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Bringing the Community Together

KENSINGTON OUTLOOK

Available Online at www.KensingtonOutlook.com

JUNE 2026

A PUBLICATION OF THE KENSINGTON COMMUNITY COUNCIL

VOLUME 84 NUMBER 5



Photo by Stacey Janoff

Next Stop: New Horizons and Big Dreams

Bottom Row, left to right: Estrella Clarke, Albany High School (AHS), UC Santa Barbara; Guinevere Troxell, El Cerrito High School (ECHS), UC Santa Cruz (UCSC); Carino Trevino, AHS, San Diego State University (SDSU); Andrew Li, AHS, UC Berkeley (CAL); Ally Tuft, ECHS, CAL; Hannah Ford, ECHS, UC Los Angeles (UCLA); Zoë Weintraub, ECHS, Cal Poly SLO; Isabela Chan, ECHS, University of Southern California; Olivia Van Herick, Saint Mary's High School (SMHS), Tufts University.

Middle Row, left to right: Lucy Anderson, SMHS, Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT); Flora Sherris-Watt, SMHS, Gap year; Ruby Miller, ECHS, UCSC; Lillian Johansson, Bentley High School, Oberlin University; Liana Barker, ECHS, Berkeley City College (BCC); Noah Novickas, ECHS, University of Oregon (UO); Aidan Herp, ECHS, Cal Poly SLO; William Bowden, ECHS, UCLA; Walter Marpavng, Miramonte High School, UO; Catherine Stechschulte, ECHS, New York University.

Top Row, left to right: Lily Stoliarchouk, SMHS, Cal State University Long Beach; Eleanor Dilling Chappellear, ECHS, Vassar College; William Snyder, ECHS, BCC; Elsa Schroeder, Miramonte High School, University of Montana; Andrea Garcia, College Park High School, Cal Poly SLO; Brighton Lo, ECHS, BCC; Storm Tananbaum, ECHS, University of Toronto; Julien Pineau, ECHS, BCC; Guillermo Medrano, ECHS, Northeastern University; Reggie Bernham, ECHS, Whittier College; Jake Hewett, ECHS, UO; Aidan Singer, ECHS, Syracuse University; Varshaun Giles, ECHS, Contra Costa College (CCC); Micah Sakita, Salesian High School, Cal State Monterey Bay University; Roman Hewett, ECHS, St. Mary's College; Pasha Azar, AHS, CCC; Kyle Chan, ECHS, UO. (See more seniors, page 3)

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Wild Things Is Back Plus Author and Artist Talks

By Jenny Rockwell

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

Tues, June 2, 6:30pm Friends of the Kensington Library Friends of the Kensington Library, a 501c (3) nonprofit organization, has worked to improve and financially support library services in Kensington since 1959. Open to all Kensington residents.

Tues, June 2, 6:30pm Castoff's Knitting Club Meets on the 1st Tuesday of each month. Open to all levels of knitters. Bring your own yarn!

Tuesdays, June 2, 9, 16, 23, 30, 6:30pm Family Storytime Lots of picture book fun with Mr. Charles!

Tues, June 9, 6:30pm Mona Halaby: Author Talk Berkeley resident Mona Hajjar Halaby, a Palestinian American educator, writer and social historian, discusses her book *In My Mother's Footsteps*. Described as a moving and heart-rendering journey of a daughter discovering her roots and recovering her mother's beloved past, Halaby will discuss her work and her efforts toward preserving Palestinian culture and heritage.

Tues, June 16, 2-5pm Cloth Produce Bag Sewing Circle Join the Kensington Seamsters Union, local 94707 in transforming donated natural fiber fabric into bags, which will be given out for free at the Kensington Farmers Market. We need you to help measure, cut, iron sew and thread drawstrings, and create community.

Thurs, June 18, 2pm Conservation Ambassadors' Wild Things Get ready to embark on an incredible journey of discovery! Join Wild Things as they explore the fascinating world of wildlife, featuring some of the most intriguing and beautiful animals on the planet. From fur to feathers to scales, they'll take you up close and personal with a diverse range of species. This popular event—arrive early for best seats—is held on the Community Center lawn across from the library.

