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OCTOBER 2021

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VOLUME 79 NUMBER 8



The San Pedro cactus on the median between the Arlington's lower parking lot and the street's south lane, below the stores, blooms once a year in full splendor. Otherwise, the plant is nondescript, even lonely looking. Who could imagine that it would explode into glory? Photo by Paul Reif.

Is It Time to Consolidate?

By Linnea Due

Chris Sorensen, one of the most active residents in the drive over 20 years ago to purchase Kensington Park, hadn't thought much about consolidating the two special districts that service police, the garbage contract, the park, fire and EMT. Recently, however, she's coming around to that position—and she is part of a rising tide of residents upset by the inability of the two districts to agree to a plan around the Public Safety Building and the almost certain rise in taxes if the police must be housed elsewhere. Others point to the duplication of district staff and the costs that entails. Sorensen especially worries about new home buyers, whose taxes

are already much higher than those who purchased their houses prior to the passage of Proposition 13, or who inherited that tax base from their parents.

Kensington property owners pay taxes to fund both the Kensington Police Protection and Community Services District (KPPCSD) and the Kensington Fire Protection District (KFPD). Although the idea of consolidating Kensington's two special districts has been ongoing, it was not until KPPCSD formed the ad hoc committee in the spring of 2015 that real analysis began of what that process would entail. The consolidation subcommittee, composed of Gail Feldman, Chris Deppe, and Rick Artis, residents appointed by the then-

sitting board, was one of three subcommittees charged with delving into issues of governance, gathering information, and preparing a report.

The three subcommittees met from October 1, 2015-September 1, 2016, with the final reports submitted to the KPPCSD on October 1, 2016. It is fair to say that consolidating Kensington's two districts, the KPPCSD and the KFPD, then seemed the least likely outcome of the issues the ad hoc committee investigated. Separating the general manager and chief of police positions due to conflicts of interest was accomplished in 2017. While contracting out police services is no longer an issue, it by far provoked the most controversy and months of continued study and consultant fees.


But lately consolidating the two districts has gathered supporters from across Kensington's tangled political map. "One thing that has changed the direction of the discussion is the controversy about the Public Safety Building and whether the police would have a home there," said Paul Dorroh in an interview on September 7. "People realized that 'Hey, wait a minute, there's a lot more involved than the immediate issues that occupy us.' It's more than outsourcing, more than who's in the Public Safety Building. It's how we are running our affairs."


Dorroh said, "Look at the obvious duplication of personnel and administration. We have two GMs, two accounting firms, two legal firms, two actuarial firms, two clerks of the board, two financial people. A lot of [taxpayer] money is going up the smoke-stack."

As both districts attempted to profession-
See Consolidation, page 6

Kensington | Market Update

August 2021 to present

	6	5	10
Detached Single Family	New Listings	Pending Sales	Closed Sales
	Average List Price 1,286,000	Average List Price 1,361,000	Average List Price 1,325,400
	Average Sq. Ft. 2,889	Average Sq. Ft. 1,958	Average Sq. Ft. 2,121
		Average DOM 14	Average Sales Price 1,700,00
			Average DOM 10




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Kensington Update




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834 Craft Avenue
El Cerrito Hills | Pending

To view online visit 834craft.com
Offered at: \$1,025,000.



80 Ardmore Road
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To view online visit: 80ardmore.com
Offered at: \$1,100,000.




6851 Snowdon Avenue
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During a wildfire emergency evacuation, your safety may depend on your preparation. Are you ready to leave now? Are your go-bags packed? Do you have a family plan for leaving and where to meet outside the impacted area? Do you keep at least a half tank of gas in your cars during fire season? Do you park facing out, on high fire danger days? Do you know the streets and paths in your neighborhood? Is your cell phone registered with the Community Warning System (cwsalerts.com) so that you will receive emergency evacuation messages? Bottom line: are you ready to leave early or immediately if necessary? Preparing now may save your life.
Paul Moss, KFPD Emergency Preparedness Committee

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

NOVEMBER DEADLINES

Advertising Deadline ❖ OCT. 8

Editorial Deadline ❖ OCT. 10

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

K E N S I N G T O N
O U T L O O K

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K E N S I N G T O N

Community Education



Gymnastics

Fall KASEP

Kensington After School Enrichment Program (KASEP) classes started on September 13th offering more than 50 after school enrichment classes each week for grades K-6. Many of the classes filled up fast on the first night of registration and some ended up with a very long wait list. With everything from basketball, carpentry, cooking and coding to gymnastics, science, math and Judo, we offer a wide range of classes for kids after school.

