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RCPC Election Results: New Faces Join Seasoned Veterans

— by Robin McDonnell, RCPC 2021 Election Officer


Michelle Boyd


Stuart Flashman


Matt Levy


Ken Rich


Ronnie Spitzer


Ashley Pandya

In mid-April, Rockridge residents cast their ballots in the Rockridge Community Planning Council's Annual Meeting/Election for seats on the board of directors. Candidate statements had appeared in the April *Rockridge News* and online at rockridge.org. The candidates presented their views to the community in more detail at a moderated Candidates Forum Webinar on April 8.

Voters turned out to cast their ballots on April 15 in the BART parking lot at Shafter/Forest and continued on April 17 in the Rockridge Library parking lot. Full social distancing and cleanliness protocols ensured a safe voting experience.

Six candidates, four of them incumbents, were elected to full two-year board terms. In all, 436 ballots were cast for ten candidates in this contested election. (Candidate and board member Eric Lombardo withdrew after the ballots were printed.) Five ballots were provisional.

Incumbents **Stuart Flashman** (272 votes); **Michelle Boyd**, (242 votes); **Matt Levy**, (237 votes); and **Ronnie Spitzer**, (231 votes) retained their seats. Two new members joined the board *(see profiles on next page)*: **Ashley Pandya** (238 votes) and **Ken Rich** (228 votes). The vote tallies for the rest of the 2021 candidates were: **Diana Mitchell-Chavez**, 210 votes, **Myrna Walton**, 203 votes, **Andrew Masalin**, 184 votes, and **Jennifer McElrath**, 171 votes.

New board member **Ken Rich** is also a member of the RCPC Land Use Committee and a professional city planner. **Ashley Pandya** works in construction technology and has volunteer experience assisting low-income communities with taxes and emergency housing.

The new RCPC board met on April 19 and elected officers for 2021-22. The board also adopted resolutions thanking **Andrew Masalin** and **Eric Lombardo** for their service to RCPC.

Congratulations to the new and returning board members, and thank you to all the candidtates in the 2021 RCPC Board Election. ■

Rockridge Couple Pays It Forward to Build Racial Equity

— by Judith Doner Berne

"They're Rockridge royalty." That's what a colleague said when I mentioned that I was going to interview John Bliss and Kim Thompson for this column. But there is no regal attitude to this activist couple. Rather, more of us could emulate how they direct their time, energy, and financial resources toward making a big impact on small pockets of need in Oakland — particularly those of minority youth. By targeting specific projects like renovating a basketball court or supporting a tutoring program,

Eyes on Rockridge cont'd on page 8


John Bliss and Kim Thompson work to support Oakland's neediest.

MEET RCPC'S TWO NEW BOARD MEMBERS



Ken Rich first lived in Rockridge in the '90s while in graduate school at Cal before drifting across the bay to San Francisco where he lived for 17 years. He never forgot how much he loved Rockridge and found himself coming here often, mostly on weekends. He finally found a house on Manila after searching on and off for 10 years.

Ken is an independent consultant who, until recently, served as Director of Development for the City of San Francisco where he negotiated with developers to maximize affordable housing and other community benefits. He has spent his career working on city planning, housing, and real estate issues in the public sector, and brings these technical skills to the board. More importantly, he brings his expertise in implementing well-developed communications and consensus building.

Ken is in favor of building more housing in Rockridge and believes that while new condos or apartment developments here will not be cheap to buy or rent, they would be a lot less expensive than single-family houses, thus helping welcome a greater diversity of people into the neighborhood. "I'm not personally bothered by the idea of a taller building at CCA or BART, but I also don't think they are necessary for this neighborhood to do its part on housing."

This is Ken's first time serving on a nonprofit board, so he plans to learn how it works and hopefully contribute to RCPC's role as a conduit for a broad cross-section of the neighborhood — from renters to homeowners, workers, businesses, and unhoused people. He also feels, however, that RCPC should embrace the fact that the rest of the City and the region also have a stake in what happens in our neighborhood. ■



After many months of searching for a new home, **Ashley Pandya** and her husband moved here from San Francisco in 2019. She loves how Rockridge brings together an urban-friendly lifestyle with a neighborhood spirit where she can walk to the playground with her toddler, hop on BART, and grab a coffee — all while running into neighbors who are also on foot or bike.

During the week, Ashley leads the user experience research team in Autodesk's construction division where she helps build software to increase quality and safety while reducing costs on the job site.

Ashley sees the RCPC as a liaison between our community and the City of Oakland on matters concerning our community's health and well-being (speed bumps, traffic congestion, new developments), as well as creating educational opportunities for residents to learn about and provide input into upcoming issues and projects that affect us all (ADUs, parklets, slow streets).

She wants to see more businesses move to College Avenue and to see Claremont Avenue become more pedestrian and bike-friendly as a way to attract more visitors to our community. In her role on the RCPC Board, she will ask, "How can we thoughtfully and efficiently ensure our community has a voice in determining the vision for Rockridge?" and, "How can we facilitate putting that into action?"