Tues, June 23, Read to a Dog Join us and a licensed therapy dog for a 15-minute reading session every fourth Tuesday afternoon, 3-4pm. Same day, drop in sign up starts 15 minutes before the read session.

Tuesday, June 23, 6:15-7:45pm Kensington Library Book Club The club meets online via Zoom, usually on the fourth Tuesday. The selection for June is *The Optimist's Daughter*, by Eudora Welty.

Thurs, June 25, 2pm Family Game Fun Come join us for summer game fun. We will have kid-friendly games, along with staff to explain the rules. Games will be geared towards elementary school age, but we will also have some games for older patrons.

June 1 – August 1, 2026, Summer Reading Plant a Seed, Read! The Contra Costa County Library's 2026 summer literacy program runs from June 1 to August 1. Every reader who completes a passport or the online challenge with Beanstack is eligible for a free book and a chance to win prizes.

Saturday, June 6, 2:00 – 4:30pm Artist Meet and Greet with Duane M Conliffe. Art Exhibit SPECTRUM on display in June through mid-July. Come meet the artist whose work features abstract light paintings capturing the intangible and transforming the fleeting into the eternal. Artist website: www.dcfoto.com

Handrails, Pavement Improvements on the Paths

By Rodney Paul

Exciting changes are being implemented on Kensington's walking paths, a direct result of the decision last year to achieve ownership of three paths for public use by the Kensington Police Protection and Community Services District. The reorganized district, the Kensington Community Services District, kicked off a project in March to install handrails on the Beloit and Coventry paths. It also has plans to make pavement improvements in multiple locations.

Contra Costa County has allocated \$35,000 per year for five years to make improvements to the paths. The district has committed to spending \$30,000 a year for path maintenance and improvement. These new projects are being implemented using those funds.

The district sponsored a walking tour on March 14 that was attended by 35 people. Supervisor John Gioia joined the group at the beginning and spoke about the importance of the paths to the community. On the tour, I discussed how the paths were created in the early 20th century to facilitate access to the light rail transportation of the Key System. After the trains stopped running in 1958, Kensington residents continued using the 11 walking paths to get around on foot.

The Pathkeepers organized a volunteer cleanup of the Beloit path on March 21, working on wooden steps that needed maintenance. Other path cleanups are planned for June 27 and Oct. 17 from 10am-noon. We'd love to have you join one of our work parties!

When Kensington's subdivisions were laid out, the developer offered the paths for public use to the county along with the streets and sidewalks. At the time, the county did not accept the paths. This changed last year when the county voted to accept three paths and immediately conveyed them to the district.

There are still seven paths that lack official public ownership, including two that have been blocked by adjacent neighbors and are not passable. The Pathkeepers advocate acquisition of these remaining paths by KCSD. It will also continue organizing path cleanups, recommending improvement projects to the district and soliciting donations from the community to enable more work to be done.

This is great news for all who enjoy walking around Kensington. The paths are a safe way to get around for shopping and recreation. They could also prove to be very useful in the event of an emergency. The Pathkeepers send out periodic emails with updates on progress and events. Email me at rodneyjacob510@gmail.com to be added to the list.



Photo by Mark Altenberg

Electrifying Your Home Can Be Easier and Cheaper Than You Think

By Jon Herbst

I don't remember which came first: My interest in reducing our family's carbon footprint, a desire to save some money on utility bills, or being angered at PG&E's safety and reliability failures.

Three years ago, having transitioned our home entirely to electric, we had PG&E disconnect the gas line to our home on Coventry Road. It was a tremendously satisfying moment, and the culmination of a multi-year journey toward electrification. That began in 2011 when we bought an all-electric Nissan Leaf.

