markets. Over the years, he worked for Safeway, Lucky’s, and Albertson’s. “We were building new stores,” he says. “I had to know how to put together projects with all the different parties, realtors, contractors, the financial aspects. I also did all the legal negotiations.”



He was still doing market research when he ran into his wife, Irene. Or perhaps she ran into him. “She was trying to make a left turn, and I was in a hurry, and the rest is history.” When asked, he says, “Of course it was her fault. But we resolved it by getting married.”

The couple, who moved to Kensington in 1968, raised two boys. Watt served as scoutmaster for five years. He brought Kensington’s troop backpacking once a month for years, and until two years ago, took an annual fifty-mile backpacking trip in the Sierras.

“Now we take day trips,” he says.

Son Thomas and wife Rachelle, who live a block away from Watt’s Grizzly Peak residence, have five children, so they keep the elder Watts busy—but Jim still works with kids, or did before the virus. “I put on puppet shows for Kensington Nursery School. I’m a big hit with three- to five-year-olds.”

Watt feels blessed. “This is one of the best places to live in the Bay Area, and the Bay Area is one of the best places to live in the US,” he says. “No crime, great schools, wonderful people, small town feel. What more could you ask for in a terrific urban setting? I’m sitting here on Grizzly Peak. I leave my house and go into Tilden Park for two-hour walks. Where else can you do that in a metropolitan area? We are so lucky to live here. We ought to manage to get along with each other.”

Kensington Police Protection and Community Services District Candidates

A career in public service began at American University in DC, where **Sylvia Hacaj** majored in European studies. “I did a junior year abroad in Brussels, and after graduation, I became an au pair for a French family for two years, the first year in Brussels and the second in Paris.”

When Hacaj returned stateside, she worked on Capitol Hill, guiding the Americorps program through the house and senate. That program merged with other programs for national and community service. “We built good bipartisan support, which inoculated it against elimination,” she says. “There was too much investment on different levels.” The Civilian Conservation Corps was modeled after the California Conservation Corps. “They do a lot of disaster relief,” she says. “Wildfire fighting, work in national parks, senior service.”

A four-month trek across the US and Canada followed. “We left the day of Princess Diana’s funeral and got back December 19.” She oversaw national campaigns on health, the environment, and consumer protection, and then Mark Shriver hired her at Save the Children as the director of US policy and advocacy. She had a break that coincided with her husband David’s job switch. “We had literally the same finish and start dates,” she says, “so we went to Africa for three weeks.”



Hacaj, her husband, and her eight-month-old moved to California in 2008. After another child, Hacaj returned to work for the World Affairs Council. She now works for Lifelong Medical Care, which provides medical services for MediCal, the undocumented, and seniors. “Four Kensington residents work there,” she says.

Her children are going on eleven and thirteen—and distance learning. “My kids are old enough that they’ve adapted pretty well to it. The youngest is looking forward to KASEP’s holiday dessert baking class.”

She and her family love Kensington. “One reason we moved here was our school. I love my neighbors. I love that we are a small town village, but we’re surrounded by anything you could possibly want. And we have Tilden right on our doorsteps.”

Hacaj thinks key to Kensington’s resilience is that neighbors look out for each other. “In the smallest ways,” she says. “I pick up trash, call about graffiti.” Hacaj once organized a big buy of water drums, food, and emergency supplies from a wholesaler for her neighborhood. And she adopted the cat next door. “Chase chose us,” she says. “He moved in with our neighbor’s blessing.”

“I attended Chicago schools until I was ten,” says **Eileen Nottoli**. Her father worked for AT&T, and the family of six (Eileen has three brothers) moved to Skokie, with its excellent schools. “I was interested in science,” she says. “In high school, I was lucky enough to have a really good chemistry course that was developed by Kensington resident George Pimentel. Plus I liked math, so I ended up taking four years. Once I got to the University of Minnesota, I had the background to major in chemistry.”

Nottoli went on to Northwestern for her PhD. and then came out to California to work for Chevron as a chemist. “A lot of the chemists at Chevron didn’t like working with the patent attorneys. I enjoyed it, so dealing with them fell to me. After awhile, I saw that the attorneys seemed to have a better grasp on chemistry than chemists had on the law. It made me consider what I wanted to do long-term.”

That era marked the beginning of chemical regulation. “The patent attorneys told me that law school was hard but nothing like grad school. I went to law school at night and left Chevron to go into environmental law.” By that point, Nottoli had moved to Kensington. “I fell in love with the house and bought it in 1990. At first I didn’t meet that many people because I was working in the City. Environmental law was a developing field. Our clients had interesting problems, and my background as a chemist really helped.”



Soon, however, Nottoli began meeting her neighbors. She joined Kensington’s East Bay Heritage Quilters and has made over 75 quilts. “These quilts go to kids in hospitals, foster care kids, kids who are victims of neglect.” She also volunteered with Guide Dogs for the Blind: “At first, I had the primo job of puppy socializing on Saturday mornings.” Many residents are familiar with the sight of Nottoli walking highly trained guide dogs. “I’ve also been working with CERT to get our neighborhood better prepared for natural disasters.”

Nottoli now knows a lot of people. “Kensington is home to some of the most fascinating people, people with good hearts, who have Kensington interests at their core. It’s impressive the time people like Lisa Caronna and Sarah Paul devote. They put so much thought into their projects. We are so lucky to have civic-minded citizens who spend a lot of time and energy making Kensington a better place.”

Elaine Stelton grew up in Kensington, in the house where she now lives. “I went to Hilltop, an excellent school then and continues to be now.” She attended El Cerrito High. “My mom went to Mills, so I went there first. But it felt too small, and I ended up transferring to SF State and got a degree in psychology.”

Stelton moved to Brookline, Massachusetts, where she ran an afterschool program for children. “I kind of fell into a job working with kids, and I loved it. I worked with older threes to five-year-olds. I did holiday programming



and also worked with seniors at the same center. And I started my own baking business.” As if that weren’t enough, Stelton also became involved in property management, which she has done for much of her life, currently managing properties in Albany. “My mom was a realtor, mostly dealing with commercial property and apartment buildings.”

Stints followed in Maryland and Boca Raton, Florida, where Stelton was living before she moved back to Kensington in 2015. “In Florida, nine months of the year it’s ninety-five percent humidity and ninety degrees. You move between your air-conditioned house and your air-conditioned car.”

She has two daughters, Eliana and Eliza, who were supposed to start Columbia and UCLA but are instead distance-learning in Stelton’s 1923 farmhouse. “I feel for them,” Stelton says. “They should be setting foot out into the world and not being confined to a house. But it’s made me extraordinarily grateful. It’s created a lot of closeness between us, and the girls have gotten closer.”

Having the girls in the home in which Stelton grew up is a unique experience. “Returning with my daughters was like revisiting Kensington with fresh eyes. They go into Young’s, and they’re in awe. In Florida, you have huge supermarkets. They can’t believe that this teensy store has everything that you could ever want. It’s like magic to them.”

Stelton jokes that she’s the only one who’s ever left. “All my friends stayed local, went to UC Berkeley, settled in Albany or El Cerrito. Nobody wants to leave. The mothers of all my best friends still live on the street. When the pandemic started, I offered to shop for the mothers. It was terrifying at first.”

She and her ninety-pound boxer mix Emmy can often be found hiking on Ye Olde School Trail. “Emmy was a Florida dog who could never take the heat. I can’t tell you how much I enjoy being back.”

Fifth generation San Franciscan **Lynn Wolter** majored in art history at UC Berkeley. Graduating in ’76, she just missed much of the turmoil of those years. “There was a demarcation line,” she says. “Our class was the second that wasn’t subject to the draft. My husband is five years older, and he had a really low draft number. He joined the Air Force, and they trained him to program computers. He knows he’s very lucky.”

Wolter went to work for Itel Corporation. “We leased intermodal containers,” she says. “I prepared marketing reports and large spread sheets. We were on the 24th floor of the Embarcadero Center; it was gorgeous.” By that time the couple had moved to Kensington. “We bought the house in 1978. That house was 1100 square feet. Two boys and a dog later we got the house we’re in now.”

Kensington Property Owners Association was looking for a treasurer and asked Wolter’s husband John. Wolter volunteered herself instead. “I grew up in a family where everyone volunteered,” she says. “At the same time I joined the Junior League. My project was earthquake preparedness for elementary school children.”