Our small class sizes are a great opportunity for kids to learn and explore in a friendly and safe environment and are conveniently located just down the hill from Kensington Hilltop School. If you didn't get into your favorite KASEP class this round the registration for our next session of classes opens on Tuesday, December 7th at 7pm.

KCC Fall Parade & Picnic

The Kensington Community Council was hoping not to have to make the same difficult decision about the Parade and Picnic that we had to make in 2020. But, with the surge of the Delta variant and the lack of a vaccine for younger children, we found ourselves up against the same dilemma of having to choose safety over fun, even after more than a year of vigilance against COVID. Regretfully, the KCC Board has decided last month that it was necessary to cancel the annual Kensington Parade and Picnic traditionally held in October.



Intro to STEM using LEGO



Muffin Madness



Environmental Science

KCC Adult Classes are now happening inside the Kensington Community Center

Yoga Classes

Tuesday evenings 5:30-6:30pm with Dani and Joanna
Wednesday mornings 10:00-11:15am with Barbara Voinar
Drop-in fee is \$15

Community Yoga, refine your practice of the fundamentals of yoga, including mindful breathing and individualized alignment in poses. This practice builds strength, flexibility, and balance to relieve stress, counter injuries, and develop a calmer state of mind. All levels welcome.

Tai Chi with Nobuo Nishi

Fridays 9:30-11:00am
Drop-in fee is \$15

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

Register at [KensingtonCommunityCouncil.org/adult-classes](https://www.kensingtoncommunitycouncil.org/adult-classes)

Tennis Court Reservations: For weekends and holidays only, beginning at 9am.
Call the KCC office for info. New KPPCSD Court Fees: 1 hour reservations - residents: \$7 non-residents \$10.

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

Letters to the Editor

How to Be a Good Guest

Dear Editor,

I was very grateful for Camden Richards’ article “Good Guest: Kensington” in May’s *Outlook*. The idea of being a Good Guest on this land that I call home, but not so long ago was taken from the Lisjan Ohlone people, is very powerful. How to be a Good Guest? As Camden wrote, one way is to contribute an annual gift—Shuumi in the Lisjan Ohlone language—to the land trust the Lisjan Ohlone people have established. This Oakland-based land trust, Sogorea Te’, is working on various initiatives to help current and future generations of Indigenous people thrive in the Bay Area. This October 11 we celebrate Indigenous Peoples’ Day. My family and I will mark this date by giving Shuumi and hope our neighbors will, too. More information can be found at sogoreate-landtrust.org.

Meldan Heaslip

Benchmark’s Parklet Proposal

Dear Editor:

The temporary parklet ushered into existence during Covid is a lifeline for Benchmark’s business and a community asset. When not in use during business hours, the parklet has created outdoor seating at Colusa Circle, which benefits businesses and residents.

As the outdoor dining scene continues to be necessary and as parklets become the norm, diners and neighbors will grow less accepting of our temporary parklet’s substandard and non-accessible condition. The main problem is the slant and slope of the street. Though we do our best to prop the tables up on wedges, tables and chairs are slanted and sloped with the street. Customers and neighbors don’t feel safe being so close to traffic; the gaps in the wine barrels (a border created to accommodate the farmers market) are bridged by plastic chains that don’t offer protection. And we can only offer wheelchair accessible tables on the sidewalk; because of the curb, the parklet is not accessible. We want to be a space that is accessible to all.

At the guidance of the county, we hired an architect to design a wood-framed parklet level to the street. Platforms address the street’s slope. The plans introduce an ADA-compliant table in the parklet and create a wood flooring that is safe and easy to clean. While funded by us, the parklet is public property, and as such would serve as a safe, beautiful, and functional outdoor gathering place.

Residents have questioned how a permanent public parklet might affect our beloved Kensington Farmers’ Market, which operates in the parklet space on Sundays. Although the new parklet would have permanent walls, the space would be available to market vendors. We’ve proposed ideas, including musicians inside the parklet, creating an eating area for the market’s food vendors, or flipping the orientation of the market so that agricultural vendors are on the north side and smaller-sized vendors that fit into the parklet are on the Benchmark side. By freeing the sidewalk that the market blocks, we can create a “people lane” that could address congestion issues. A permanent parklet will benefit everyone.

Melissa and Peter Swanson, Benchmark Pizzeria

Farmers’ Market Should Drop Negative Approach

Dear Editor,

I'm a resident who walks to the market and lives a few blocks away in El Cerrito. Controversy has arisen around parklet improvements at Colusa Circle and crowding concerns for the Kensington Farmer's Market on Oak View on Sundays.