With the rapidly rising cost of fuel, I know many other people are considering making a similar move away from natural gas. I get that it can seem intimidating. But the good news is that today's appliances — heat pumps, solar panels, batteries, and induction stoves — are much better and a lot cheaper than they were in 2011.

There are also rebates and tax breaks available to offset some of the cost for these upgrades. If this seems too daunting or costly, Kensington residents can start small with inexpensive options, such as weather-stripping drafty doors and windows. These fixes pay for themselves quickly.

After the Leaf

In the decade that followed buying the Leaf, we replaced several appliances when they died with eco-friendly alternatives. When our 33-year-old gas furnace failed in the middle of a very cold winter, we installed a Harvest Heat Pump system.

We tackled other energy upgrades on a less-urgent basis: LED lights throughout the house; an electric clothes dryer; upgraded insulation in our attic; a heat pump hot water heater; and—the biggest undertaking—solar panels with batteries.

Today our gas-free home is less drafty, safer, more resilient, and a healthier place to live. The cost to electrify hasn't been insignificant. But over time, the money we've saved (and continue to save) will offset the investments we've made.

These upgrades have also increased the value of our house. And, given that in California, homes contribute about 10-13 percent of the greenhouse gases that are fueling climate change, it feels good to know that we're doing our small part to improve things.

If you're considering making a similar move, here are a few first steps you can take:

Hire an energy pro to do a complete home energy audit. The report will identify areas of inefficiency and suggest potential solutions. Rising Sun Solutions and Rewiring America are a good start.

Attend one of the many upcoming home electrification events nearby. Google upcoming events. Scan the QR code for a list of events.

Talk to your neighbors who've started this process. They can share their real-world experiences with you. Then you can prioritize what you want—and can afford—to upgrade.

A final note: My wife, who is a wonderful cook, was initially skeptical about making the switch from gas to an induction stove. She now swears by it.



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If you are thinking about a move in 2026, I'd welcome the opportunity to talk. All consultations are complimentary and confidential.

About me

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Top Concerns of Residents: Police, Fire, and More

By Gail Feldman

What are the current concerns of Kensington homeowners? This past October, the Kensington Property Owners Association (KPOA) mailed all Kensington residents a brief survey to select their three top Kensington community priority concerns from a list of eleven, in order to guide KPOA's workplan and community engagement.

The survey responses were compiled and analyzed this spring. The results found that locating the police station in Kensington is a top concern of respondents, ranked number one with 58 percent of responses out of all the issues, very closely followed by implementing wildfire safety measures (57 percent). The results are in this table:

Issue	Rank	Votes	Percent of Respondents*
Siting a police headquarters within Kensington's borders	1	70	58.3%
Fire safety measures incl evacuation drills and red flag day street parking restrictions	2	68	56.7%
Budget and priority setting for KCSD	3	43	35.8%
Evaluating the status and future of KCSD finances	4	39	32.5%
Establishing Firewise communities throughout all of Kensington	5	34	28.3%
Tree View Obstructions on neighboring properties	6	32	26.7%
Road improvements and maintenance	7	26	21.7%
Reduction of AC Transit Service & elimination of parking spaces at El Cerrito BART	8	23	19.2%
Kensington's garbage and recycling rates	9	11	9.2%
ADU regulations and other housing development	10	6	5%
Other: Undergrounding utilities	11	4	3.3%

The survey return rate was approximately five percent of Kensington's occupied residential properties—a small response pool that is common in this type of survey.

To contact KPOA, go to www.kpoa.net or email kpoassoc@gmail.com to get more information on applying to serve on the board.

Outlook Intern Selected for International Studies

By Lin Due

Last year Westley Burnham responded to an ad in the *Outlook* for high school interns interested in journalism—and now the multi-talented teen is off to school in Eswatini (formerly Swaziland). Burnham will finish 10th grade at El Cerrito High and then begin his studies at UWC Waterford in the next academic year.

He is attending on a scholarship from the Davis United World Scholars Program.