As president of the KPOA, Wolter spearheaded a meeting of agencies to address Kens-



ington’s earthquake preparedness: “It was alarming because these agencies were not on the same page.” She was president of KCC during the park purchase and later became a director for KPPCSD. She served on a search committee to look for a new GM/COP. The committee recommended three names, and the board selected Greg Harmon. In 2013 she took on the job as district administrator. She was first turned down. “I think they were concerned that I had served on the board—too much of a change to go from boss to low man on the totem pole.” When the person the board hired did not work out, the baton was passed to Wolter.

A hand-off that came to a sad end: “It never occurred to me that I would have to hire an attorney to protect myself from a group of people.” Wolter left when the district paid a settlement of \$43,500, enough, she says, to cover her attorney fees.


“My husband and I have loved living in Kensington,” she says. “It’s because of my affection for the people here that I have spent about forty years trying to make it a better and more contented place.”

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*Bea Lieberman, Retired Kensington Hilltop Teacher
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KASEP VIRTUAL CLASSES

We have started our first session of virtual fall KASEP classes, offering a variety of enrichment opportunities for kids. Our second six week session will start on November 2nd. Here is a list of our upcoming classes, registration is open now at KenisngtonCommunityCouncil.org/Kasep

6 Weeks of Class Starting November 2nd - December 18th

3D PAPER ART
Wednesday 3:00-4:00 Grades 2-6

ALOHA MIND MATH
Thursday 3:30-4:30 Grades 1-3

CIRCUS ARTS
Wednesday 3:00-4:00 Grades 2-6

CODING
Friday 2:30-3:30 for grades 1-3
Friday 4:00-5:00 for grades 4-6

CONTINUING MANDARIN THROUGH HANDS-ON ART
Mondays 3:00-4:00 Grades 1-3

DANCE FITNESS
Tuesday 3:00-4:00 Grades K-3
Tuesday 4:00-5:00 Grades 4-6

HANABI JUDO
Monday 3:00-3:40 Grades K-6

MAKING FESTIVE HOLIDAY DESSERTS
Thursday 3:00-4:00 Grades 2-6

MATH CLUB
Wednesday 4:00-5:00 Grades 2-6

ORIGAMI MAMI
Wednesday 3:00-4:00 Grades K-3
Wednesday 4:00-5:00 Grades 4-6

SPANISH THROUGH ART AND PLAY
Monday and Wednesday (2 days a week) 4:15-5:15 Grades K-1
Tuesday and Thursday (2 days a week) 4:15-5:15 Grades 2-6

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Monday 3:00-4:00 for grades 1-2
Monday 4:15-5:15 grades 3-5



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- It is hands-on, interactive learning that sparks the imagination and unlocks creativity. It enables students to make connections and apply their learning in the real world.
- It encourages students to investigate varying sides of environmental issues to understand the full picture.

Adult Classes Coming this Fall

We will be offering some new virtual adult classes this fall. Keep checking our website for more information.



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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. M-F: 11:30am-5pm.
Our website is: www.kensingtoncommunitycouncil.org.

In Person Tennis Camp Started



Letters

...from Page 3

Demand Change

Dear Editor:

The KPPCSD board has overspent on consultants, staff, and the Community Center. They have failed to engage in good faith with the fire board regarding a new, safer Public Safety Building. And now they are planning on higher taxes for us because they have spent the reserve monies built up by prior boards.

Board performance is harming us and demands change. Vote for Wolter and Stelton for KPPCSD board on November 3!

Jan Stensland

21st Century Governance

Dear Editor:

Eileen Nottoli and Sylvia Hacaj have our support in their run for re-election to the KPPCSD board of directors. Under their guidance Kensington has been brought into the twenty-first century in governance. We can now rest easier knowing the chief of police does not report to himself as the general manager, police officers have body cameras, and police cars are being replaced with energy-efficient models. In addition, the town has decreased its financial burden through a new contract with the police union. Our employees are also benefiting from a modern, efficient payroll system.

We can also proudly point to our renovated community center that came into being under the guidance of Eileen and Sylvia. The grounds have been enhanced by the clearing of poison oak and trees at risk to the public. What may not be so publicly obvious, but of equal pride to Eileen and Sylvia, is for the first time, Kensington can boast of the existence of both a two-year and five-year comprehensive, projected budget.

KPPCSD has many challenges ahead with the renovation of the public safety building. We will be in good hands under their continued leadership on our board.

Mary Korn and Mark Wegner

Where Have Our Reserve Funds Gone?

Dear Editor:

For months and months the KPPCSD board has made decisions without having a handle on district finances. Now the directors are talking about raising our taxes!

This is a major failure—spending like crazy without foresight and driving our financial health into the ground. The current incumbents originally ran on financial accountability. Hold the KPPCSD board accountable and vote against the poorly performing incumbents.

Diane Gould

Preserve Progress

Dear Editor:

A letter in the last issue of the *Outlook* reimagined a community of congenial neighbors. Amen to that vision!

But Kensington and its politic haven’t been congenial. KPPCSD board meetings have centered on the scandal-ridden Kensington Police Department (KPD) and its prior mismanagement. Typical are three anonymous fliers of misinformation and one smearing then interim Chief of Police Hull that were sent to all Kensington households. However, since 2016, the board that was elected to bring change has made tremendous progress in turning the KPD around despite a poison pill ordinance that restricts it from seeking alternative, improved police services, and the constant harping and nay-saying by the vocal status quo opposition.

Key successes include separating the combined Chief of Police (COP)-General Manager (GM) position with its inherent costly conflicts of interest, the hiring of a highly competent part-time GM (T. Constantouros) to help reform the KPD structure and staffing, and employing a highly competent interim COP (S. Simpkins), who in a few months changed the dysfunctional culture of the KPD. GM Constantouros left our service because his retirement pension conflicted with employment at the required level, and Chief Simpkins left to become second in command of the county sheriff’s department. Both set the stage for their successors, and we owe them a debt of gratitude for their service.

Among other accomplishments, the board funded and oversaw renovation of the community center within budget and on time (take a look), developed a new procedures manual for managing the KPPCSD, dealt with carryover litigation from the prior boards and two that accrued as a result of reforming KPD operations, professionalized fiscal record-keeping, etc. Despite opposition claims to the contrary, the board has been transparent within the constraints of the State of California Brown Act and of privileged information having legal consequences for the community. Our KPPCD has made more progress in the past four years than in the previous 32 years I have observed the KPD comedic tragedy. Keep this progress in mind in November—vote for Democratic incumbents and continued improved governance!

Andrew Paul Gutierrez

Don’t Reward Poor Performance

Dear Editor:

The KPPCSD incumbents running for re-election this November must be turned out of office for the good of our community. They have contributed to mismanagement on nearly every front.

The district has delayed and fumbled efforts to develop the required new fire/police building by working in bad faith with our fire board. This prolongs safety risks and is projected to increase building costs by at least \$1,000,000.

The Youth Hut remodel project—managed by Dir. Hasaj—suffered months of delays and went two times over the original budget to finish at over \$2,200,000. Worse yet, the incumbents depleted our reserve funds to pay for the work.

Dir. Nottoli helped approve over \$150,000 on consultants for the police outsourcing matter. Outsourcing is still on the table despite the comments of two interim police chiefs that the police are doing well and can further improve with good management. The consultants also publicly stated that an internal solution was appropriate;

The incumbents allowed the General Manager to spend approximately \$60,000 on consultants for tasks that his position would typically handle. The board has acted for long periods without financial statements and allowed administrative costs to rise to \$614,433 per year.

District properties have been poorly maintained for months despite citizen requests to act. Incumbents have recently participated in board discussions of a proposed tax mea-

sure to cover their mis-management of finances.

Enough already. Let’s not reward poor performance. Let’s bring in responsible oversight that will base actions upon facts rather than pre-conceived agendas. Please do not vote for directors Hasaj or Nottoli unless you want your taxes raised and continued mismanagement of our resources.

Andrew Reed

No Credit Due to Wolter

Dear Editor:

At the KPPCSD meeting on August 13, much credit was given to former district administrator and now candidate Lynn Wolter for securing a \$178,000 capital grant for park improvements. Upon review of the relevant documents, it turns out Ms. Wolter essentially just followed the breadcrumbs that were laid out for her by the CA Parks and Recreation Department. She took a phone call that alerted her to the opportunity, attended a required meeting, and filled out a few checkboxes on a form.