Ashley is open to the construction of buildings seven stories or taller at both CCA and the BART, and supports ending exclusionary zoning. She believes that increasing the overall housing supply is the best way to bring in more diversity, as long as community concerns and considerations are taken into account. ■

The Rockridge News

The Rockridge News was founded March 1986 by Don Kinkead, and is published monthly (except August). It is sponsored by the Rockridge Community Planning Council (RCPC), a nonprofit public benefit organization founded to: preserve and enhance the unique character of the Rockridge neighborhood; promote the health, safety and quality of life of its residents; furnish a forum for community involvement; and provide leadership and representation of neighborhood interests.

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Jo Ellis ..... Assistant Editor & Ad Manager
Susan Montauk ..... Business Manager
Judith Doner Berne ..... Eyes on Rockridge

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Robin McDonnell ..... Vice-Chair
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Ronnie Spitzer ..... Treasurer
Matt Levy ..... Assistant Treasurer

Michelle Boyd, David Garcia, Stuart Flashman, Annette Floystrup, Kirk Peterson, Ken Rich

Contact the board: chair@rockridge.org
For information: info@rockridge.org

Contacting The Rockridge News

Are there community issues you'd like to see covered in *The Rockridge News*? Have questions about newsletter distribution? Want to volunteer to be a *Rockridge News* block captain? Want to write a letter to the Editor?

Articles submitted for consideration should be emailed to the editor. All submissions are limited to 600 words max (300 words for letters), and must include the author's name, email address, and city or neighborhood of residence.

All submissions are subject to editing for clarity and brevity. To submit content, or for reprints of an article, contact: editor@rockridge.org.

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To subscribe to *The Rockridge News*, send your check for $20, payable to *RCPC* with "Rockridge News" noted on the memo line.

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Display Advertising

Deadline for the June 2021 issue: **May 20**

Advertising rates are $28/column inch. Six-month pre-pay rate available. For display ads, call Jo Ellis at 510-653-3210 (after noon), or email joellis1@hotmail.com. Email Susan Montauk at smontauk@gmail.com for information regarding classified ads.

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Views expressed in published articles do not necessarily reflect those of The Rockridge News, its editor, or the board of directors of the Rockridge Community Planning Council.

RCPC

Rockridge Community Planning Council — Land Use Committee

The May Land Use Committee meeting will be held on **Monday, May 24, at 7:30pm**, via Zoom. The meeting is open to the public. Please check the RCPC Facebook page the week before for details. **Send an email to landuse@rockridge.org or call (510) 652-5373 to receive a web link or phone number to attend.**

RCPC Land Use Committee Update — May 2021

by Stuart Flashman, RCPC Land Use Committee Chair

The Land Use Committee held its monthly meeting on April 26th via Zoom, with a quorum of members present.

Rockridge Housing Study

The subcommittee working on evaluating the feasibility of incentives for affordable housing has met once, but scheduling problems have slowed its progress. The hope is to have results to report at the May Land Use Committee meeting. The committee discussed what options should be analyzed. The analysis will look at both smaller changes (e.g., allowing subdivision of existing houses into 2-4 units) and building larger multifamily projects.

The Committee will begin presenting study results in the June *Rockridge News* with an article explaining the meaning and importance of land costs.

The Future of College Avenue Retail

The chair reported on further progress. He talked to a local retail consultant, who said that Rockridge is in an excellent position to continue to have a thriving retail district. We are now trying to meet with the City's retail specialist in the economic development department to get their opinions. Further consultations are also planned.

Blight Conditions at the Broadway/ Pleasant Valley TRC Site

The committee discussed the continued blighted condition of the vacant lot at Broadway and Pleasant Valley (former site of Safeway and its parking lot). The chair reviewed prior efforts to goad the City or TRC (the master tenant) to clean up the site. The Committee recommended that the board work in concert with Piedmont Avenue Neighborhood Improvement League (PANIL) to approach the City and also involve Councilmembers Kalb and Kaplan in the effort.

There was discussion of TRC's "testing the water" for possible retail tenants — namely a car dealership, "big box" retail store, or drive-through fast food restaurants. The committee was undecided about whether to oppose such businesses, and the issue will be presented to the Board of Directors. Residents with opinions may express them via email to landuse@rockridge.org.

Current Housing Legislation Affecting Rockridge; Future Upzoning near BART

There was preliminary discussion of housing legislation that would affect Rockridge, notably SB 9 (Atkins) and SB10 (Wiener). Both bills would increase housing density and have stirred deep divisions within the state. In addition, the City is apparently considering upzoning areas around the Rockridge BART, but it is unclear if the zoning change would be limited to the BART property. Further clarification is being sought; an article will follow in *The Rockridge News*. A video will be posted on RCPC's YouTube channel. ■

NCPC MEETING

The Greater Rockridge Neighborhood Crime Prevention Council (NCPC) will hold its regular bimonthly meeting on **Thursday, June 10, at 7pm**, on Zoom. Guest speaker, Creighton Davis, chair of Oakland's Community Policing Advisory Board (CPAB), will present his vision for community-oriented policing. Join us to discuss crime and public safety issues in your neighborhood.