Besides writing for the *Outlook*, Burnham has advocated around substance abuse and has collected clothes and food for unhoused neighbors. He began a Ukrainian club at El Cerrito, creating opportunities for cross-cultural discussions among students. Burnham sees UWC as an opportunity to challenge himself, step out of his comfort zone, and grow into someone who can match his ideals with action.

"I'm incredibly grateful for this opportunity to join a community that is as serious about peace and justice as it is about academics," Burnham said. "UWC Waterford will push me to live up to my values and, I hope, prepare me to one day report from conflict zones in ways that create real, measurable peace."

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CITIZEN FORUM

The Real Story on Flock Cameras

By Anya Sophe Behn

In a move surprising to Kensington residents and to directors on the Kensington Community Services District, Kensington Police Chief Mike Gancasz announced at the regular May 14 board meeting that the temporary 90-day suspension of the Flock camera apparatus would continue and that the department planned not to renew the contract with Flock that comes up in June.

Gancasz said that after talking to residents and directors that he had decided that more investigation was needed into privacy concerns. He made it clear that the technology was useful, but perhaps it would be necessary to find another vendor.

The El Cerrito City Council recently voted to remove its Flock cameras and end its contract with Flock. The city of Mountain View ended its contract with Flock last month after finding the city's data was shared with ICE without officials knowing—and because Flock quietly removed the line in its terms of service that stated, "Flock does not own and will not sell customer data." Flock claims the change is to "remove redundancy." This is so the company can sell community videos and use them to train AI.

Why is Flock a concern?

Flock is already involved in many lawsuits across the country for privacy violations and broken promises. Kensington does not control the 15-second videos gathered by Flock license reader cameras. Rather, they are saved on the private servers owned by Flock. The company says that say they delete the data every 30 days, but they refuse independent audits. Image-only capture was changed to short video capture on all license plate readers in June 2025.

All of the various Flock cameras are linked (networked) together across the US. This is more than 100,000 types of surveillance cameras in different communities across most states.

The Flock Group's license plate reader cameras are sold as being specific to only reading car license plates along with "other identifiable details" about the cars (stickers, color, make, model, racks, dings). These "other identifiable details" make your car specifically identifiable. Flock calls this a "vehicle fingerprint."

The cameras activate when they detect movement—a vehicle or any moving object.

Whatever is in the view of the video camera is saved when the camera is triggered by motion, for example a person walking or biking by.

If you live in or around Kensington, each time you drive by a Flock camera it registers you, your car license, what time your car went by, visual details of your car, how often you go by. All of these are timestamped, dated, geolocated and saved on Flock's servers.

Video is taken of the vehicle, and the vehicle "fingerprint" is kept as a record of that vehicle. The video clips and the "fingerprint" are saved to Flock's private cloud database.

DMV records are easily linked to your license plate, giving access to your driving record, your address, your height, weight, color of eyes, hair, and skin, date of birth, residency. Now imagine someone with nefarious intentions knowing all this about you. It's too much information for anyone to have access to.

Meanwhile, linking other networks and data are under active discussion. One example is Amazon Ring cameras sharing data with Flock, which was canceled due to customer backlash.

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Our police officers refer to "accessing the Flock cameras." Rather than going to a live feed of the cameras, which are recording continuously at busy traffic times of day, what they mean is that officers log into the Flock website, type in a search that uses AI image detection to find something relevant in our community videos on the proprietary Flock cloud database. We do not have control of our video footage. It is not stored or secured locally.

Selling access is part of the business model

This network of at least 85,000 automated license plate readers operates as a mutual data-sharing platform. This is a major part of the company's income.

Other police departments and federal agencies can request the data from any of the Flock cameras, including ours. We do not have strong legal protections on how Flock uses the video of our communities, and the only tool given is an access log, which can be modified by Flock since it is on their servers.

Fortunately, Flock Safety's national lookup tool no longer includes data from California, Illinois, and Virginia because of state laws prohibiting this kind of data-sharing. State investigations and lawsuits are ongoing. Meanwhile, Flock is facing intense scrutiny for its weak security and for enabling federal overreach.