But true to her character, she managed to make a hash of what was a straightforward questionnaire by inventing a “small park” that is “planted with trees and provides a nice bit of open space for this part of Kensington” that most of us recognize as the triangular parcel of land adjacent to the gas station that serves as a bus stop. Her confection was designed to meet the criteria of a different Prop 68 program that helps “critically underserved communities” acquire land for parks. This sleight-of-hand based on erroneous assumptions was typical of Wolter’s long tenure with the district and one that usually ended with terrible consequences.

Just like a mortgage, we are now prequalified to receive funds pending further submissions by the district. We are fortunate that we now have professional staff that can develop an actual proposal to the board for qualified uses of the program in a timely manner with no drama. Please reject Lynn Wolter’s poor judgment and vote Hacaj and Nottoli for KPPCSD.

Eyleen Nadolny

These Green Postcards

Dear Editor:

Last October, a group of us sent out a letter to about 1,000 households in Kensington about requiring a vote before the KPPCSD board moved to outsource the police. We asked those who wanted a vote to respond by postcard to my address.

Over the last months, 409 households responded with a resounding yes! These green postcards kept arriving for months. I brought these postcards to a board meeting, but instead of proposing to put the vote on the November ballot, the board spent \$12,000 to hire a consulting firm to develop an RFP for outsourcing to submit to El Cerrito, Berkeley, Albany, and the County Sheriff. The RFP omitted any mention of the 2009 Ordinance requiring a vote. All agencies declined to respond.

We need new faces on the KPPCSD board, board members who actually listen to and respond to their community, who aren’t fixated on defunding what is a truly community-focused police force; a board that hears us and represents us and defuses the animosity in our community. This board (despite repeated written requests) doesn’t even let us see each other’s faces at Zoom meetings!

I created the email address aBetterKensington@gmail.com to communicate with everyone who included an email on their postcard. I was especially distressed when Eileen Nottoli co-opted that phrase in her campaign pledge to “build a better Kensington.” She has consistently supported the current board’s efforts to outsource the police—in direct opposition to the grassroots group that wants a voice in our governance.

I never planned to get involved in Kensington politics, and most of my efforts are on the national election this year, but I sincerely believe we need to elect Elaine Stelton and Lynn Wolter to the board to bring a fresh, open, collaborative perspective to Kensington.

Meryl Rafferty

Continue the Good Work

Dear Editor:

Two of the KPPSCD directors are now up for re-election: Eileen Notolli and Sylvia Hacaj. They came in four years ago and successfully improved the professionalism of our district. The conflicting jobs of Police Chief and district General Manager were separated. The (albeit temporary) GM instituted professional procedures that were sorely lacking. The CoPs (again on temporary duty from the sheriff) addressed citizen concerns about the actions and non-actions of our police officers. Under Hacaj’s coordination, the Community Center was renovated under budget.

Let’s benefit from their experience and let them continue their work for our community.

Bill and Mabry Benson

Protect the Paths

To the Editor:

The recent survey by the Kensington Pathkeepers shows overwhelming support for public path acquisition. We had responses from more than 119 Kensington residents and found that 98 percent want to see the paths protected as a resource for future generations.

With our upcoming election for the police and fire district boards, we found that 79 percent agree or strongly agree that public ownership of the paths is an important voting issue. With our current concerns about wildfire, we found that 58 percent stated that the paths would be important or very important in an evacuation.

The full summary of the survey results are available on our website at kensingtonpathkeepers.org. Please visit this to see the results for yourself. If you have not yet participated, we’re still eager to capture your responses, too.

The Pathkeepers believe the survey responses validate our advocacy for public ownership. The upcoming election will determine if we have board members who agree. The paths are a great way to get around Kensington but could also be critical for getting residents to safety in the event of a wildfire.

Rodney Paul, Pathkeepers

Forum

...from Page 1

general welfare of the community and to cooperate with county and local officials to attain needed improvements. Our mission has been the same for all 99 years, as a vital advocate for Kensington. KIC recently published the Centennial Edition of *Kensington Past and Present* and coordinated with the county to install new Welcome to Kensington signs.

Candidates Tackle Questions about Issues Facing Each District

KFPD Candidates Q&A

Is there room for the police in the Public Safety Building and what must be sacrificed on the fire side to keep them there?

Dommer: This is a tough question as the space is about the same as the existing area. Both police and fire have weighed in knowing that this is what is available. Administration will be relocated to other quarters for both fire and police as well as both agencies requiring security. This will result in minor added costs.

Nagel: I have been a member of the Public Safety Building committee for the calendar years 2018, 1019, and 2020. During that time, we hired the architectural firm of RossDrulisCusenbery Architecture, Inc. (RDC) to study the options for renovating the existing PSB to meet the Essential Services Standard that is required by state law for all emergency services buildings.

The study results were presented at a public meeting on November 16, 2019, and to state the results succinctly, there was not enough room in the existing footprint of the building to adequately house both the police department and the fire department. The report stated the results even more succinctly as “A Ten Pound Problem in a Five Pound Bag.” That report is available on the KFPD website under the special meeting of November 16, 2019. Because of the proximity to the Hayward fault and other more minor fault lines, we are not allowed to increase the footprint of the existing building. The conclusion of RDC was that either the fire department or the police department had to be moved out of the Public Safety Building to other quarters. I still believe that the report is accurate.

Since the time of the RDC report, the Kensington Police Protection and Community Services District (KPPCSD) commissioned the same architectural firm to have another look at fitting both agencies into the existing building footprint. RDC is still working with the county to determine if this can be done and the supplementary report has not yet been presented to either the KPPCSD or the KFPD for consideration. What we have seen at the KFPD are two alternatives: (1) the original plan presented on November 16, 2019, and (2) a plan that fits both agencies into the existing building footprint but is not adequate for either the needs of the police department or the fire department. I am opposed to spending about \$4,000,000 of taxpayer money for a building that is not adequate for either agency.

Watt: There is adequate room for a police presence in the Public Safety Building and no reason why the firefighters would sacrifice if the police retain an area equal to their current size. The primary reason for the building’s renovations is to bring it up to current seismic safety codes, yet the bulk of the estimated \$5 million in upgrade costs will go to enlarging firefighter living space from 1,900 sq. ft. to 2,800 sq. ft. This additional square footage adds no additional uses that do not currently exist, just greatly enlarges what is currently present.

Some feel that the police should pay part of the capital costs of the renovation if they occupy that space. Do you agree or do you think they should pay rent, and if so, how much?

Dommer: I agree with the board expecting KPPCSD to pay about 25 percent of the building area/construction cost and soft costs and expenses. We have discussed this proposal with KPPCSD and hope to reach an agreement soon.

Nagel: I understand the sentiment that we are “one Kensington,” and that the KPPCSD and the KFPD should share expenses for the greater good of the people of Kensington. However, it is against California state law for any special district to spend taxpayer money on anything that does not directly support the mission of the district. By law, KFPD cannot give money to the KPPCSD or vice versa. Board members can be held personally accountable for inappropriate expenditure of public funds.

Clearly, a building to house the police department is a legitimate expense of the KPPCSD, and whether the police department is housed in the Public Safety Building (which legally is owned by the KFPD) or in some other building, the KPPCSD would be expected to pay rent for the building unless they purchase and maintain their own building.

Watt: Although the fire district owns the Public Safety Building, it was built with Kensington taxpayer money for the combined use of both fire and police. The police district contributed to the initial cost of construction and has always paid its appropriate share of ongoing building improvements. Going forward, the police district should contribute its pro rata share of costs to upgrade the building to today’s seismic safety standards. This rent should be based on some reasonable cost for tenant seismic improvements solely attributable to the police part of the facility. Moreover, the police should be granted the right to use this space in perpetuity.

In the last two years, district expenses have gone up markedly. What are the causes and can costs be reeled back in?

Dommer: We are going through a reorganization with our administrator and our bookkeeper leaving. There was a lot of work with consultants including revising procedures. It turned out to be very expensive. We are out of the woods now, and these costs should not repeat.

We are in the process of hiring a permanent general manager, which will change how we do business at a higher level of professionalism and additional services such as evacuation and preparing for forest fires. Now the president carries that load and that has been significant. The salary will be in line with the market. Now we have an acting general manager whose time is running higher than the past administrator in part because of the workload.

Nagel: In Fiscal Year 2017-2018, the KFPD expenses were \$2,952K; in Fiscal Year 2018-2019, expenses were \$3,403K (a 15 percent increase), and in Fiscal Year 2019-2020 expenses were \$3,753K (a 10 percent increase). Whether these expenses “have gone up markedly” depends upon your point of view, but there are reasons for the increases.