To Join Zoom Meeting:
https://zoom.us/j/99809678270?pwd=RG5ROU90WmZLNU9aT09uOHFZQ294Zz09
Meeting ID: 998 0967 8270
Passcode: 990756

The April 2021 minutes are now available online at: https://tinyurl.com/y7r5qmbz. You can also open the document directly at this link: https://tinyurl.com/26ak72wn.

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The Question of Affordable Housing

— by Annette Floystrup

May is Affordable Housing Month. The phrase "affordable housing" has become a component of every project and proposal for new housing, but what does the term mean? How do we define affordable? Can affordable housing be built in Rockridge?

According to the National Low Income Housing Coalition, housing is affordable if it costs no more than 30 percent of one's income. Renters who pay more than this are considered "cost-burdened"; those who pay more than 50 percent are "severely cost-burdened." In Oakland, 59 percent of residents are renters; with the median income of these households around $40,000, more than half of them qualify as very low income.

However, due to the high cost of Bay Area housing, even households that bring in as much as six figures can be designated as "low income," according to income limits set by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). That designation applies to those earning incomes at or below 80 percent of Area Median Income (AMI). In Oakland, 80 percent of AMI is very high — $73,100 for a single person and $104,400 for a four-person household.

Housing Cost Burdens Have Stark Racial Impacts

In Oakland, African American households face the highest housing cost burden, with 63 percent devoting more than 30 percent of their income to housing (according to the PolicyLink National Equity Atlas). Overall, 59 percent of households of color are housing-cost-burdened, compared to 42 percent of white households. Between 2000 and 2010, Oakland lost 34,000 African American residents (a 24 percent decline). This included 10,000 OUSD students. Lack of affordable housing fuels the fire of Oakland's ongoing and dramatic exodus of African American and other POC households.

Is It Really Affordable?

The need for genuinely affordable housing in Oakland is very high, but are proposed developments in Rockridge going to meet these affordability standards? The cost of land in Rockridge means that the answer is, generally, no. One of the more recent proposals for the multistory tower at the California College of the Arts property would consist of approximately 462 residential units, 10 percent of which would be affordable.

That sounds good until you realize that here, affordable is defined to mean "moderate-income" households, with eligibility defined as 120 percent of median income. For 2020, that is $109,600 for a one-person household, and $156,600 for a four-person household. In other words, not one single unit of affordable housing would be made available to low-income renters, as defined by HUD.

Oakland Knows How

Oakland knows how to build excellent affordable housing by partnering with local nonprofit organizations. The Oakland Housing Authority partnered with the East Bay Asian Local Development Corporation (EBALDC) to build Lion Creek Crossings, a planned neighborhood only one block from the Coliseum BART Station. There are 567 affordable homes for families and seniors.

The family-friendly project includes 1- to 5-bedroom units designed for larger and multi-generational families, plus 128 units specially adapted for seniors. There is a 5.7-acre park with a restored creek, as well as playgrounds throughout the complex, plus a central open space at the park.

The City also recently purchased the Clifton Hall Dorm through the State's Project Homekey, providing deeply affordable long-term and short-term housing for Oakland families — and directly impacting the lives of more than 100 families.

Just last month, the Oakland Housing Authority, in partnership with nonprofit MidPen Housing, opened two new affordable housing communities in Brooklyn Basin on the Oakland waterfront. Vista Estero and Paseo Estero provide 211 deeply affordable rental apartments for seniors and families. This affordable housing is reserved for families earning just 60 percent of the Area Median Income (AMI).

The City of Oakland provides financing to developers to increase and preserve affordable housing in Oakland. This housing is aimed at households with incomes of 40 to 80 percent of AMI. One source of this funding is the City of Oakland's Affordable Housing, Jobs/Housing, Transportation and Capital Improvements Impact Fees.

***Affordable Housing,** see next page*

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***Affordable Housing,** from previous page*

Since the program began in 2016, the City has collected about $20 million in fees for use in affordable projects. Several projects have been funded, but currently only one is under construction; it will yield 57 units and is due to finish in May.

The City of Berkeley has just partnered with BART to build hundreds of new affordable homes at the Ashby and North Berkeley BART parking lots, committing $53 million to make the project at least 35 percent affordable — a total of about 570 affordable units. Similar possibilities exist here in Oakland, including sites such as the Rockridge BART station.

The Affordability Crisis

Affordable housing is desperately needed in Oakland if we are to retain housing stock for low-income workers, seniors, and the disabled. About 93 percent of new construction in Oakland is market-rate development, geared to luxury class apartments like the 40-story Atlas Tower downtown. While rents have recently dropped, often significantly, none fall into the affordable range, and the number of available and genuinely affordable units is almost zero.

The demand far outstrips the supply. Building costs have risen steeply in the past year partly in response to Trump Administration tariffs on Canadian lumber (which now costs 50 percent more than a year ago). Meanwhile, COVID has slowed production of building and snarled supply lines.