Beyond breaking contractual promises and selling access to community data, Flock has broken laws in at least five states for not getting the necessary permits to install its cameras. Flock's actions indicate the company doesn't mind breaking laws, which is ironic given its targeted customers are law enforcement.

According to its website, Flock plans to link its systems into commercial data brokers (like Palantir) to offer services like "people lookup." This creates an invasive, far-reaching, unregulated surveillance tool. Think of what you can find out about someone using internet searches and looking through posts on social media websites (Facebook, twitter, Instagram, TikTok, WhatsApp).

Now add in proposed Flock data: when and where you are, your car details, your DMV records. Palantir collects and sells as much information about people as it can get. For Flock's latest product, a boon to authoritarianism, the company boasts it will let police "jump from LPR [license plate reader] to person."

A proposal called the "Fourth Amendment is Not For Sale Act" that would ban this information scraping from being sold, was passed by the U.S. House in 2024, but it was blocked in the Senate.

Kensington is famed for our low crime rate. A major part of our safety is neighbors knowing each other, community-minded officers, and police patrols. I applaud that in the board meeting, Chief Gancasz said that our officers are fully on board with the suspension of the cameras and ending the contract.

Cameras with weak security and dubious efficacy in our public gathering spaces violate citizen privacy. These are not making us safer. The fact that so much data about us can be collected by this dubious company, then sold or hacked into, puts each of us at much greater risk than not having the cameras at all. And these same issues may apply to other vendors as well.

In a broader sense, privacy, state sovereignty, and the ethical boundaries of mass surveillance are under debate. This is the intersection of civil liberties and technology. As we have seen over and over again, software and AI companies don't often consider the consequences of their actions and will sacrifice ethics for profit at our expense.

Social media is an example of this short-sighted blindness to consequences. The destruction wreaked in our society by social media companies has yet to be fully understood. The massive collection of personal information, the anxiety, depression, increased teen suicide (especially girls), dislocation, isolation, and distancing from neighbors and in-person interactions has not helped us.

Let's not do this again

We must consider and determine the future we dream of, the technologies we want that help humans, the societal values we will hold, and the laws we require to protect us from unmitigated greed.

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

Board Meeting

...from Page 8

Flock's object detection module, which uses AI to analyze the clothing, posture, and physical attributes of people in public spaces. "It's not paranoia when there are object lessons of people who are out to get you," he concluded.

Board president Sylvia Hacaj was blunt in her assessment. "I think Flock has shot themselves in the foot. This technology had some great results. But Flock has lost trust and faith, and they deserve to lose contracts."

Public commenters were not pleased with the decision. One woman said that her gardener had stopped coming to her house because of too many thefts of his equipment. "These people also need your protection," she told the chief.

Gail Feldman didn't like that the decision was made on the basis of private conversations between the chief, residents, and directors. "I don't see any of the people in this room talking about their concerns. I'd like to see those community meetings." And Lynn Wolter urged the chief to find a replacement system promptly.

For more on Flock and how the technology works, see the Citizen Forum in this issue.

What Our Clients Say...

"I cannot express how great this team is. They did everything they said they would. I inherited a home in Kensington but lived out of state. TTL led me through the process from start to finish, explaining and taking care of everything. They spruced up the garden, were present for all repairs, and even checked my mail. And their spot on marketing found the perfect buyer. My only regret is that I don't have another house for them to sell!" — C.N.





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Kensington Community Education

Photo by Sindy Süßengut/Unsplash

KASEP- Kensington After School Program

KASEP recently wrapped up another fun and engaging spring session, offering TK through 6th grade students a variety of enriching after-school classes. Students stayed active on the tennis courts, strengthened their language skills in Spanish, built imaginative LEGO creations, and sharpened their strategy skills in chess. Others explored their creativity through cooking classes and creative art projects, giving students opportunities to try new things, learn new skills, and connect with friends after the school day

ends. KASEP continues to be a vibrant community where curiosity, creativity, and fun come together each afternoon.