The two-year increases in order of decreased amount are: \$343K increase (12 percent) in the contract with El Cerrito which is unavoidable and due mainly to paying our firefighters a decent wage. \$275K increase because we did not receive a refund from CalPERS last year as we did in the two previous fiscal years. This is neither predictable nor controllable.

\$263K increase (200 percent) due to a disastrous engagement with the firm Regional

KPPCSD Candidates Q&A

Should police be in the Public Safety Building and how much should the district pay to keep them there?

Hacaj: We are best served by keeping Kensington’s police and fire departments housed together in one Public Safety Building. Regrettably, the initial design developed by the Kensington Fire Protection District (KFPD) board did not include space for the police or any of the KPPCSD staff who are currently housed in the PSB.

I voted twice to approve funding for the fire board’s architect to conduct additional analysis to see if it would be possible for at least the police department to remain in the building. Given the proximity of the building to the Hayward fault and challenges with the site meeting today’s accessibility standards, the feasibility of a design that satisfies building code regulations for essential buildings remains unknown pending feedback from county building officials.

The fire board is primarily responsible for how much the KPPCSD should pay to be housed in the public safety building as the KFPD owns it. Currently, the KPPCSD pays \$36,000 in rent annually. We expect the police to occupy a smaller amount of square footage in a new configuration, so hopefully those costs will go down with a more predictable long-term lease, rather than the current arrangement. The fire board directors were responsive when residents voiced opposition to locating the Public Safety Building on parkland, and I hope they will be equally responsive to the benefits of keeping the two departments together, barring any prohibition by county or state authorities.

Nottoli: There are several reasons for the police to be located within the Public Safety Building. Police and fire often must respond to the same event and working in the same building allows both departments to interact and create better working relationships. Because buildings that house police and fire must meet stricter building codes, it makes fiscal sense for our community to have police and fire housed in a single structure rather than two separate structures. A single location for both police and fire also provides better and more efficient services to the community. For the past many years, the fire district has owned both the land and building and leased space to the police district. This long-standing arrangement has served the community well, and I hope that can continue.

Stelton: I believe that police officers and firefighters should be housed together in the Public Safety Building as they have been for decades. The renovation of the PSB is urgent because the building requires structural upgrades to meet current seismic standards and functional upgrades to meet current best practices for fire and police agencies. Both boards should work together in a public manner on this community asset to address the financial and spatial challenges posed by the renovation.

The KPPCSD majority has avoided this responsibility. During the past two years, they have refused to meet with KFPD directors in public to discuss the needs of the police department to enable the renovation and the associated financing to be planned in a timely manner. These antics have negatively impacted Kensington taxpayers with uncertainty due to rising construction costs.

It is fair for the KPPCSD to contribute a percentage of the renovation cost based on the amount of space occupied by the police department and any required police-specific add-ons. If elected, I promise to promote better interagency cooperation and an environment in which the two districts can collaborate on cost-sharing arrangements to ensure the most efficient process with optimal outcomes to the residents.

Wolter: It would be helpful for the police to be in the Public Safety Building, along with the fire department. With both public safety departments in the same location, residents’ public safety questions or issues can be addressed with a single visit. For several years, the fire district, which owns the Public Safety Building, has been discussing the need to renovate this essential building. My understanding is that more space may be needed for the fire and police departments because of updated codes. Adding to this is the pressing need to address the building’s seismic safety issues. Despite these needs, the current KPPCSD board majority, which includes its incumbents up for election—Sylvia Hacaj and Eileen Nottoli—has stonewalled on the KPPCSD’s side of the project. In August 2020, the fire board reported that the KPPCSD board majority’s obstructionist behavior had cost Kensington taxpayers \$1,000,000 in increased construction costs. Furthermore, the board majority failed to push for or support public discussion about other critical aspects of this essential public safety project. They failed to budget or arrange for a temporary location to house the police department during construction or to budget for the renovation costs associated with the department’s permanent location.

The amount the KPPCSD should pay to be in the building should depend on the percentage of the building they would occupy and on the tenant improvements needed to accommodate their specific needs. However, negotiations with the fire board should bear in mind that the Public Safety Building ultimately belongs to and is paid for by Kensington residents. Hopefully, the two districts will reach a decision that keeps the taxpayers’ interests in mind.

How can district spending be managed while not impeding service?

Hacaj: Electing board directors with good judgment, who realize trade-offs are inevitable, is key. We also can’t afford to be myopic about our district. We are more than a police department. We have to fulfill other responsibilities related to our park, recreation programming, recycling, and solid waste removal. I kept my election promise by eliminating a major conflict of interest when we created the new position of a civilian general manager, who does not also serve as the police chief, and who could look at spending on all district services with a critical and unbiased eye.

Managing spending also requires we stay a few steps ahead of where we are today and keep an eye on future needs and costs. In my time on the board, we’ve made smart choices to stabilize our finances by establishing a reserve policy requiring 25 percent of annual operating costs, reining in medical inflation costs with our new police contract, and refinancing our police pension debt, saving taxpayers nearly \$2 million. And as noted elsewhere we manage spending through partnerships. In every aspect of service delivery, we have a major contractor: Bay View for solid waste hauling, City of Albany for police dispatch, and the Kensington Community Council for recreational programming.

Nottoli: Spending can be managed by implementing efficient, cost-effective systems and best practices. We have made consequential improvements in the few last years. The district has improved its budgeting system and streamlined its payroll system. These

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KFPD Q&A

...from Page 10

Government Services to provide administrative services during the transition from our previous district manager to our present interim general manager. As long as I am on the board I will insist on better accountability so that this will not happen again. \$48K (300 percent) increase in legal fees which can be controlled by only using lawyers when absolutely necessary. The remaining budget items actually decreased by \$128K over the same two-year period. In my opinion, these items were neither predictable nor controllable.

The short answer to this question is that some district expenses can be controlled, and some are beyond our control. The district now has a highly competent interim general manager, Mary Morris-Mayorga, who is doing an excellent job of running an efficient district. We are well underway on our plan to hire a permanent general manager for the district to continue the efficient operation. We also are working with our lawyers to control the legal costs.

Watt: Three years ago the costs to handle the day-to-day operations of the fire board were about \$65,000. Last year these costs (including consulting fees to restructure the department) were \$350,000—a fivefold increase. While administrative costs for the coming year are estimated at about \$200,000, this is considerably above the costs just three years ago. We need to bring these costs down.

KPPCSD Q&A

...from Page 10

improvements have freed staff to work on additional tasks such as finding the cost-effective lease/purchase of three new hybrid police vehicles. The board has tackled some long-needed reforms to police retirement benefits that will save the district money over time. Because we are a small agency, we will continue to retain consultants to advise us in the future. As we have in the past, we will solicit bids from qualified consultants to complement our in-house expertise and select those consultants who are qualified and cost-effective.

Stelton: Stronger board oversight is needed to curtail the excessive administrative, non-police legal, and external consulting fee costs that have plagued the district in recent years.

For example, administrative costs have unnecessarily increased by almost \$100,000 over the last two years, creating a top-heavy organization that has grown from two to six non-police staff. Excessive reliance on attorneys, such as to help manage every board meeting, has resulted in non-police legal costs exceeding the yearly legal budget by about \$145,000 for the last three years. Board members and the general manager should take responsibility to be trained in board meeting conduct, rules of order, and the Brown Act instead of relying on a contracted attorney to guide their actions during every meeting.

Historically, the district has been able to perform within its budget and provide for ten sworn police officers while effectively delivering park and recreational services. In short, it is possible to provide a full complement of services and still maintain a fully functioning police force. Unfortunately, this board has not been able to meet that goal because of their reliance on consultants, attorneys, and on an unchecked but highly paid general manager. My goal would be for the board to take a more prudent and disciplined approach to expenditures, which minimize consultants and attorneys, and channel district resources to support the district’s services.

Wolter: Recently, the current general manager (GM), Bill Lindsay, reported that a grant application I’d submitted, while serving as district administrator, had been awarded in the amount of \$176,000. In May 2019 and subsequent to submitting this application, GM Constantouros issued a memo to the board, in which he wrote, “I am recommending that the district not pursue grants.” The board majority did not object to this. However, I do disagree with his recommendation. Resuming the process of pursuing grants could be very helpful to the district’s financial situation by increasing revenue

Reckoning with Democracy

Novel Takes on Student Protests

By Linnea Due

Kensington author Sunisa Manning’s first novel, *A Good True Thai*, explores the student democracy movement in early ‘70s Thailand, a subject not well known in the US. Manning, who grew up in Bangkok, did not plan to write an historical novel—or even about that period. “I didn’t set out to write this book,” she says. “I wanted to write about the contemporary political movement, which has parallels to the ‘70s. But I couldn’t figure out how to do that safely.”