I've been dismayed to see the Kensington Market stirring up ill will against Benchmark Pizzeria through its market newsletter and a campaign directed at market shoppers. Using local market supporters as leverage against a parklet that the market personally opposes feels un-neighborly, and I worry that the market's zero-sum game approach has stirred up negative sentiment towards a much-loved local restaurant and small business owner. The "facts" presented by the market to its large captive audience aren't objective or true, but I hear my neighbors reporting them as so.

It's a lot of drama we don't need. It frustrates me that market manager Chris Hall and the Kensington Market Board took this negative approach instead of working with Benchmark on a compromise that could support both uses.

Parklet improvements at Colusa Circle would add value in a community where neighbors enjoy a pastry together. A parklet that can accommodate wheelchair use would be especially valuable. I have many friends with disabilities, for whom the current temporary structure is not accessible.

Crowding at the market is a problem. I emailed the market board in October 2020 to ask whether the market could expand onto Santa Fe. Chris Hall said that the market was looking into permits with the county. Nothing seems to have come of that permit request, and a year later, the market is busier than ever.

Residents could encourage Supervisor John Gioia to find more space for this well-loved institution and to help the market better support distancing and accessibility. Crowding isn't just a concern for COVID, it also makes the market less accessible to people with disabilities.

The market is fighting Benchmark over a space equivalent to a few stalls, a space for which Benchmark has proposed shared solutions that would benefit the community seven days a week. I would like to see both institutions continue to grow and thrive.

Naomi Black

The Costly Revolving Door

Dear Editor:

For years Kensington’s two districts, the KPPCSD and KFPD, operated with a minimum staff consisting of one part-time employee and costs of less than \$100,000 per district. However, both boards have now added a part-time general manager and support staff. The estimated 2021-22 cost of these office functions are \$442,000 for the KPPCSD and \$199,000 for the KFPD. These combined costs of \$641,000 do not include the cost to recruiting firms and specialty consultants which add at least another \$275,000 in annual costs, for total estimated annual management services by the two boards of about \$900,000. What a change from five years ago when salaries and consultant costs were running about \$200,000.

But these numbers are hypothetical and assume that positions will be filled for the entire 21-22 fiscal year. As of this writing that will not happen, as the staffing situation has gotten considerably worse. Since the budgets for both boards were adopted at the end of June, the KPPCSD has lost three staff (general manager, finance director and

administrative assistant) and the KFPD is in the process of losing its executive assistant. This means both boards have to undertake recruiting efforts, adding recruiting costs and probably salary increases to attract staff.

Why is this happening? Because both boards only have enough work for part-time personnel and hire individuals that take the position until a better work environment and/or full-time position comes along.

So what is the solution? Answer: Consolidation of both boards. This could save staffing costs of perhaps \$300,000 annually by eliminating duplicative positions and producing enough work to justify full-time positions. Even more important, it would create a board that would have to consider the needs of both fire and police, and hopefully result in the continued location of both fire and police in the Public Safety Building—which would save Kensington taxpayers at least \$5 million. So maybe the employee revolving door will produce a financially beneficial outcome for you and me, the forgotten taxpayers.

Jim Watt



Flowers Gone Traveling

By Linnea Due

Many Kensington residents will remember the flower shop in the sliver of a building next to Magnani’s on Hopkins, across from Monterey Market. Presto, change-o: Freshly Cut now resides on Colusa Circle, where the cobbler had his shop for many years.

“I got hooked on flowers working at Berkeley Hort,” said Janet Farina, owner of Freshly Cut. “I cultivated a love of perennials, and then a love of perennials that could be cut for arrangements.” She and a friend took on a few side jobs providing arrangements for businesses and events. “Then we did a big wedding and got burnt.”

But Farina never stopped thinking about her love of flowers. “One day my husband and I were at Berkeley Hort, and we noticed the building. I thought, ‘That would be a great spot for a store.’ I talked to the owner, and we had a little bit of a plan and a handshake.”

Farina said that she knew nothing about owning a business. “I told myself I’d do it for ten years, then do something else. After ten years, I thought, ‘Well, what do I do now?’” She stayed on Hopkins for 38 years, selling cut flowers and arrangements.

Farina said the last couple years have been difficult. “I wasn’t as happy doing what I was doing. The store was a full-tilt retail business from 10-6 everyday. I wasn’t with the flowers as much. Let’s say I was doing more and enjoying it less.”

Then the pandemic hit. “I started doing deliveries from home. Suddenly I was doing way more arrangements and being with the flowers more than I had for years. Since we live just a few blocks away from our new shop, I knew that the cobbler had moved. There were papers on the windows for a long time. Then once we walked by, and the papers were down. I looked in there and I said, ‘Oh, I can see myself in there for sure.’”