Be sure to mark your calendars for the Fall KASEP Registration on Tuesday, September 1st, 2026 at 7pm for TK & Kindergarten and 7:30 for Grades 1-6. Classes begin Monday, September 14th, 2026.



KCC Summer Camp

Olympic Week is one of the most exciting traditions of summer camp and a favorite among campers year after year. Throughout the week, camp groups come together to compete in a variety of fun and friendly challenges that encourage teamwork, creativity, and camp spirit. From energetic games of Capture the Flag to exciting Jenga tournaments, campers cheer each other on while building friendships and creating lasting memories. We still have a few spaces available in Olympic week July 27- July 31st. kensingtoncommunitycouncil.org/summer-camp

KCC Summer Camp begins in the Kensington Park June 15th through August 14th from 9-4pm



Summer Schedule for Adult and Family Classes

Tai Chi with Nobuo Nishi

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

Community Center - 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.

Yoga with Anja Borgstrom

Strength & Balance Yoga - Tuesdays at 8:30am

Community Center - Cost is \$20 drop in or register online

Chair Yoga with Angi Love

Thursdays 10-11am

Community Center - Cost is sliding scale

Slim Chance Circus School - All-Ages Unicycle and Juggling Class

Thursday evenings, 6:00 PM - 7:15 PM

Recreation Building Classroom A

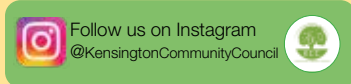
(Kensington Park near the flat upper lawn)

Cost: \$20 per person (drop-in). Family discounts available!

Family Yoga in the Park with Lori Hess

June dates: Sunday 6/14, Saturday 6/20 and Sunday 6/28. Suggested cost: \$25 per class; Please contact Lori Hess wayto-glowkidsyoga@gmail.com with questions about the class.

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



The Kensington Outlook can now be found at: KensingtonOutlook.com

Archive copies can also be found on our website dating back to 2003. Office: 59 Arlington Ave., Recreation Building Kensington CA 94707 E-mail: Info@KensingtonCommunityCouncil.org, or call 510-525-0292. Our website is: www.kensingtoncommunitycouncil.org.



KENSINGTON EATS OUT

Kensington Eats Out at the Prepared Food Annex
By Ittai Shiu

From Organic Market to Everyday Gathering Space

There’s something refreshing about a business that knows exactly what it is. In an era where retail spaces try to become everything at once, the employee-owned Natural Grocery Company feels less like a marketing exercise and more like a natural extension of the community it serves.

Since the 1982, the Natural Grocery Company has focused on organic, local, and thoughtfully sourced products, becoming a long-time staple in the community. More recently in 2014, next door to the market, the Prepared Food Annex (aka, the Annex) expanded that philosophy into a lively gathering

space. Part café, part deli, part wine shop, and part community hub, it blends everyday convenience with the slower rhythm of a place designed to linger.

Open daily for breakfast, lunch, and dinner, the space hums from morning coffee runs to evening wine tastings. The café leans into quality without unnecessary pretension, serving Equal Exchange coffee alongside house-made organic syrups, sauces, and whipped creams that elevate even a simple latte. Nearby, the juice bar spins organic fruits and vegetables from the market into smoothies that feel more Berkeley wellness than chain-store smoothie counter.

The deli anchors much of the experience. Soups, salads, burritos, sandwiches, and rotating seasonal dishes are prepared in-house using many of the same organic ingredients stocked next door, including made-from-scratch soups that have become a comforting staple for regulars. It’s the kind of setup that quietly solves a common neighborhood dilemma: wanting something quick without sacrificing quality.

The Annex also leans into the sweeter side of things. Its baked goods section turns out refined yet approachable pastries made with organic ingredients, while the dessert counter serves organic dairy ice cream from Straus Family Creamery alongside vegan offerings from Mr. Dewie’s Cashew Creamery. Sundaes, shakes, and other treats are elevated with house-made organic sauces and cones, carrying the same thoughtful philosophy found throughout the rest of the space.