Manning decided to write a book that takes place in the past but has parallels to today: “There is a large protest movement there now, asking for freedom of speech, elections, a new constitution. It’s the biggest protest since the events that I describe in my book.”

Manning’s language is beautiful, spare, gorgeously written. Three young voices tell the story: Lek, a Chinese woman whose family immigrated to Thailand; Chang, a bright firebrand from a working-class family, and his friend Det, a descendent of royals. The trio navigates its own struggles of class and assumption, dipping into affection to weather hurt and frustration. When wealthy Det delves into union politics, he listens to a factory worker’s story and wants to “adopt” the woman and her daughter. Yet even he realizes that such generosity solves nothing.

Students take to the street in protests (at one, the king and queen emerge to serve drinks to the protestors) and are met with increasing force. These scenes of chaos are frightening and dark. Manning says that social media influences present protests. “Today’s young people are looking at their future, and they don’t like what they see,” she says. “It’s more hopeful now because we have social media. There were a lot of campaigns where activists ‘disappeared.’ Now we have a level of accountability that wasn’t available in the ‘70s.”

The novel took Manning six years to write. “It was too ambitious,” she muses. “I wish that I had chosen something a little different. Three different points of view... and it takes place before I was born. Writings about that period are banned in Thailand, so it was really hard to research. I tracked down some activists and talked to them. Encountering that material was shocking to me. I compare it to leaving a religion. I had to grieve and explain to my family that I now saw things differently. Writing this novel really changed me.”

Manning’s mother is Thai and her father American, so she has dual citizenship. “I went to an American school, so I was always schooled in English,” she says. “I used to go back all the time. Now, with the virus...”

“My husband and I lived in Berkeley, in the flats,” she says, describing her own journey to Kensington. “Then we moved to the Mission, but it didn’t suit us. We found the perfect house in Kensington. I like the quiet, I like the green. I grew up in a mega city. This is so different, and that worried me, but I love it.” Manning has a two-year-old son who is attending the Good Earth School at the Unitarian Church. She teaches at Head Royce School.

A Good True Thai will not be released in the States—“My agent has tried to sell it, but we’re told that there would be little interest in a book set in Thailand with no American characters,” a sad commentary on US publishing. “However, it will be at East Bay Booksellers starting October 1.” (East Bay Booksellers is more familiar to many as Diesel Books on College Avenue.)

“This is shaping up to a year when Americans are fighting for their rights too,” Manning says. “We are going through a reckoning and interrogating ourselves. Sometimes it’s hard to see ourselves. My book turns out to be eerily relevant. When you’re writing a novel, you can’t plan for that.”



and offsetting expenses. During the past three years, the board majority failed to exercise its financial oversight responsibilities because it seemingly provided the GM with whatever he wanted—with little hesitation or financial analysis. They authorized tens of thousands of dollars for consultants, some of whom charged more than \$200 per hour to perform tasks, such as facilitating community meetings, preparing the district’s budgets, and hiring administrative staff—all of which the GM should have performed, based on his job description. Some of these projects have gone over budget, and district (non-police-related) legal fees have exceeded budgeted amounts by about \$100,000 per year. This problem has been exacerbated because the board majority has authorized the expenditure of tens of thousands of dollars to have an attorney present at every board meeting to handle basic Special District and public meeting laws—again, things the GM should have been able to handle. Legal counsel did not used to attend KPPCSD board meetings, nor does legal counsel attend every fire district board meeting.

Q&A for both districts continued on the web at www.kensingtonoutlook.com

Food Drive and Virtual Events

By Ruth Robinson

Arlington Community Church, 52 Arlington Avenue, is promoting and sponsoring a local food drive. Canned and packaged items may be dropped off at the front door of the church now through Election Day, November 3. Collected items will go to the Richmond Emergency Food Pantry. In addition, donations of checks in any amount made out to Arlington Community Church, Food Drive, or directly to the Richmond Emergency Food Pantry, may be dropped off at the church in the mail drop in the office door.

Meanwhile, a couple of virtual events provide a sense of community. On Thursday, October 1 at 4pm is a virtual potluck. Eleanor Crump organized this month's event. For details see www.arlingtoncommunitychurchucc.org/calendar. Another virtual event is Ruth Robinson's memoir group Monday, October 19, 10am. See details on ACC's website.

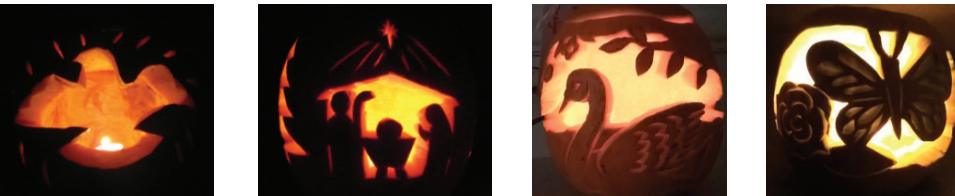


Pumpkins Galore—Even Carved!

By Eric Riess

The Discalced Carmelite Sisters at 68 Rincon Road (next to Blake Gardens) hold their annual pumpkin sale October 17 from 3-6pm. This marks the fourth year the sisters have offered homegrown pumpkins to the community.

The popular Holy Pumpkin carving service is available for pumpkins purchased that day or pumpkins you bring from home. As a bonus, expect to find monastery-made treats. This event is fun for the whole family. Donations benefit urgently needed repairs to the monastery building.



Teen Call-Out and Distance Learning Support Available from Library

By Kara Sheetz, Librarian

Teens, we want to hear from you! What is the best book that you have read this year? Let us know, and you may be featured on Kensington Library's Instagram or the Contra Costa County Library website. Please include the book title and author, a short review of why you liked it (three to five sentences is fine), your first name and your age. You must be between 11-18. Email reviews and questions to robyn.brown@library.cccounty.us

Distance Learning Support

Under the best of circumstances, education is a community effort. As parents, we rely on a network of teachers, counselors, and caregivers to help guide the choices we make for our kids, flag problems, and offer solutions. As a parent I understand how the sudden exponential increase in responsibility that distance learning has heaped upon our plates is overwhelming (to put it mildly), and so I invite you to use the library to its full potential. We have a myriad of educational and enrichment tools available, including:

ABC Mouse—With 9,000+ (English/Spanish) interactive books, educational games, puzzles, and other learning activities, ABCmouse.com's award-winning online curriculum is an invaluable resource for young learners ages 2 to 8.

Brainfuse—Connect to free online tutors. Trained tutors in most subjects are available for academic assistance every day from 1pm-10pm. For elementary to adult learners. Includes resume help.

Explora School Research—Designed to meet the unique needs of its users, Explora supports both student research and classroom instruction. For elementary, middle, and high school.

Learning Express Library—Includes online tutorials, practice tests, and eBooks to help students of all ages. Offers job search and workplace skills improvement, skill building in reading, writing, math, and basic science, career certification and licensure exam prep, college and grad school entrance test prep, GED test prep, and more.

Niche Academy—Learn to use library digital resources with step-by-step how-to video tutorials.

Teaching Books Library—Explore children's books, young adult literature, and their authors. Find high quality, ready-to-use instructional resources by book, author, illustrator, subject, series, award, or booklist. Resources include meet-the-author videos and book readings, book discussion guides, and literature lesson plans.

There is a full list of digital resources available on our website, and all are accessible remotely with your library card.

Beginning July 1, Kensington Library pivoted to new hours. Our new hours are: Tuesdays, 1pm-8pm; Wednesdays and Thursdays 11am-6pm; Fridays and Saturdays 10am-5pm. Closed Sundays and Mondays.

You are welcome to call us during our open hours for assistance with placing holds and making appointments for pickup, getting a library card, choosing grab bags, or general questions. We are here for you. Connect with the library online at ccclib.org or call the branch at (510) 524-3043. Follow us on Instagram [@kensington_library](https://www.instagram.com/kensington_library)

Remember to wear a mask, wash your hands, check in on neighbors, and keep reading! Stay safe Kensington.



The raffle drawing attracted a cheerful masked crowd. Kensington Farmers' Market manager Chris Hall took home the grand prize, Mabry Benson's beautiful quilt. From left to right: Jane Taylor, Cheri Brunetti, Anne Forrest, Esther Hill, Mabry Benson, Marnie Mufti, and Jaima Roberts.