Farina was determined to make the new space work for herself. “It’s not a hobby, but I didn’t want it to be the full-on retail business I had on Hopkins. I didn’t commit on it for a long time. After many long hours of discussing it, we decided to give it a try. I signed a lease in May and moved in August 3.”

Freshly Cut is open Tuesday-Saturday from 9-3. “The whole neighborhood closes up when Semifreddi’s closes,” she joked. “And it’s perfect for me. I get back to my house right after three. I can be in the garden, cook a meal. It’s worked out very well.”

Longtime fans are happy with the new location. “Just since day one, it’s been a wonderful cavalcade of cheers and well wishes. Everyone’s so happy that I’m there. I am happy as a clam being in that space.”

Besides being a full-service florist, Farina carries Bauer pottery. “Bauer started in LA in the late ‘30s, early ‘40s, in the same vein as Fiestaware. They took it right up to the ‘60s. The man who owns it now added colors, brought in old styles that hadn’t been used before. Good ceramic containers are hard to find. A lot of glass isn’t made anymore. I decided to make Bauer my mainstay in the ceramics department.”

To source her flowers, Farina gets up at 3 or 3:30 a few days a week, always on Tuesdays and Fridays. “Over all these years I’ve fostered good relationships with wholesalers. It’s actually the part of the business I love the most. I love to see what came in, especially at this time of year. I’m a fall girl. Pistachio branches and oak branches are starting to turn color. It still takes my breath away when I see all the beauty that comes to the flower market.”



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Celebrating Halloween in Colusa Circle

By Camden Richards

The Colusa Circle Merchants Association (CCMA) is excited to announce that this year we will be hosting a "Where's the Witch?" kids' scavenger hunt activity throughout the month of October (we will look forward to resuming our popular Halloween costume contests, parade and animal show in 2022). To participate, kids can print out a map and instructions from colusacirclemerchants.org/events or pick up a hard copy from Benchmark Pizzeria in Colusa Circle during their business hours.

Use the map to help locate witches hiding in the window displays of participating CCMA businesses, and color it when finished. Upon completion, the colored map can be redeemed at Benchmark for a free ice cream, and will at that time be entered into a coloring contest. A free ice cream sundae will be awarded for the best & most creatively colored map from the two- to six-year-old age group, and a free cheese pizza will be awarded to seven- to twelve-year-olds. For more information or questions, visit colusacirclemerchants.org or email info@colusacirclemerchants.org.

Should You Consider Pre-Evacuating?

By Kevin Padian

As I write this, the Caldor Fire has run through the South Lake Tahoe area, and about 55,000 people were evacuated. About half of them “pre-evacuated,” that is, they left before they were ordered to. Why? Because they were concerned for their safety, and they knew the roads would be congested. Indeed, they were. Some people ordered to leave were stuck for more than two hours on the highway toward Nevada as the fire advanced. And that was after pre-evacuation.

What does this mean for Kensington? We have about 5,500 people in our square-mile town. To reach 55,000 people we’d need to include the El Cerrito and Berkeley hills, plus much of the Oakland hills, including Piedmont. Now imagine trying to evacuate all those people at once.

Our Exits Are Few

Each of these communities, like Kensington, has few roads going downhill to the west, and they aren’t large ones. Think of ours: Moeser (wide, but actually in EC), Sunset, Ardmore, Coventry, Berkeley Park. That’s all. Thinking of going south on the Arlington through Berkeley? So is everyone on the Berkeley streets that drain into that southern mile of the Arlington. Plan several alternate routes.

Currently, parking is allowed on both sides of the street on some blocks of Ardmore and Coventry roads, and on some blocks the one-side parking faces uphill. Imagine how long it will take for those people to turn their cars around, while residents fleeing the higher slopes are backed up and stalled.

How long do you think it will take to evacuate Kensington if everyone leaves at once? Based on data from our fire district’s Traffic Evacuation Study (on the homepage of kensingtonfire.org), our 2,800 households have an average of just over two cars each. If each household takes an average of 1.5 cars, and each car is about 15 feet long, and we have about 10 miles of road (excluding cul-de-sacs and semi-private roads), then each car would be allotted about 12 feet of road. That includes the length of the car.

Clearly that’s not going to work. But even if it’s one car per household, that’s 18 feet per car, which makes for a very short distance between cars. Expect bumper to bumper on Purdue, Beloit, Columbia, Amherst, Lenox, Cowper, Kingston roads... But wait, there’s more.

