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Filling the vacant board seat

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To: public.comment@kensingtonfire.org

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Kensington Fire Protection District Board,

I'm a long-time property owner on the dead end of Purdue Avenue, along the East Bay Regional Park District boundary.

Having read the applications for the open board seat, and watched some of the interview meeting video, I want to share a few comments:

1. Many neighbors along the WUI (Wildland Urban Interface) in Kensington have worked on wildfire prevention for years. This includes working on our properties, and in EBRP lands, helping to create and maintain a shaded fuel break along the Kensington border. A few resident volunteers, in particular, have put in hours and hours of physical volunteer work on the fuel break, in collaboration with staff from EBRP. There is a good, longtime working relationship between neighbors and park staff.
2. As well, many Kensington WUI neighbors have been and are working hard to become Firewise communities, with assistance and support from the KFPD's emergency preparedness coordinator, and Fire Department officials.
3. Some Kensington residents attend the [West Council Firesafe Council](#) meetings, which is a fairly new regional group focused, of course, on West Contra Costa. These meetings sometimes present important, relevant information for Kensington, helping explain regional programs, services, and research. (The Diablo and Oakland Firesafe Councils, long established, are also excellent resources.)
2. Contra Costa County's Measure X supported [Wildfire Mitigation](#) office serves Kensington, and is actively supporting the development of our Firewise communities, working with KFPD's emergency preparedness coordinator. One service of the county's Wildfire Mitigation office is free community chipping, which is already happening, with more to come this year. The county also offers mitigation assistance for low-income residents. This office is a key resource and partner.
3. Under a relatively new law (AB-2911), [CalFire must now identify dead-end streets/neighborhoods](#) in very high wildfire hazard areas statewide, and conduct assessments with recommendations for improving egress and ingress. This has already been done for Kensington, which has two areas that qualified for review, on Purdue/Garden Drive and a portion of the Leneve area, primarily in El Cerrito. KFPD fire officials, and the emergency preparedness coordinator are familiar with these reports and this program.
4. I am saying all this because I was shocked to hear one candidate for the board seat saying nothing is being done for wildfire prevention. While more can always be done (more on this below), his statements simply don't reflect the truth. This indicates a lack of knowledge, study and research.
5. The East Bay Regional Park District regularly publishes [wildfire prevention plans](#) and strategies, identifying areas of highest needs (using various measures), and budget priorities. The district rigorously pursues grants for its mitigation work. I believe it takes wildfire seriously. (No, I don't work for EBRPD, but as a WUI property owner, I strive to stay up on its efforts, to understand how this major public landowner approaches wildfire.) There is always more for EBRPD to do. It manages thousands of fire-risk acres that border developed areas, and is severely limited by funding. But to approach EBRPD as if it is doing nothing, or even very little, simply doesn't add up. I believe partnering with the park district, as is already happening with the fuel break bordering Kensington, is a far better way to affect positive change, than with an adversarial approach, as suggested by one candidate. It helps to have a sense of the district's overall wildfire plans and challenges. Note: the local fuel break needs more work and maintenance. This can best be achieved through partnership.
6. Finally, in my opinion what is lacking in wildfire prevention in Kensington (and in El Cerrito) is inspection. The KFD hasn't done thorough inspections for a few years, citing budget constraints. It does "windshield" or drive by inspections. This doesn't get into backyards. How can people learn what's needed to meet regulations if they don't get the feedback of inspections? How can regulations be met? This is where it would behoove Kensington to follow programs used in Berkeley, Marin County and elsewhere, investing in an educational inspection program, with part-time certified inspectors (to avoid the costs of full-time fire department officers), hired for the spring and early summer inspection season. This approach is based on the belief that educational inspections will result in better compliance than the threat of fines. (Save these for those who still don't comply.) Inspectors educate residents about legal requirements, and make "best practice" recommendations beyond these. Many communities doing this use [dedicated software](#) on notebooks in the field. To me, the investment up front in this kind of approach is potentially more than paid for by compliance results.
7. I agree that any board member should be prepared to study and weigh in on more than just wildfire issues. This is but one area of fire safety.
8. I encourage you to select a candidate who is measured, understands the importance of doing research, grasps the significance of data, demonstrates the ability to forge working, non-antagonistic partnerships within Kensington, and with neighboring jurisdictions.

9. My gut feeling tells me this is Rick Artis, based on his responses, background, and manner.

Thank you for reading (if you made it this far!),
Catherine Rauch


[Kensington](#)

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Catherine (Kate) Ann Rauch