Quilt Raffle Raises Funds for Renovation. Farmers' Market Manager Takes Home the Prize

By Esther Hill

And the winner is...Chris Hall! The drawing for the beautiful blue and white quilt created by Mabry Benson, longtime Kensington resident and founding member of the East Bay Heritage Quilters, was held in front of the newly renovated Kensington Community Center Wednesday, September 2. A group of civic-minded volunteers raised funds for the community center renovation by reaching out to friends, neighbors, and shoppers at the Kensington Farmers' Market throughout last fall and winter. The pandemic brought an end to in-person raffle donations in mid March, but over \$2,000 was raised.

The quilt raffle was part of a larger effort by the Kensington 360 campaign and the Kensington Community Council to raise funds specifically earmarked for the Community Center renovation. KCC will donate those proceeds, which totaled over \$15,000, to enhance outdoor landscaping at the center and to install a new sprinkler system. When groups are able to meet again in person, we will have a safe and beautiful community center in which to gather.

A big thank-you goes out to members of the quilt raffle committee: Cherylyn Brunetti, Anne Forrest, Cathy Garza, Esther Hill, Marnie Mufti, Janice Prudhomme, Jaima Roberts, Karen Shebek, and Jane Taylor. KPPCSD director Sylvia Hacaj provided a helpful link to district planning. Raxakoul Coffee and Cheese, the Kensington Farmers' Market, and Zip Code East Bay were supportive partners in the effort.



Kensington Farmers' Market manager Chris Hall won the drawing for Mabry Benson's beautiful quilt. This raffle benefited the community center renovation.

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Fire Board Candidates' Q&A

...from Print Edition, Page 11

Does the district have enough money to fund the renovation?

Dommer: We should have enough funds to pay for the renovation and have developed cost projections.

Nagel: As of June 30, 2020, the district had \$587K in cash, \$2,498K in Accounts Receivable, \$6,805K in Other Current Assets, and only \$371K in liabilities. Assuming the price of the Public Safety Renovation is \$4 million, the district has more than enough money to fund the renovation.

Watt: By June 30, 2021, the fire district will have set aside \$3.8 million for renovation of the PSB, yet estimates indicate costs could easily top \$5 million. The KPPCSD only has about \$500,000 of excess funds available, which will likely be consumed in relocation costs during construction, tenant improvement after construction, and finding office space for a general manager and staff. The same office space costs will apply to the fire district. Covering these “excess” costs will require taking on debt obligations or requesting a tax increase from Kensington taxpayers.

Besides the PSB, what challenges await the fire district?

Dommer: I would say that we are in a time of unpredictability beyond imagination.

Nagel: I consider emergency preparedness to be the most important task facing the district. We have entered what probably will be the most disastrous fire season in recorded history. Kensington is in a very vulnerable position. We need to invest in technology for early detection of wildfires, early alerting of the citizens of Kensington, and a workable evacuation plan should the residents of Kensington find themselves in imminent danger.

Another priority for me is the education and organization of Kensington neighborhoods into Firesafe communities, where neighbors cooperate in hardening their residences against fire, controlling vegetation, and creating a plan to assist neighbors if an evacuation becomes necessary.

Watt: The fire board should continue to play a major role in preventing a fire on the adjacent Tilden Park hillside, as well as the densely wooded area between Kensington and Berkeley and below the Arlington. This can take many forms including brush and tree removal, adequate fire hydrants, and improved access for fire trucks. Additionally, the fire board needs to continue to develop a good emergency evacuation plan that is integrated with that planned by Berkeley and El Cerrito. Finally, the fire board should be concerned about El Cerrito’s financial difficulties and how this could affect costs going forward, and also escalating CalPERS pension costs since Kensington picks up almost 28 percent of these costs for El Cerrito fire services.

Why did you decide to run?

Dommer: To finish up the Public Safety Building and help in the reorganization and other issues.

Nagel: I have been involved in the fire service for my entire life. I served a 33-year stint as a volunteer firefighter in New Jersey. When I moved back to California, I started attending KFPD board meetings and after about a year I was appointed to fill a vacant director position. I’ve been serving as a director ever since. I find the job to be immensely rewarding and a great way for me to give back to my community as well as to stay in touch with my firefighter family.

There is also a lot of unfinished business that I want to work on, including renovation of the Public Safety Building, establishing wildfire evacuation procedures, and working on getting more community involvement in wildfire preparedness. There is much to do.

Watt: I am primarily running because of my concern about the direction we are going in the redevelopment of the Public Safety Building. Last year this station had only 680 calls for service and almost all of these calls were for health issues, not fire-related. Furthermore, 40 percent of these calls were for El Cerrito residents, yet El Cerrito is not contributing a nickel to the upgrading of fire fighter living quarters.

Are you in favor of consolidating the two districts?

Dommer: This comes up almost yearly and fades away due the to the vast differences, goals, and hard feelings. This might be possible after the two agencies are in sync with goals and financial stability.

Nagel: I think consolidating the two Kensington districts would be a colossal mistake. At present, the directors of both districts are volunteering an enormous amount of time on numerous board meetings and special board meetings. Combining the two districts would almost certainly require hiring at least part-time and perhaps full-time directors for the combined board. I don’t see the economies of scale of consolidation that some residents claim, and I think the time required for the staff of a combined district might actually increase. Moreover, I am not aware of any successful special districts in the state of California that combine fire protection and police protection in one district. In summary, I think consolidation would cost the taxpayers more, create a district that would be difficult to manage, and would provide no advantages over having the two districts we now have.

Watt: If the two districts start to work together for the common good of the citizens of Kensington and also work on reducing overhead costs, then consolidation is not necessary.

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Do you believe contracting out all or some police functions is a dead issue?

Hacaj: We already contract for some police services and contracting for others is being explored right now. In his exit memo, “turn-around expert” and interim Chief Steve Simpkins noted the excellent dispatch services provided by the City of Albany under our existing contract and cited Internal Affairs, Major Crimes, and Property/Evidence storage as other services that were good candidates for contracting.

Few people recognize that our fire board has had a contract for fire services from El Cerrito for thirty years. And just a year ago with great fanfare, it signed a new contract to extend the partnership until 2030. The arrangement is mutually beneficial to both communities and is a model of collaboration. As board president Julie Stein explained at the Open House celebrating the new contract, Kensington owns the Public Safety Building and our fire engines, “but El Cerrito keeps the rest of it working like clockwork for us. They staff our fire engines 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.”

I value public safety. As the mother of two daughters, and neighbor to several people in their eighties and nineties, I want the same high-quality law enforcement and preventative crime services as everyone else. Fortunately, if you look at crime statistics going back thirty years as I have, we are a low crime district and our incidents of property and violent crimes are lower now than they ever have been.

Kensington has a unique opportunity to be a leader in innovative policing due to our low crime and community engagement on police issues. We have changed the culture and brought major reforms to the operation of the Kensington Police Department. And contracting has been part of that solution. Our experiences contracting with the County Sheriff’s Office for Simpkins’ leadership, and with Albany for dispatch, create working relationships that provide expanded support and resources for Kensington and yield far more value than just the dollar amount of the services.

A large part of the job of an elected board director is ensuring dollars are being spent efficiently. Taking contracting off the table ties one hand behind our back in our mission to deliver high quality services at a price we can afford. Kensington established a service district with duly elected directors to execute on its mandate to provide community and police services. It operates democratically with residents expressing their will every two years with board members they choose. The elected board should have every tool at its disposal to best represent residents’ wishes, including contracting.

Nottoli: This topic has been the focus of community deliberations for over ten years. My flexibility on this issue has resulted in my ability to consider all options. Because of the high tax burden on new families moving into Kensington, we need to make sure that we can sustain our department in a fiscally prudent manner. To fully understand all options and discerning what is the best approach for our citizens requires an objective, fact-based approach. I have found value in having our own department but also have seen successes related to contracting some services. While I recognize the historical pride and appreciation of an internal department, we need to focus on the interests of all community members, especially the new residents who are bearing a high tax burden as we examine the costs and desired level of service. Taxpayers need and want a district that provides police services in a financially prudent way. As a small department, we have no economy of scale, and we cannot afford staff for any and all potential needs. Contracting for certain services may best serve residents. We currently contract for dispatch. Former Interim Chief Simpkins demonstrated that we can successfully contract for leadership, and he noted that we might consider contracting for internal affairs. The science of forensics continues to advance, and contracting for certain investigative services may provide better service rather than trying to do everything in-house.