If a fire threatened us tomorrow, who would control the critical traffic intersections in town? There are only one to four police officers on duty at any time, not enough to handle all junctions in town, including where vehicles will need to cross to join cars on the Arlington. Can we depend on drivers to yield and alternate, or will they act selfishly? Can we rely on outside help, or will they be drawn to other emergencies? Hard to predict. So we need to prepare.

During extreme fire weather, Red Flag Warnings are issued. One type of RFW is for a Diablo Wind Event (DWE), intervals of two to three days that come two to three times a year, mostly in summer and fall. Hot dry winds from the northeast gain speed and can easily fan sparks into great flames. Our fire chief has noted that if a fire starts in Concord, 12 miles away, it will typically take three to four hours to reach us. Do you think we could evacuate the whole town in three to four hours?

Assess Your Own Situation to Stay Safe

The three levels of evacuation information are Alert, Warning, and Order. In an Alert, be especially aware and make sure your go-bags are packed as usual, and other things you want to take are listed and handy. Given a Warning, put items in your car or near your door and stay ready. When an Order comes, leave immediately.

However, if your household needs a bit more time—pets, children, mobility or health issues, special equipment—or if you simply feel uncomfortable, don’t wait. Leave when the Warning comes; do not wait for the Order.

This is called Pre-Evacuation, and Berkeley Fire is now recommending it for residents of their hills, which are very much like ours. Another thought: the fewer cars on the road when the Order comes, the better. You are helping your neighbors by being realistic about impediments to your leaving instantly.

And look on the bright side. Use the opportunity of pre-evacuation to stay with friends for a night or two, take that quick getaway to SF or the coast, go camping on a trailhead away from it all.

In September the Kensington Fire District mailed you a Wildfire Preparedness Workbook, which explains everything here in further detail. Please read it now and take its precautions to heart. Fire won’t give us much more warning than an earthquake!

(Disclaimer: I’m on the Kensington fire board, but this is not an official board communication.)



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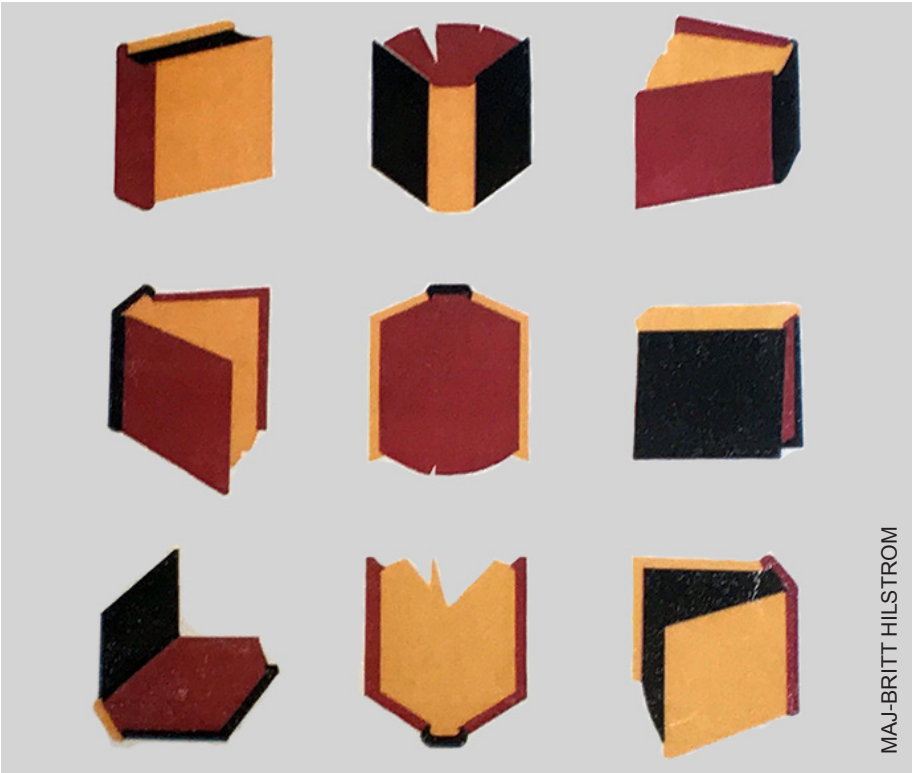
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Consolidation

...from Front Page

alize their administration, costs rose dramatically. Kensington used to have one general manager, who was also the chief of police. KPPCSD, as a community services district, is required to have a general manager; the fire district is not. Fire district administrator Brenda Navellier oversaw district business for two decades, wearing multiple hats as business manager, clerk of the board, *Fire Plug* editor, and other titles. She managed this working half-time for Kensington and half-time for El Cerrito; now she works solely for El Cerrito.

