

PROPOSED ITEMS FOR THE FIREPLUG

How the Fire Board is Working to Make Kensington Safer

In 2019 the Board commissioned a Traffic Evacuation Study (TES), engaging experts from UC Berkeley's Institute for Transportation Studies. They measured all the roads in town, assessed the population, vehicle loads, and possible evacuation routes. They issued a 125-page report with dozens of useful recommendations that the Board is gradually implementing in concert with our Police and Fire Departments. The report has been held up as a model to other local agencies. You can find it (including a 6-page Executive Summary) on the District website homepage (kensingtonfire.org). It provides a guide to how we are trying to make Kensington safer.

New Emergency Evacuation Route through Sunset View Cemetery

Last year the Board's Emergency Preparedness Committee (EPC), along with Ofc. Brad Harms of the KPD, contacted the owners of the Cemetery to ask about the possibility of opening their gate at Sunset and Franciscan in case of emergency to allow traffic to evacuate via their roads to Fairmount and Colusa. The TES estimated that up to 30% of traffic could be relieved by passing through the Cemetery. Mr. Scott Pennington, the Cemetery president, graciously agreed, and last spring representatives from the EPC, the KFD, and the KPD installed emergency evacuation signs on the Sunset gate and two new EXIT signs inside the Cemetery to guide traffic. Our deepest thanks go to Mr. Pennington and the Cemetery owners.

Making Hilltop Schoolchildren Safer in Emergencies

Our EFC members have been working with the KPD and the leadership of Hilltop School to help devise plans for evacuating Hilltop schoolchildren in orderly and effective fashion in the event of an emergency. The TES recommendations indicated a general problem with traffic flow and parking configurations in the general neighborhood of the School, especially the neighborhoods southeast, which are the most congested in town. To improve traffic flow, the immovable concrete bollards on Kensington Park Drive, Highland Ave., and elsewhere were replaced with removable chains.

New Parking Configurations for Better Evacuation Traffic Flow

Based on the TES recommendations, the KPD and KFD are and will be proposing new parking configurations to provide better traffic flow and emergency vehicle access during an

evacuation. The proposed new parking configurations would affect a variety of Kensington streets, mainly by changing the direction of parking to facilitate evacuation. The goal is to minimize roadblocks and bottlenecks while residents try to turn around and reverse the directions of their cars, wasting precious minutes. The KPD is working with residents and the County to try to implement the Study's recommendations.

New Fire Danger sign in front of the Public Safety Building!

Last Fall the Fire District erected a Fire Danger sign on the median strip near the PSB at 217 Arlington. Notifications of low, medium, high, and extreme fire danger are adjusted by our firefighters daily, and now viewed by many hundreds of people who travel up and down the Arlington each day, hopefully bringing awareness all along our hilly corridor!

Fire Surveillance Cameras are now on Vollmer Peak and elsewhere

During Diablo Wind Events (DWEs) a fire in our heavily overgrown region could sweep into Kensington from Tilden Park in a matter of minutes. Two video cameras were installed last year to monitor wildfire on a 24/7 basis in Wildcat Canyon and surrounding areas. Because there is no proven automated method of detecting fire, a local group of about 40 trained Kensington volunteers take turns monitoring these cameras during DWEs to provide an early warning to fire officials should a fire ignite. Find out more about this group and volunteer to help protect your neighbors at (<https://wildcatwatchgroup.blogspot.com/>). The KFD's EPC and community volunteers are working to place additional cameras to give more complete coverage of the Canyon. We hope to have these operational in time for this year's fire season.

We Support the Kensington Pathkeepers

... in their efforts to resolve the issues of ownership and maintenance of our paths. These are of great potential importance, especially in evacuations and for firefighter access. For information go to kensingtonpathkeepers.org.

Register with the Contra Costa County Community Warning System and local NIXLE!

Our Police and Fire Chiefs, and our Fire Board, ask you to take a moment to register your cell phones with the Contra Costa County Community Warning System (CWS). CWS will alert you of life-threatening incidents such as wildfire and power shutdowns, occur. Register at www.cwsalerts.com. It's easy! Also, for NIXLE text your cell phone number to 888777 or sign up at nixle.com and you will be registered with Kensington Police and Kensington Fire, who can provide even more local alerts.

(Items for future mailings to be considered:)

- Hiring of an EPC Coordinator to boost our education efforts and (eventually) to help organize neighborhoods for hazard awareness
- Hiring of a Grant Proposal Writer to take advantage of State, Federal, and local funding opportunities for public safety improvements.
- Emergency magnets and stickers to be mailed out soon!
- Alert residents once the evacuation plan is finalized with proposed traffic flow directions; direct residents to website with map of plan and proposed traffic flow.

If there is space sometime, it might be good to take a page to explain some of the calculations and projections we have made about the traffic load on our streets in case of emergency (B/C Grupalo's major concern), the importance of considering pre-evacuation during DWEs, and the very limited warning time we may have once a fire is detected. Some will say this is alarmist but every second is going to count, and it's our job to get people thinking about this.

Fire-Safe Dos and Dont's

Walking around the neighborhood you'll notice a variety of landscapes, some lovingly tended, others, well, no so much. But whatever best describes your yard, everyone can practice fire safety in the landscape. If you feel uncomfortable or uncertain what to do, contact one of our fine nurseries (*Berkeley Hort, East Bay, Westbrae*, etc.) for professional gardener recommendations.

Here's some tips for you or your gardener, liberally borrowed from Pacific Horticulture's excellent Fall 2012 article, *Fire-Safe Favorites: Year-Round Interest from Choice Plants*:

- Limb up trees 10 feet above the ground, particularly if they're close to the house.
- Don't overplant. Provide generous spaces between plantings. If the landscape has become crowded over time, don't hesitate to remove plants.
- Remove old, dried-out, or drought-stressed plants in favor of healthy ones.
- Clear dead material from mature trees and shrubs. Reinvigorate shrubs and perennials with regular pruning to remove masses of dry growth.
- Keep soil covered with mulch, groundcovers, bulbs or wildflowers to control invasive weeds.
- Keep weeds, litter, woodpiles and flammable materials away from the house.
- Water plants close to structures to keep moisture levels high in fire season. Do this in the cool of early morning or evening so as not to lose the benefits of watering to evaporation.
- Choose non-flammable outdoor furniture (e.g., a wrought iron patio table in lieu of a wood one). Avoid plastics. Keep propane grills far from the house.
- Remove flammable non-native plants such as juniper, eucalyptus, acacia, broom and tall ornamental grasses. Replace them with natives from local sources including the *Native Plant Nursery in Tilden, the Tilden Botanic Garden, and Annie's Annuals*. Our local nurseries also carry large selections of native plants and can advise you on which ones to choose for fire safety.