Stelton: My answer is yes and no. On the surface, contracting out the Kensington’s police services ought to be a dead issue because no other entity except El Cerrito, which is currently in financial crisis, was interested in submitting a contract proposal. However, the lack of concrete acknowledgement of this and subsequent closure of the matter by the KPPCSD board majority is worrisome.

This is compounded by the current board’s lack of urgency and concern toward executing their duty to arrange for temporary or permanent housing for our police force. Without a physical home for the police department, its operations will be at risk.

In order to house all police functions in the public safety building, it may be necessary to consider supplemental long-term evidence and document storage. This would save space in the PSB while not impeding day-to-day or emergency response functions.

I am committed to ensuring an independent Kensington Police Department operating at the best-practice staffing levels we need. I am also fully committed to protecting the ordinance that ensures our right to vote on any attempts to contract out police services.

Wolter: No, because the current board majority has not declared it to be dead, which is why contracting out is such an important issue for this election. Quite incredibly, even before the board majority issued its Request for Proposal (RFP) to outsource, they knew that contracting out was unaffordable because of the costly termination information contained in its annual CalPERS actuarial report. Furthermore they should have known that El Cerrito was in dire financial straits. In fact, soon after the district issued its RFP, the State Auditor reported that it had placed El Cerrito as seventh worst among California cities in extreme financial distress. Then, when the district received no proposals to its RFP last year (even after the board majority had granted El Cerrito a several-week extension), the board majority did not declare, and still has not declared, this issue to be dead. Contracting out has been an incredibly divisive matter for over a decade, and it has consumed hundreds of thousands of taxpayers’ dollars to pay for consultants, attorneys, and district staff, and it has consumed thousands of volunteer hours.

Many are also concerned that the contracting out issue isn’t over because of what happened at last month’s El Cerrito Democratic Club’s endorsement meeting. The only Kensington candidates who attended were incumbents Sylvia Hacaj and Eileen Nottoli. El Cerrito City Councilman Gabe Quinto posed the first question: “Kensington is designated by LAFCO as within the El Cerrito sphere of influence. What is your view of annexation upon outsourcing of the police department and the issue of preserving the agency’s and town’s autonomy and self-governance?” Sylvia Hacaj and Eileen Nottoli equivocated in their replies, saying things like, “We’ve had a great partnership” and “Should anything grow in a partnership way, I do not believe that that would be an issue.” El Cerrito’s first question makes it clear: El Cerrito assumes that outsourcing will occur and that outsourcing is meant to lead to annexation. Outsourcing is the Trojan horse for annexation. Annexing Kensington would go a long way toward solving El Cerrito’s financial woes, but annexation would result in the following negative impacts on Kensington: higher taxes; the end of our independent police department (which would trigger the CalPERS termination fees of about \$14,000 per household); and Kensington turning over to El Cerrito all of its public assets, which include our park and recreation

buildings (which El Cerrito could sell to developers), our Public Safety Building (which was built and improved with Kensington taxpayers’ money), and the millions of taxpayer dollars held in reserve by our public safety districts.

I’m running because I strongly support Kensington’s local and independent police department and because I believe that residents should retain the right to vote on contracting out if the issue ever surfaces again. Kensington should not allow itself to be annexed by El Cerrito. It should retain its ability to self-govern, and it should preserve its unique and charming identity.

Some complain that the board has become less transparent in the last few years. Do you agree?

Hacaj: Not at all. I love to talk to residents about what the KPPCSD board does, and I do it every chance I get. This personal openness translates into a public commitment to transparency. Since my election four years ago, knowing we had pressing priorities related to studying police service options and the renovation of the community center, I supported adopting a vigorous schedule of two regular board meetings per month. We sponsored four town hall meetings on police services as well as others on composting and housing options for the police and KPPCSD staff. We instituted a twice-yearly district newsletter mailed to every household, and upgraded our website so that it is fully ADA-compliant, searchable, and mobile-friendly. The district maintains a special section on its website dedicated solely to transparency. It includes staff salaries, annual budgets, audits policies and procedures and more.

All these actions were designed to communicate with a broader swath of our district’s residents and enhance opportunities for public education and participation. The district is poised to earn the California Special District Association’s (CSDA) Transparency Certificate of Excellence in Operations and Governance this fall for the first time.

Nottoli: We have an active community of residents who are interested in governance and want greater involvement. We have made substantial improvements toward advancing transparency as recommended by the Special District Leadership Foundation. These improvements include revised policies and procedures, website changes, a community newsletter, a revised board agenda, updated code of ethics, and improved financial procedures. On our revised website, with few exceptions, new documents and agendas are posted in a textual/searchable format, which makes finding and reading them easier and downloading much faster. The general manager has a monthly report that discusses progress on a number of items, and our Interim chief of police also provides monthly updates on topics of interest; both our GM and iCOP answer questions from the public and the board during our meetings.

Stelton: Yes! This is one of the reasons that I decided to run for a seat on the board. Many practices utilized by previous boards to keep the public informed have been jettisoned by the current board. For example, the board meeting minutes have been truncated and have actually paraphrased board motions, making it difficult to see exactly what actions the board took. The minutes are the only permanent record after the videos are deleted, and have been a vital resource to many residents. For over two years, the minutes have been of inconsistent quality and omitted almost all detail of the important discussions undertaken by the board. This massive change happened without any public input. Compounding the problem, monthly financial reports have been eliminated, making it difficult for the board to hold itself or its general manager accountable for its spending throughout the year.

The current incumbents have distanced themselves from the community they pledged to serve, and sometimes take an aggressive or dismissive stance against dissenting opinions in the community and with the single director who often offers a differing perspective. The board has also disbanded its emergency preparedness, building, and solid waste temporary committees, keeping only a whittled-down finance committee. If elected, I promise to establish a transparent environment at board meetings in which public comment is acknowledged and the Brown Act is clearly and obviously followed in between meetings. I would bring back committees to enhance resident engagement and reinstate meaningful board meeting minutes.

Wolter: Yes, the board has become less transparent. Among other things, the current board majority, which includes the incumbents, eliminated the traditional manner in which the district’s minutes had been kept for over thirty years. With the prior version, residents could quickly read the minutes of each board meeting and know what had occurred in detail, with all motions highlighted and recorded verbatim. In early 2018, the board majority abruptly put an end to this community-supported methodology, and for the next two years, the minutes were mostly ghost-written, usually by members of the board majority. Now, the minutes have been reduced so that public comments are no longer reflected and descriptions of board discussions are paltry. Someone reading the minutes can no longer fully understand how the board reached certain decisions. If residents want to know what happened at a meeting, they have to sit through the recordings, some of which are as long as five hours.

In addition to abbreviating and distorting the district’s minutes, the current board majority has eliminated monthly financial reports and community correspondence from the agendas. Thus, the taxpayers’ money and communications to the board may no longer be seen or discussed by the public. The board majority also decided no longer to support reporting budget details (the calculations that justify and explain amounts shown in the budget’s summary sheets, which are all the public is allowed to see now). The current board majority, which includes directors Hacaj and Nottoli, has actively prevented members of the public from addressing the board, it has cut public comment periods short, and has refused to answer questions posed by the public. The board majority has curtailed other aspects of community involvement by eliminating committees, including the Emergency Preparedness Committee, which they deemed unimportant.

How will you reduce the divisiveness that seems to plague district politics?

Hacaj: I don’t let posts on NextDoor or yard signs lead me to the false conclusion that our town is divided. I encourage citizens who hold seemingly opposing views, but who are truly open to listening to other perspectives, to work together and seek compromise. You’ll find we are actually quite united on our goals and objectives.

I personally strive to listen, learn, and be an informed voice for progress. I recognize that not everyone has the time, or wants, to attend board meetings. If you think about it, less than 1 percent of our residents are engaged on a regular basis with the KPPCSD board. It’s incumbent on the elected board members to represent the 99 percent of residents who want good service and want us to do our job with common sense and responsible fiscal stewardship. As a board member I try to engage on common objectives, broaden the conversation, and educate residents to help us navigate the choices before us.

Nottoli: It’s important that directors and residents have open and honest conversations

and avoid emotionally charged language. On many issues, we will have some common ground, and we can start there to build new relationships. Respectful dissent and debate lead to better decisions. Personal attacks and misinformation degrade civil discourse.