Said Dorroh: “For 2021, the police district budgeted just over \$300,000 in salaries and \$614,000 for other administrative costs, such as consulting, accounting, workers’ comp. Some of those things, like workers’ comp, are not duplications, of course. The fire district does its budget differently. It had \$158,000 budgeted for office wages and related expenses and \$141,000 in district activities. Clearly there is overlap in personnel. It adds up to a big number.”

In 2009, the Contra Costa County Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO, which administers special districts), commissioned a municipal services review. It found that “Consolidation of the Kensington Fire Protection District with the Kensington Police Protection Community Services District would streamline local government” and “would offer opportunities to the community in exercising greater control over the share of local property tax dollars spent on fire, EMS, law enforcement and other services.”

So why didn’t it happen? There are as many answers as Kensington residents, but suffice to say that the necessary public prodding or political will did not exist until rising costs and the controversy over the Public Safety Building brought the issue to the forefront.

There are other practical problems aside from the duplication of positions and their associated price tags. In just the past two months, KPPCSD’s former GM Marti Brown left to take a full-time job as GM in Willows, and Katherine Korsak, the board’s finance czar, is also leaving for a full-time job as Clayton’s financial director. This means that interims or new hires must be found, which entails engaging a recruiter to locate and vet candidates (a significant expense in itself), board time spent interviewing candidates and orienting new hires.

KPPCSD board vice president Eileen Nottoli said, “We have been told by recruiters that trying to hire part-time people without offering benefits is not going to work. We were lucky with Marti. The job Marti got, that Katherine is getting, are jobs with benefits and retirement accounts they can pay into. We can’t offer any of that. And [the staff turnover] takes time away from board members as they try to do other work.”

What’s the Possible Next Step?

The ad hoc report on consolidation is an excellent guide to how two special districts can be merged into one (the reports are available on the KPPCSD website under Committees, and then Committee Documents). According to the report, “Any such merger must demonstrate that public service cost is likely to be less or similar to costs of alternate means of service delivery.”

Consolidation would entail the KPPCSD taking on the service contract now administered by the KFPD. This is because the fire district can only deliver fire and EMT services, while the KPPCSD, as a community services district, can deliver multiple services, as it already does, with police, parks, and the solid waste contract. LAFCO might gradually reduce the number of people on the new board from nine to seven to five, so directors could have carryover and serve out their terms. In the end, one consolidated board would consist of five directors who would manage the finances and services now administered by both districts.

Dorroh noted that consolidation would be a lengthy process. “Pockets of opposition are likely to exist on the two boards,” he said. “There are indications of territorial attitudes. It’s not a simple speedy procedure. You’d have to have a cooperative attitude on the part of both the disappearing and surviving district to have it move forward. Maybe it’s a matter of convincing LAFCO that no matter what the two boards think, it’s what the people think.”

Gail Feldman, as one of three members of the ad hoc consolidation subcommittee, is disappointed that the boards have not taken the idea of consolidating seriously. While community members, seeing the costs savings that would result, are warming to the idea, Feldman points out that “There is the public will and the political will. The people who are elected to office are the ones who have to make this happen. There might be one or two people on the elected boards who would be willing to discuss this. My sense from the fire board is that they’ve said hell no, all along.”

Janice Kosel, KFPD board director, has another take. "(KFPD) administrative costs have increased dramatically in the last three years,” she acknowledged. “We now have a half-time GM, accountant, full-time emergency coordinator (for one year only), part-time grants person, and a financial analyst. Hopefully, the latter two will pay for themselves. Legal costs have been reduced significantly since the beginning of this calendar year.” But, she noted, “It’s hard to see how consolidation would reduce any of those costs.”

Feldman remembers the unpleasantness that attended their subcommittee’s work. “The City of El Cerrito inserted itself into Kensington’s discussion and analysis regarding consolidation,” she said. “Sometime in the very beginning [then fire chief] Lance Maples wrote or called LAFCO and said that he wanted to be included in all discussions with our subcommittee. We went back and forth with [LAFCO executive officer] Lou Ann Teixeira, and it was decided that we had to include Lance in all discussions and emails.” When ad hoc reports were given in public meetings, fire union officials sat in the audience. “El Cerrito was trying to intimidate us to back off from this idea,” Feldman said. “We were never talking about changing the contract. Consolidation would have no real impact on the fire contract with El Cerrito.”

Feldman found the tactics offensive. “It’s something that people should know, especially given El Cerrito’s inability to manage its own affairs. And that’s how fiercely some members of the fire board would go to protect their jurisdiction.”