In summary, land and building costs are very high and rising, making public-private partnerships and government-subsidized construction perhaps the surest ways to add more truly affordable housing in Oakland — and particularly here in Rockridge. ■

The views presented in this article are solely those of the author and do not necessarily represent the position of the Rockridge Community Planning Council or its Board of Directors.

From Laptop to Doorstep — Delivering a Kid's Take on the News

by Skip Fogarty

It wasn't until we got a tip that we learned the neighbor on the other side of our backyard fence, Mia Gousman, a fifth-grader at Hillcrest School, was running a hyper-local news operation.

"We saw an article in the *New York Times* about how kids could make their own newspaper," Mia says. "It was in the At Home section, which used to be the Travel section. It was changed to At Home this year — for obvious reasons."

Stuck at home with distance learning this past year, Mia decided to explore the tools available for self-publishing. She is now recognized as CEO and Editor-in-Chief of *The Romany Post*, named for her home street in upper Rockridge. She produces a six-page print version and maintains an attractive website complete with archives.

Now planning her fifth edition, Mia is striving to maintain a monthly schedule. "I always start a new edition by working on the trivia feature," she reveals. "I don't know why, but that always gets me going." She employs an array of online tools to make it all happen. "I use an app called flipsnack for the basic layout. They offer templates to use, but I changed them a lot myself." Graphics and puzzles are created on separate platforms as well.

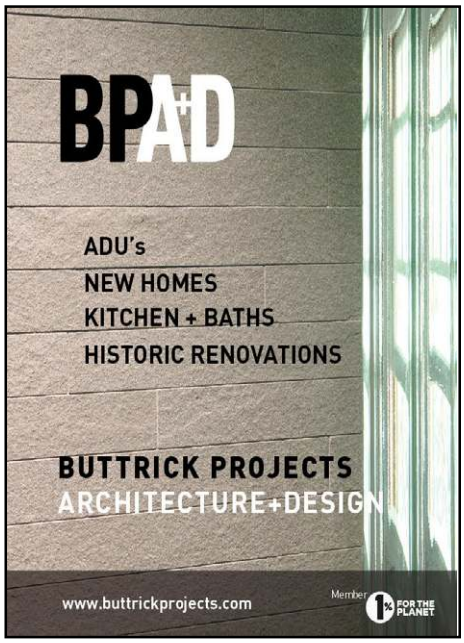


Fifth-grader Mia Gousman publishes *The Romany Post* from her bedroom.
Photo: Matt Gousman

The Post started as a one-girl operation with some oversight from her dad, Matt, who is officially listed on the masthead as "Advisor." However, since the first edition last December, Mia has attracted new contributors,

***The Romany Post,** see page 14*





Notice To All Rockridge Residents: Please Remove Foxtails Around Your Area

—by Linda Zunas

This time of year when you are out in your garden, it is especially important to be careful of foxtails. As foxtails dry out, they become dangerous for dogs, cats, and other domestic animals, as well as a nuisance for people. When dry, the foxtail barbs may physically bore into muscles. It's important to check your animals regularly — especially between the toes, and in the nostrils and ear canals. Foxtails can even embed themselves directly into a patch of skin.



To avoid spreading seeds, pull the foxtails out by the roots with a simple garden tool. Cutting or breaking off the seed stems is less effective and may need to be repeated several times to fully remove them. Do not just mow them down as that spreads seeds as well. Place all foxtail debris in a plastic bag, seal it tightly, and place it in the trash, not in the green yard waste container, to avoid spreading seeds into any resulting mulch.

Should your pet show any symptoms, like continuous licking or having a tough time chewing or swallowing, see your vet. Removing foxtails from your pet can be tricky, and is best left to the professionals. ■

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Volunteers Needed

The Rockridge News needs volunteers to help with delivery once a month, for no more than a half hour. This service is invaluable in preserving our old-school tradition of delivering the newsletter door-to-door since 1986 to all Rockridge residents.

A Marshal is needed to pick up their bundles on the weekend of publication, and deliver them to ten houses in the Colby/Hillegass neighborhood.

Block Captains are needed to deliver newsletters door-to-door (do not put in mailboxes, please) for the following routes: Route 10A: The 5500 block of Lawton; Route 17F: Both sides of 5200 Locksley between Clifton and Cavour; Route 25A: 400 block of 57th and all of Vicente Street.

The newsletter is published the first weekend of each month except August. To join, call (510) 547-3855 or email Susan at smontauk@gmail.com. ■

Rockridge Library Opens for First Time In Over a Year

All Oakland Public Library (OPL) branches are now open to browse the collections, check out items, pick up holds, get new or replacement library cards, use the computers or wifi, print/scan/fax documents, pick up tax forms, use the restrooms, and get help from staff.

The Rockridge Library will allow 20 people inside at any given time (25 percent of capacity). Visitors must wear a mask (they will be provided, if needed) and respect a 6-foot distance from others. There will be a screening station with a temperature scanner as you enter, and hand sanitizers.