Stelton: I believe that the way in which the current KPPCSD board majority conducts themselves during meetings contributes to the divisiveness within the community as a whole. Our leaders should model professional, constructive behavior and be inclusive rather than exclusive and condescending. They should engage with the public and with other board members in a respectful, polite, and open-minded manner. In short, they should be our role models for productive civic engagement.

The positive tone and inclusive discussion process of fire board meetings are in sharp contrast with the curt and dismissive manner in which both KPPCSD board incumbents have treated some members of the public and their fellow board members. In fact, the KPPCSD board majority has even been dismissive of fire board members who have made several presentations on the PSB at their meetings, either by pushing their presentations to the end of the agenda when the public has largely gone home and by failing to even recognize their presentations in the minutes.

Most of the current divisiveness between the two districts seems to stem from the KPPCSD board’s unwillingness to discuss renovating the PSB with the fire board. The KPPCSD board’s current response to the fire board’s invitations to publicly discuss the building renovations were met with the equivalent of “I’ll have my lawyer call your lawyer.” It is confounding why the two district boards can’t sit down and talk to each other. I will work together with the fire board members, not in opposition to them. As a director, I would plan to treat my fellow directors and members of the public in the same way I would want to be treated by them and by others.

Wolter: By being courteous to everyone—following the old Golden Rule—would go a long way toward reducing divisiveness. I will work to listen to and understand others’ perspectives because differing opinions, respectfully expressed and buttressed by facts, are healthy for a democracy, and I will reopen dialog between the board and the community to which it is accountable. Free speech is a right, and denying it is divisive.

In December 2019 the current board majority—specifically incumbents Sylvia Hacaj and Eileen Nottoli—denied the public the opportunity to comment following GM Constantouros’ report on the responses the district had received to its RFP for outsourcing police services. Outsourcing has been, and continues to be, an incredibly divisive and important issue for our community. Public comments about it should have been permitted. The board majority has also questioned the validity of the Petition Ordinance, which is meant to guarantee that the public shall have the right to vote on whether it wants to contract out its police services. It is unfathomable why an elected body would want to take such a right away from its community. It erodes public trust. Police service is fundamental to our safety and property values. The Kensington Police Department has kept Kensington among the safest communities in the Bay Area and in the state for years. And, during this unprecedented fire season, it’s important to remember that our police officers, who are patrolling our community 24/7, will be responsible for ensuring we are safely evacuated. As noted earlier, the board majority has snubbed the fire board in its many efforts to meet to discuss the public safety building renovation. How can these two boards, whose mandate is to provide public safety to Kensington residents, provide this essential service if KPPCSD’s board majority behaves in such a divisive manner and refuses to meet with the fire board?

If you could correct one mistaken assumption residents have about the board, what would that be?

Hacaj: The most common mistaken assumption that I’ve encountered is that the KPPCSD board has primary responsibility for emergency response. In reality, the fire department is the lead local agency. The police department takes their direction and supports them, primarily by facilitating evacuation and maintaining civil order.

When I was elected, our police department wasn’t meeting the community’s expectations. Our board took time and was deliberate in carefully studying what we needed to do to improve it and meet standards of a 21st century police department. I was a key vote in hiring a turn-around expert police chief who shifted the culture of our police department, refocusing it on residents’ top concerns, including emergency evacuation in close partnership with the fire department.

Nottoli: I have the impression that some residents believe that board members have hidden agendas. I do not agree with that. I believe that board members do not have fixed positions and are open to hearing all rational views.

Stelton: I would correct any misconception that there are limited consequences associated with the actions of a volunteer board. In reality, our special districts are governmental entities, that even as small as they are, have significant power and influence over your quality of life in Kensington. This includes deciding on whether or not to purchase a park for the community, and the manner in which it is accomplished. It means making critical decisions about community policing in the town. If the KPPCSD board is prudent in its spending, it they can have a reserve of funds available for emergencies; if directors are not good stewards of your money, they can lead the district to insolvency. The board can and has used its power and taxpayer dollars to study abridging your right to vote: throughout the whole process of exploring contracting out of the police department, the board majority (with the incumbents up for reelection) has made comments challenging or disregarding the duly adopted 2009 petition ordinance that mandates that the community have the final say, through a vote of the people, on contracting out police services.

I believe that serving on the KPPCSD board is a serious responsibility for which candidates should be judged for their actions and intentions. It is my intent to always make informed, fair, and sometimes tough decisions that benefit all of Kensington.

Wolter: One mistaken assumption is that the current board majority is financially responsible. Among other things, their budgets don’t reflect reality. During the past few years, they have consistently redirected money out of police services (both operations and capital expenditures), leaving our officers without adequate safety equipment, a safe building in which to work, and safe and reliable vehicles in which to respond to emergencies. Money has been redirected to cover excessive consulting and legal fees and the approximately \$2,000,000 Community Center renovation—a project the board majority promised would not exceed \$1,000,000.

For the past few years, the current board majority has pushed to contract out. To give this agenda the appearance of legitimacy, they hired Matrix Consulting to analyze outsourcing, at a cost of about \$80,000. They proceeded with this even though they knew, before Matrix’s work even began, that outsourcing was unaffordable because of Kensington’s CalPERS termination costs (the cost to shut down Kensington’s independent police department), which could be as high as \$30,000,000 or about \$14,000 per house-

hold.

Are you in favor of consolidating the two districts?

Hacaj: The issue of consolidation, or more accurately, reorganization, has been thoroughly researched and presents significant hurdles and costs. I’ve always said the KPPCSD needed to get its own house in order before it would be wise to contemplate any reorganization. And a formal reorganization is not needed for the staffs of both boards to work together to see if they can create efficiencies at the administrative level.

The issues managed by both volunteer boards are weighty and complex, and there is concern whether a combined board could give adequate attention to all of them. Fire board members have raised concerns that our police which, unlike our contracted fire personnel, come with a large unfunded pension liability and generous retiree benefits, could take up more tax revenue than in the current arrangement. The level of trust required for reorganization can only be built by board members over time. The districts should continue to collaborate in order to leverage Kensington’s tax dollars.

Nottoli: Not at this time. This has been a topic of considerable interest with strong opinions on both sides of the issue. Some see consolidation as a money grab, and some see consolidation as a way to build a single, more efficient, cohesive governing body like cities have. There may be some long-term advantages if financial and administrative matters noted in the 2016 Ad Hoc report, which addressed the pros and cons, are addressed. The pros include potential reduced costs for redundant services and improved coordination and use of resources for disaster preparedness. Among the cons are the high costs to repair and replace expensive fire equipment that the consolidated Community Service District would be responsible for, including building reserves for emergencies and future upgrades, and the significant time to petition and reorganize both districts into one. The Ad Hoc report recommended that the “community receive an objective and factual understanding in order to make informed decisions about how they are governed and receive services” and a poll or survey to determine community support for combining both districts.

Stelton: I am against consolidation and in favor of Kensington maintaining its unique system of self-governance under two special districts, which has served us well for more than 70 years. The system of two separate districts allows each board to specialize and give more attention to the different and unique aspects of public safety and community services that it governs.

Given that both boards are composed solely of volunteers, it is not realistic to expect directors to contribute a sizable amount of time, beyond what they currently spend. And, realistically, without increasing the amount of time that directors would need to invest to govern a consolidated district, the result would be to actually reduce the depth of directors’ oversight in governance. Distinct boards also provide a natural form of checks-and-balances. I am greatly concerned about the notion of putting so much money and power in the hands of so few people in a consolidated model. I worry about what our town’s financial situation would become if the current KPPCSD majority was handling all of Kensington’s taxpayer money, buildings, and the park. Finally, while I understand some make arguments about potential advantages of combined administration and revenue, efficient use of taxpayer money can be addressed by the two districts working more productively together on community projects.

Wolter: I don’t currently support consolidation, given the many unknowns and unanswered questions and because it is not clear what the community wants with respect to this issue. On the one hand, if Kensington were starting from scratch today, it’s unlikely that it would choose to have two public safety districts. It would be logical to have one district, one general manager, one auditor, one law firm, etc. So, on the surface, it appears that there could be cost savings from consolidation. On the other hand, there are a number of operational and cultural issues. Police and fire services are very different from one another and learning sufficiently about both could prove challenging for directors elected to oversee them. Some are concerned that consolidation could make Kensington vulnerable to being annexed by El Cerrito. Ultimately, it is the residents who should decide, given the impact such a change would have. Any major decisions, whether consolidation, outsourcing, or annexation should go to the voters because they’re the ones who would be directly affected by the benefits or drawbacks.