Former chief Maples agreed that he had asked to be copied on email correspondence between the subcommittee and LAFCO. “I wanted to stay in the loop,” he said. “If the group was researching something, I wanted to make sure the information was accurate.” He mentioned that there are different forms of consolidation. “The KFPD would go away. All the tax revenue would go to the succeeding organization. That’s scary because you lose control of the

governing body. You may get the same services, but you have no control.”

LAFCO, Feldman said, would not want a hostile takeover. “But we need people to come to terms with the sense that [how we govern presently] isn’t working. We’re spending so much more money than we need to. The whole way the Public Safety Building has been worked through shows that there wasn’t cooperation on both sides.”

Feldman said that a consolidated district could have a full-time GM with the staff support needed to run a district administering police, fire, garbage, and parks. “Prioritizing how taxpayers’ money is being spent is important,” she said. “Paying for public safety is expensive. Our salaries for police are below market. We don’t want to be wasting limited tax dollars on services people don’t need. The only way to do that is have all the funds available and to make spending decisions. There are always competing interests.”

She sees the turmoil around the Public Safety Building as case in point. “The way it’s being done, where a decision was made without it being known how the police department is being handled and how much it’s going to cost is just such poor decision-making. If there were one district, that wouldn’t have happened.”

Residents are concerned about rising costs—for their neighbors. During a Zoom call about consolidation, Sorensen, a Kensington resident since 1988, commented, “If we had a chart that showed how much a taxpayer pre-Prop 13, a taxpayer moving to Kensington in mid-‘90s, and a taxpayer who bought a house in 2021 are paying for Kensington’s services, the differences are staggering. And it’s only going to go up. The pressure is really on young families who are moving in, who are paying way above market rate. If we were starting anew, of course there would be one district, not two, and there would be an emphasis on efficiency with a limited tax base.”

Feldman ticked off some of the main criticisms she’d heard about consolidating. “One thing is that there would be too much work for the board,” she said. “Yes, they’d probably have to meet twice a month, but you’d have money for sufficient staffing. And the staff would be less of a revolving door.” The time and energy costs spent relying on interims and permanent hires who stay only for a matter of months is considerable and increase the frustration of trying to make the districts efficient.

Another worry is financial. “That was one area we were concerned about,” Feldman said. “The county auditor would conduct the process, and everything that’s coming to the districts would continue to flow to the new consolidated district. The concern was that the auditor could say that the county was providing such and such service and make a claim for those funds. But at any point in the process, the districts could say that we’re not doing this. So if any revenue was being siphoned off, we could pull the plug. These are legitimate concerns people have raised, but they shouldn’t impede the process.”

Consolidation Light

Paul Dorroh has another idea for how to solve one of the main issues, the turnover and duplication of staff. “Let’s have a single GM, a single finance person, accounting person, a single clerk of the board to do this for both districts, and save some money,” he proposed. “The districts could set up a joint powers agreement, in which the districts agree to set up their administrative structure to a JPA. Say they’d each chip in \$250,000 and that would give them \$500,000 to hire a single GM and staff. It’s a way to get our feet wet.”

Dorroh explained that a JPA is free-form. “Any two agencies can enter into agreement. They don’t need voter approval or LAFCO approval. You’d get two boards hearing from the same general manager on what makes the most sense for both districts.” Each district would still have its own board and its existing tax base. “You don’t ruffle any feathers in terms of structural changes,” Dorroh said. “If there were the political will to do this, it wouldn’t be overnight, but it wouldn’t take months.”

Feldman thought this plan wouldn’t work. “I get why he’s saying that,” she said. “But we need to stop trying to protect what we have. We are moving more and more towards a very urbanized city style of management. Well, if that’s the case, we really should function like the urbanized area we are, we should form a town government. If Kensington were being built now, it would have been a town. No one would have dreamed of these special districts.”

Feldman noted that we have three service providers for a town of 5,500 (the county and the two districts). “We want a high level of service, and we want a high quality of service,” she said. The problem of retaining staffers is becoming acute, and, Feldman added, “the PSB is a perfect example of how not to do it. My feeling is that at the next election, we must put people on the boards who are willing to look at consolidation seriously. We need to find people to run who are willing to tackle this.”

Board director elections are coming up next fall, with three seats open on each board. Expect consolidation to finally get a hearing.



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Highlights from August/Early
September Police Log

08/10– Officer Bang conducted a traffic stop on Arlington Ave for a vehicle code violation. Driver was found intoxicated while driving and was arrested for CVC 23152- DUI

08/11– Officer Bang conducted a traffic stop of a vehicle on Arlington Ave for a vehicle code violation. Driver was found under the influence of drugs while driving, and was arrested for CVC 23152-DUI.