The Rockridge Library is located at 5366 College Avenue, and is open Monday to Saturday, from 10am to 3pm. To reach an OPL reference librarian, email at eanswers@oaklandlibrary.org, or call (510) 238-3134. ■

New FROG Co-Chairs Take the Helm; Thank You to Outgoing Chair, Carol Behr

— by Theresa Nelson, Co-Founder, Friends of The Rockridge Greenbelt



New FROG Co-Chairs: (L to R) Alison Drury and Will Sheldon, Frog Park Co-Founder Theresa Nelson, Councilmember Kalb's Chief of Staff Olga Bolotina.

After nearly eight years, **Carol Behr** is stepping down as FROG Chair to focus on new professional and personal endeavors. Carol led FROG through an important period of growth by creating and administering our first-ever community survey, and worked with the City and neighbors to find a way to expand the park's play equipment and the DMV greenbelt design. For the third phase of the park project, Carol led the design, community outreach and fundraising with the help of dedicated committee members.

Carol helped to enhance the area in Big Frog with a design that added new regular and ADA swings, new long-awaited toddler swings, a new multiplay see-saw, and the popular multifunctional conical spinner. This equipment provided new play opportunities for very young children with the toddler swings, and for older children with the popular spinner. Additionally, Carol wrote and received significant grants for the Big Frog "Swings and More" project as well as a small grant for the bathroom mural by a local artist.

We are grateful to Carol for her energetic commitment to the park and her outstanding project management skills, especially working with the City of Oakland, Caltrans, and Alameda on a complex permitting process as well as the County and the California State Transportation Agency /DMV and elected state and local officials. Thank you, Carol for your leadership improving our park in a collaborative way with community volunteers and generous donors.

FROG will now have two Co-Chairs, **Alison Drury** and **Dr. Will Sheldon**. Alison is a neighbor on Shafter, and she and her family are almost daily users of the park. She is a Senior Partner at Environmental Resources Management. Dr. Will Sheldon and his young family live on Broadway, and they have been park users for a number of years. Will is a physician with Contra Costa County Public Health Department.

Interested in joining FROG? We'll be building a new butterfly garden and exploring the possibility of running the creek year-round. Contact Alison and Will at chair@frogpark.org. ■







Continued from front page

eyes on Rockridge

Bliss said, "you get tons of bang for your bucks."

Thompson, who is Black, and Bliss, who is white, met over a keg of beer at a student party while in graduate programs at U.C. Berkeley in 1989. Thompson was in law school and Bliss was studying for a master's in civil engineering. Both grew up in families that emphasized volunteerism and public service.

Fast forward to 2021, Bliss is president of SCI Consulting Group, an engineering and political consulting firm that helps public agencies establish new funding sources for construction projects. Thompson, following her rise through Price Waterhouse Cooper to partner and risk management leader, is now one of more than 200 executives handpicked by major corporations working fulltime to advance racial equality. The program, CEO Action for Racial Equality, was created in the wake of the George Floyd and other police killings of unarmed Blacks.

"I have such good fortune, I get to do challenging work aligned with what I want to do — helping Black and brown people. Giving back to my community helped me secure the post," said Thompson. Bliss continued her thought, saying, "Our volunteer world and Kim's work world came together. Every time we give, it comes back ten times."

The couple regularly holds events in their spacious 1936 Tudor Revival house where everyone is welcome. The home, designed by architect E. Geoffrey Bangs, is best known as The Morse House, after its original owner, and was awarded Oakland Historic Status in 2013. Featuring an expansive front porch and backyard, it's the site of frequent fundraisers for the raft of charities Thompson and Bliss mentor, advise, and support, and which they hope to resume this fall. "We're committed to getting Oaklanders more involved — particularly our neighbors in the Oakland Hills," Bliss said.

The house is full of contemporary art, much of it local and purchased through charity auctions. Beneath a glass top on their breakfast room table are photographs and mementos described by Thompson as "pieces of the puzzle of our life." And on the second floor is Bliss's model train room — a labor of love for the last 10 years. "I had a box of trains that I carried around until then."

"It's always a happening place," said Rockridge resident Brooke Levin, the former Oakland public works director, who co-chaired last year's successful Measure Q campaign along with Bliss. The two continue to oversee the implementation of the funds raised for the city's parks, recreation, permanent housing, and homelessness services. "They're a great couple. They're big networkers and connectors."

Bliss is especially proud to have founded Oakland Technical High School's Engineering Academy's annual Model Bridge Competition and to have helped establish the Oakland Parks and Recreation Foundation. The couple funds an ongoing "learn to swim" scholarship program for Oakland youth who otherwise couldn't afford lessons.

Thompson is on the board of two San Francisco-based charities that reach into Oakland. The Cowell Foundation makes site-specific grants to directly support and strengthen children, their families, and their neighborhoods. Legal Services for Children, of which she is vice-chair, provides free representation to children and youth who require legal assistance to stabilize their lives and realize their full potential. In response to the active Black Lives Matter movement, both agencies "have put even more of a lens on racial equity," she said.