A carefully curated wine and beer section highlights bottles and brews with stories behind them, while rotating flower bouquets bring color to the entrances throughout the



week. The walls regularly feature local artists, while community events—from beer and wine tastings to live music and entertainment—help transform the space from simply a place to shop into a place where people genuinely gather.

Every Wednesday night, local musicians perform at the Annex through events organized by SunJams, a nonprofit supporting music education in under-resourced public schools. Fittingly, the partnership reflects the same community-centered values that define the market itself: half of the proceeds go directly to the artists, while the remaining half supports SunJams’ mission.

“The Annex is like an oasis, offering a place for the community to connect and relax,” says Annex manager Jose Ruiz.

Beyond the weekly music nights, regularly hosted wine, beer and craft chocolate tastings mingle with live performances, artist showcases, and other community-centered gatherings throughout the year. The calendar changes often, so it’s worth checking [Natural Grocery Company](#) for the latest events, featured artists, and upcoming tastings.

As the days get longer and warmer, the Annex especially shines as an easy neighborhood stop: grab a coffee, settle into the patio, pick up flowers for dinner, or linger over a casual meal while live music filters through the space. It’s less about maximizing cross-selling and more about creating an environment where all the pieces naturally belong together.

El Cerrito Natural Grocery -
Prepared Food Annex
10387 San Pablo Ave., El Cerrito



May 14 Board Meeting Lands a Shocker

By Lin Due

Kensington Police Department Chief Mike Gancasz delivered a report on Kensington’s Flock cameras to the Kensington Community Services District board at its regular meeting on May 14. The report filed in the agenda packet provided to directors and the public was full of details of the benefits of Flock cameras. Gancasz listed crimes solved with Flock, crimes not solved during the 90-suspension of Flock that was announced at the February 12 board meeting and would have ended in May, and how Flock helps keep Kensington’s officers safe.

So it was a shock when Gancasz took to the podium to explain to the district’s directors that after talking with numerous residents and board members that he had decided not to restart Flock and not to renew the contract with the company that is due in June. He said that these conversations had raised “thought-provoking questions” that he believes “deserve more investigation. How can we address those concerns?” he asked

He suggested that perhaps modifications to vendor agreements, searching out another company to provide the service, or educating the public about the technology were all possibilities, but meanwhile the cameras would stay off and the contract not be renewed. He explained that Kensington would keep the infrastructure — the cameras — though they would not be operating until more investigation had found a satisfactory solution.

“During this period, we will consult with other agencies and review alternative vendors and explore contract language modifications,” Gancasz said. “We will also have at least two town hall meetings. This is not a decision to abandon the technology. This is a deliberate decision to continue to investigate.” He also noted that Kensington’s officers supported this decision “wholeheartedly.”

“This is not a house fire where we have to make a decision right now,” he said. “We risk losing the public trust. Taking time to get it right is not a weakness but a responsibility.”

Sarah Goff and Alex Aquino-Fike complimented the chief on the decision. Goff said, “This is a wonderful example of community policing done well,” adding that she hoped that Kensington’s officers understood that the board truly does prioritize officer safety. Aquino-Fike said she was thrilled to hear that there would be a continued process and dialogue with the community.

“These isn’t enough oversight of these companies,” she said. “There are documented instances where information has been improperly accessed and used.”

Dave Spath said he was disappointed. He wanted to know what issues people had raised with Gancasz to lead him to this decision.

“It’s a mass surveillance system, it’s used by the federal government, language in the contract, a whole host of concerns,” Gancasz answered. “The majority are centered on a misunderstanding of what it does.”

Rick Artis confessed that he knew little about Flock at the start. “I could not answer a lot of questions from opposed people. The value of the system is substantial to a small police force like ours.” He emphasized that people are not concerned about our department or our officers misusing data but about Flock itself. He read aloud a description of

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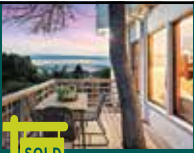
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