08/24- Officer Bang conducted a traffic stop for a vehicle code violation. While investigating the incident, Officer Fajardo arrived on scene and together, after contacting the driver, the vehicle was found to be stolen. Driver and passenger were arrested for CVC 10851-Possession of a stolen vehicle. The vehicle was later returned to owner.

08/29– Officer Jose Fajardo responded to a report of person in the backyard of residence. The subject was attempting to break into the home and tried to flee but was located nearby and arrested for PC 602 -Trespassing.

09/01– Officer Bang observed a vehicle stopped in the middle of the roadway on Franciscan Way. Driver was found with an active warrant for his arrest. Subject arrested and vehicle towed from Kensington.

09/02– Reserve Officer Ho, Lieutenant Harms, and Sgt. Nath located a man attempting to break into a residence. The subject was found with illegal narcotics and a illegal knife in his possession. Subject was arrested for PC 647(H)-Prowling, PC 653(K)-Possession of Switchblade Knife and H&S 11377(A)-Possession of Controlled Substance.

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New Book, Thousand-Year-Old Walk

By Linnea Due

Eleven years ago, longtime Kensington resident Sheila Kogan decided to walk the Camino de Santiago with her friend Reed. She knew nothing about the pilgrimage before she met Reed, who had done the 500-mile walk five-and-a-half times (blowing out his knee midway through trek number six). Kogan didn't know that Santiago was the Spanish combination of Saint and Iago (James), or that pilgrims had hiked this trail in Spain for over a thousand years. A secular Jew converted to Catholicism, Kogan did not care for James and had a healthy dose of skepticism for pilgrimages. But she did like to walk.

When she learned days before their trip that Reed had stomach cancer and could not go, she reassessed her ambitious plan. "I was three months shy of my sixty-seventh birthday," she writes in her new book, *Found Along the Way*, "had traveled alone only once, and had not quite finished lesson three in my Spanish-speaking CDs. What was I thinking heading off to walk across Spain—the width of a whole country—by myself?"

It took Kogan another ten years to finish her book of essays about her journey, and I caught her for an interview on the eve of another long walking trip, this time to Ireland. Kogan's Santiago book is made up of loosely connected stories about revelations that occurred on her trip. "I kept a journal," she said. "Some of the chapters were almost a complete story. Like the sandal."

In that chapter, Kogan is struggling to put one foot in front of the other, exhausted and obsessing that she will not find a bed in a hostel, when she spots a sandal fallen along the side of the trail. Pilgrims often tie their sandals to their backpacks, using walking shoes for the hike itself. A lost sandal, as one of only two pairs of footwear, is a blow to its owner—but Kogan vacillates. How will she find the owner, it will mean carrying it and her hiking pole in one hand up a vertical incline to the hostel that she fears is full. She finally picks it up, discovers that the hostel is indeed full—but finds the sandal owner, who offers dinner and room in a pension.

"Some chapters came together in bits and pieces," Kogan said. "The book is not sequential, and it is certainly not a guide." She cites another chapter, called Homeless. Before she left on her pilgrimage, Kogan volunteered to work with the homeless at San Francisco's St. Boniface. "I had to look at the whole thing, thinking how this whole homeless phenomenon brought up for me how I am so entrenched in my home. I have not moved, the arrangement of the furniture has not changed," she said of the Kensington house that she bought in 1970. "Working with the homeless gave me a different perspective. Being on the walk, especially as I did it with no phone, I was homeless in the world. There is a way we handle our lack of control or lack of security. I wanted to capture that sense."

Stitching together those bits and pieces took time. "I've written and rewritten these for



ten years," she said. "Very often I feel like they teach me." Kogan had some singular experiences, akin to visions. Her insights are often beautiful. There are painful moments as well. Part of her walk was dealing with the rejection of her family; her mother disowned Kogan after she converted to Catholicism. "I don't think of this as a Christian book at all," she says. "I don't want the book to be proselytizing. The whole thing about writing the book was to share the extraordinary encounters. I hadn't told anyone about those encounters. It was all woven together with my mother disowning me and so much else. That's why it took me ten years. I wanted to share the gifts that I got." Kogan was about to embark on another walking trip when we talked, this time with a friend and B&B rooms reserved ahead. "I'm nervous and excited to see if I can do it," she said. "Some of the distances are ten miles apart. I did mostly fifteen to sixteen miles per day on the Camino, but I haven't done ten miles in a long time. I don't think I'll hang my poles up, but this might be the last walking trip." She returns in time for an Oakland book launch on October 17 at Our Lady of Lourdes church hall at 12:30 pm. Everyone is welcome.



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