"They seem to consider their home as a service to the community," said Lesley Evers, a longtime friend and neighbor whose College Avenue clothing store is a Rockridge fixture. "They're just always thinking about

Eyes on Rockridge, see next page

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4/09/2021	4	3	5448 Boyd Ave	$1,895,000	$1,895,000	12	$2,554,488
4/10/2021	3	1	5732 Clover Dr	$1,585,000	$1,585,000	0	$1,585,000
4/13/2021	2	2	5885 Ocean View Dr	$1,149,000	$1,149,000	6	$1,355,000
4/15/2021	4	4	5848 Colby St	$2,495,000	$2,495,000	0	$2,850,000
4/19/2021	4	3.5	5850 Chabot Ct	$1,599,000	$1,749,000	46	$1,720,000
4/23/2021	2	1	481 55Th St	$799,000	$799,000	4	$960,000
4/26/2021	1	1.5	448 60th St	$799,000	$799,000	15	$1,325,000
4/27/2021	2	1	400 60th St	$998,000	$998,000	8	$1,450,000
4/27/2021	4	4	6121 Harwood Ave	$1,999,995	$1,999,995	4	$3,025,000
4/27/2021	4	1.5	6475 Colby St	$1,950,000	$1,950,000	11	$2,730,000
4/29/2021	3	2	5947 Keith Ave	$995,000	$995,000	16	$1,300,000

Homes sold in April closed 28% over the asking price on average.

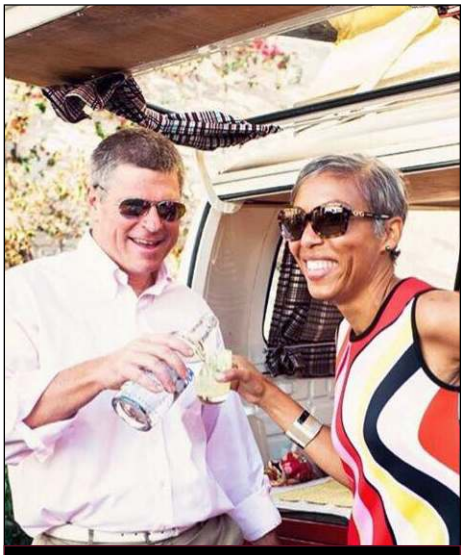
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***Eyes on Rockridge,** from previous page*



"He's super fun and she's a 'wow,'" says friend and neighbor Lesley Evers.

Kim's viral post got 2.8+ million views and 55,000+ likes:

I'm an Ivy League educated Black female professional with a flourishing career at a great firm. I'm well compensated and feel respected by those who know me at work and in my community. By anyone's standard, I've "made it."

How do the senseless killings of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery and Breonna Taylor and the Central Park incident affect me personally? They upset me not only as an empathetic human, but also because they are needless, painful reminders of indignities that I face daily. When I'm with people who know me, I'm a respected wife, mom, colleague, board member, friend, volunteer, neighbor, etc. But once outside of those insulated bubbles, I'm an anonymous Black woman subject to diminished respect and trust and it's exhausting.

I've been followed by store clerks. I've been stopped for a DWB (driving while Black). I've been mistreated by airline personnel. White women move their purses if I stand near them in elevators. I was followed for several blocks by a home security car in my own neighborhood… etc., etc. And beyond all this, I fear that a Black family member or friend could end up on the wrong side of a cop's knee or bullet at any time.

If it's exhausting for me, the Black woman who has "made it", how do you think it is for Black communities generally? ■

others. She's a 'wow!' and he's super fun and interesting." Kim has always been such a devoted customer and often models for Evers' photo shoots.

"When you're in their realm, they're just very loyal. John's out there on the weekend doing gardening and the other day I saw him trimming the median down the block," Evers said. "Kim's always so open and willing to talk about what it is to be a Black woman."

When the Black Lives Matter demonstrations against police killings were taking place last summer, Thompson detailed her experiences as a Black woman in a LinkedIn posting that has recorded more than 2.8 million views *(see reprinted posting on this page).* It includes the story of being followed in her own neighborhood by someone's private security company. "Even Rockridge is imperfect," she said.

Notwithstanding, the couple embraces Rockridge, focusing on the ability to walk to lots of places (Thompson) and enjoy the urban fabric and architecture (Bliss). He emphasized "the area's positive attitude toward inclusivity and issues of race." She pointed out the numerous lawn signs welcoming people of all races, religions, and genders, and advancing the belief that "science matters." "You don't see that in many communities," Thompson said.

They worked hard to ensure that raising their two biracial children in an affluent, predominantly white neighborhood didn't cut them off from Oakland's Black community. Mandela (Mandy), now 23, played youth soccer in Fruitvale, and Thompson (Tom), 24, played football for and graduated from Oakland Tech.

Tom is now a data scientist for the National Football League and Mandy is pursuing a master's in business analytics. Bliss appreciates that they "always check white and Black when asked to describe their race. They have a strong mixed-race self-image."

"We feel financially blessed beyond our wildest dreams," Bliss said. "You can invest in Tesla or you can invest in your community." For Thompson, "You can live in your fancy house and put up huge walls to keep you safe from the world. But by not putting up that wall, you make the community safer and stronger."

