
Districts need to hold joint townhall to discuss financial and service ramifications of the PSB conversion

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Dear KPPCSD and KFPD Directors,

For nearly five years the Kensington Property Owners Association (KPOA) has urged the boards of the Kensington Police Protection & Community Services District (KPPCSD) and the Kensington Fire Protection District (KFPD) to work collaboratively on identifying a solution to the renovation of the Public Safety Building (PSB) that would ensure that both police and fire departments continue to occupy the PSB. However, it is now evident that the KFPD has decided to convert the PSB to a fire department-only facility. At the same time the KPPCSD has not committed to a location to house the police department, and neither board has disclosed forecasts of Kensington tax implications.

These actions highlight what the KPOA perceives as shortcomings in Kensington's governance structure and in the boards' lack of engagement with the community.

As a partial remedy, KPOA recommends that the two boards come together in one or more town hall meetings to engage with the community on the financial and service ramifications of the PSB conversion. Attached is a Citizen Forum column that KPOA has written, which will be published in the February Outlook. The column is intended to raise community awareness about issues and consequences of moving forward with the current PSB plans to both districts and their residents. In addition, we recommend governance structure and procedure reforms.

We hope you will accept these KPOA recommendations as it would be a clear demonstration to the community that our representatives can come together to provide meaningful information that Kensington residents clearly deserve.

Sincerely,

Rob Firmin, President, and the KPOA Board of Directors

Public Safety Building Conversion Illuminates Dysfunctional Community Governance

Major financial and service consequences for all Kensington citizens are coming from the fast-moving plan to convert the Public Safety Building (PSB) into a fire station exclusive of the police. It is not clear, even apparently to either governing board, what the financial consequences of the change will be for taxpayers, including in the long run. The decision to remove the police from the building was made by the fire board (KFPD) unilaterally—not the Kensington voters, nor in consummate deliberation and cooperation with the police board (KPPCSD).

Elimination of the PSB as a joint facility for police and fire districts—abandoning the original financial justification for building it—requires that the Kensington public receive full disclosure, from both boards, of financial and schedule projections of the short and long term effects of the PSB conversion into a fire station.

This need should be addressed with public joint meetings of the two boards, including their General Managers (GMs) and other staff, before PSB destruction/conversion commences.

Joint plans must be released publicly well in advance of meetings. It is critical that disclosed plans include the impact on unrestricted cash reserves that will remain for both districts after each stage of the move out and conversion of the PSB into a fire station, cost of locating both departments temporarily, and creation of a new permanent police department location. In addition, citizens need to see, at a minimum, the five year consequences of all changes wrought for both departments, and for a longer time span for added debt service. What are the districts' plans for how Kensington citizens are to be expected to pay for these changes over the long term?

As the conversion of the PSB has illuminated systemic governance shortcomings, the community needs a clear, comprehensive unified guide to board progress and plans for fundamental issues raised by the KFPD's unilateral decisions, and the KPPCSD's plans in reaction to them. For community consideration the following are examples of relevant issues that have been raised in consequence:

- The most serious uncertainties/risks in the conversion and relocation plans, and severity of their possible consequences
- Given what has been learned, whether it is still reasonably prudent to disrupt Kensington finances and services by forcing the police to rent or build new quarters
- Renewed analysis of a joint-building alternative
- Financial and scheduling plans from both boards extending as long as it will take to pay for the conversion and relocations
- Funding plans: e.g., new special taxes and applications for grants that have been or are planned to be submitted, their financial relief potential and chances of approval
- Plans for the converted fire station to survive an earthquake as a usable building in addition to personnel survival—the conversion is extremely expensive, will an expected earthquake destroy it?
- Explanation of how the police would upgrade a new space if they do not own it
- Whether possible police station locations under consideration meet or can be made to meet public service building standards (if so, at what cost)
- Locations, adequacy and security of parking for staff from both departments and police vehicles
- Effects on residential parking
- Damage to local businesses, e.g., by using the lot currently used by the hardware store and other businesses largely for the police instead

Finally, we are not questioning board members' dedication. Instead, we see that community governance is hampered by the current methods of decision making and community participation. Community confusion and even nonengagement over plans and actions cannot be laid at the feet of the public. Instead, Kensington needs a reformed public engagement system.

Three initial steps will help. Improved Kensington governance requires: a mandatory system of cooperation between the two boards, much more professional financial reporting and forecast modeling, and transformed guidelines for public engagement with the boards.

Changes in public participation rules for both boards should follow a format that allows for open engagement between Kensington residents and board members. Current meeting rules inhibit informative discussion with attendees of issues under board consideration; they give the appearance that the boards essentially ignore public participation, regardless of intention otherwise. For example, public meetings should allow a reasonable opportunity for citizens to not only provide comments or raise questions but also the ability for a brief followup to a board response to their comments. Time for each public comment can be restricted to two minutes if many are in queue, and three minutes if there are fewer. All commenters then would have one minute to respond to any board response, as well as to no board response to the comment. Such a format would result in much greater assurance among citizens that their inputs are being considered even if there is disagreement in the end, and not break the clock.

Ultimately, Kensington governance would be substantially improved by adopting a single board system with a single GM. This would eliminate the possibility of unilateral decisions affecting the whole community without community-wide, balanced planning. Budgets and forecasts could then be optimized in the interest of all of Kensington simultaneously. The community should vote to make these reforms happen.

Rob Firmin, President of KPOA