To comment on this column or send ideas for another, please email judyberne@att.net. ■

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New Housing at Rockridge BART?

— by Myrna Walton, Upper Broadway Advocates

In 2018, the California Legislature approved AB2923 in order to address California's housing and climate crises. The law mandates cities in Alameda, Contra Costa, and San Francisco counties change zoning laws at BART stations located in urban neighborhood centers to allow for building at least seven stories high; limit residential parking to no more than one space for every two new housing units; and require a minimum density of 75 housing units per acre.

At least 20 percent of the housing units must be affordable to very low and low-income persons, and BART has set itself a system-wide goal of 35 percent affordable units. So far, it has built 3,251 housing units at BART stations around the Bay Area of which 30 percent are affordable. Many more are in the pipeline.

BART's Vice Chair and Director of District 3, Rebecca Saltzman, spoke recently to a meeting of Upper Broadway Advocates (UBA) about BART's interest in developing the Berkeley and Rockridge stations. "Although it is still very early to start talking about the Rockridge Station, Councilmember Kalb and I have talked about having an outreach meeting some time this year — a virtual town hall. We want to build as many affordable units as possible," Saltzman noted.

More density means more people shopping on College Avenue. Oakland Councilmember Dan Kalb, whose district includes the BART Rockridge station, confirms his desire to have an informational town hall, the first of several, this spring or summer. "We want robust, iterative community participation."

"We want affordable housing, and BART has a self-imposed policy of 20 percent minimum at any station. I speculate you could have one building, maybe 100 percent affordable (to access tax credits), and the other building, maybe 10 to 15 percent affordable because 20 percent is hard for a market developer to attain."

Saltzman knows the Rockridge station well as she walked there throughout the 15 years she lived in North Oakland. She recently moved to within walking distance of the El Cerrito BART. She noted that while BART could propose projects taller than seven stories, the BART Board voted last year unanimously to not build higher than the minimum zoning standards set in AB2923, even though cities may do this on their own.

What About Parking?

The BART-owned property at Rockridge consists of approximately 1.4 acres in two lots on the west side of College Avenue — one across from Market Hall on Shafter/Keith and the second on Miles — separated by the freeway overpass. The land on the east side of College is most likely too narrow to build up. Additionally, Caltrans has the rights to the land directly under and immediately adjacent to the freeway, and would not



The green shaded areas indicate the two lots under consideration for possible development.

permit development there.

While the parking lot to the east of College Avenue will likely be retained, overall transit parking will be reduced. It might be possible to re-stripe some of the parking areas to accommodate more vehicles then the current plans allow, but AB2923 did not set minimum standards for the number of parking spaces for transit riders. This leaves open the question of what happens to the many BART riders who have been waiting years for a parking lot permit?

According to Director Saltzman, "BART is aware there are people in the hills who can't walk or ride bikes to the station. There are similar issues in El Cerrito, as well as Berkeley." Although one solution would be to add AC Transit feeder routes from the hills, the transit agency is not funded to add new routes and is struggling to maintain its current routes. Private jitney services in the hills would most certainly be unprofitable due to its low-density population.

Abigail Thorne-Lyman, Group Manager, Transit-Oriented Development at BART, notes that the transit organization could encourage car-pooling with a guaranteed parking space and cheaper rates. More trans-bay bus routes to San Francisco may be another possible solution for Rockridge. BART and City staff are seeking a planning grant to help determine parking needs and solutions, among many other issues. The ridership gained from denser housing at the stations, e.g., five or more stories tall, would potentially offset the lost revenue from less available parking.

BART Housing, *see next page*



***BART Housing,** from previous page*

These solutions are aimed at BART riders, however, and do not address the current use of the parking lot for neighborhood shopping on College Avenue. Many shoppers use the BART lot, especially during evenings and weekends, to visit local merchants and restaurants. Creative alternatives will be needed if the College Avenue business district is to remain vibrant and accessible.

In response to questions regarding architecture and style, Director Saltzman confirmed that good design was important to BART. "Since developers really want to build at BART stations, they are willing to come to the table on things like design and community amenities. We do not have cookie-cutter buildings at our stations."

Community Participation Is Key

The planning process depends heavily on community participation. In Berkeley, the City created a Community Advisory Group (CAG) consisting of representatives of four commissions along with residents from both the immediate neighborhood and citywide. The type and mix of development (housing, retail, commercial); the amount and mix of affordable housing, from very-low-income on up; the target population (teachers, for example); design elements and construction materials; and parking, are all addressed by the CAG.

CAG member Blaine Merker describes the CAG "as a place to develop a consensus vision informed by the views of the community, but insulated somewhat in order to have a more thoughtful conversation." It includes neighbors and residents nearby and farther away because the stations serve the entire community. Some in Berkeley want no change in the neighborhood; some want to build as high as possible.

All this is worth considering as it's a great opportunity for Oakland and for Rockridge to rethink its housing and transportation policies. Stay tuned.

To learn more about BART's Transit-Oriented Development, visit https://www.bart.gov/about/business/tod. ■

Spring Cleaning & Greening Frog Park

— by Theresa Nelson, Co-Founder, Friends of The Rockridge Greenbelt (FROG)

Friends of the Rockridge-Temescal Greenbelt (affectionately referred to as FROG) and park users gathered on the **17th of April** for an Earth Day clean-up at Frog Park. While last year's clean-up event was canceled due to Covid-19 restrictions, this year a few dozen determined volunteers came together to help maintain the community green space.

Volunteers (masked and appropriately distanced) trimmed the overgrown ivy and trees which had grown into the play structure, picked up a huge amount of fallen eucalyptus bark and leaves as well as lots of weeds, removed trash, and turned some of the packed fibar. We expect the city will replace the fibar (shredded bark) and to bring in new sand for the sandboxes soon. Certain areas of the park were left alone due to the homeless people camped nearby. Our next clean-up will be in September for Creek-to-Bay Day.



New Co-Chair Alison Drury and her family make cleaning the park a family affair.



New Co-Chair Will Sheldon and volunteer Barney Smits load up the dumpster with trimmed branches.

In other maintenance news, the new slide to replace the broken curved slide is now on order and should be delivered soon. The bathroom door has been replaced. A new ADA swing is also on order. The conical spinner was lubricated so it now moves freely again. For the time being, the water cannot be turned on for the creek flow, as there is a huge pile of trash in the area near the DMV and large branches in the culvert, both of which need to be removed by the City so the creek will not back up.

If you see an area that needs maintenance, please call 311 or report it on the SeeClickFix app, and also alert Councilmember Dan Kalb's office as they are tracking some of these issues, (510) 238-7001; dkalb@oaklandca.gov. ■

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The Dish on Takeout Food in Rockridge

by Terre Beynart
(a.k.a. "The Green Celiac")

The Green Celiac reviews Rockridge eateries that offer takeout with a focus on ease of ordering, clarity of the menu for those on special diets, and a critique of the sustainability of takeout packaging.

There is a charming patio off of the west side of College Avenue between Bryant and Clifton which is the workplace home of a plucky group of Tibetans, **High Peaks Kitchen**. These folks were unhappily exiled from Tibet and afterward honed their cooking skills in India. They serve up a nice mix of Indian and Pakistani dishes with friendly flair and less oily versions of South Asian standards.

On our first visit, we ordered the Chicken Tikka Masala ($12.99), the Lamb Korma ($14.25), and Basmati Rice ($2.50). The Tikka Masala and the Korma were both excellent — flavorful and rich. The rice was perfectly cooked. I especially liked the whole cashews in the Korma.

Their style of both the Tikka Masala and the Korma is to serve the meat in the sauce, sans vegetables. We could not in good conscience limit the review to this item only, so we went for a vegetarian lunch to get a true sense of how they cook vegetables. For that, we ordered the Vegetable Korma ($12.49), Baingan Barta (Eggplant) ($11.99), Yellow Daal Tadka ($11.49), Garlic Naan ($3.49), and rice.

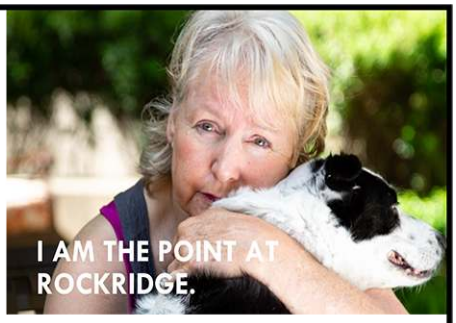
The big winner was the eggplant. The eggplant was so cooked that it was almost like it had been sent to the blender. The flavor was delicate and lovely. The vegetarian Korma had peas, green beans, cauliflower, and carrots, which was satisfying and flavorful. The Daal was very good, too. Be careful when ordering their food "spicey" as they take their spice level very seriously.

The takeout came in a paper bag, the naan was wrapped in aluminum foil and the rice was in a box. Points for all that and for not including cutlery or napkins. All of the other dishes came in plastic containers; good for reuse, but not good environmentally.

The Dish, see next page



High Peaks Kitchen, 5299 College Avenue, is open daily from 11am to 9:30pm (closed on Tuesdays).

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Beer Baron, 5900 College Avenue, is now open for indoor dining.

The Dish, *from previous page*

Their menu is extensive, however their website does not include photos of all of the dishes. Also, there is no indication of gluten-free or the use of dairy on most menu items. On the phone, they were very kind and patient with my incessant questions.

Enjoy takeout from High Peaks Kitchen and tip your hat to the Dalai Lama whose photo is across from the register at checkout.

Beer Baron

The corner of College and Chabot has seen a lot of changes over the past decade. I was jazzed when Toast made the effort to become a community enterprise… it's sad to see them go. I can honestly say that Beer Baron, the current occupant, hit the ground running and established itself as a happy home for good food, great cocktails, an array of craft beer, music, and overall good vibes.

For takeout, we selected the Kale and Quinoa Salad ($14), Farro and Veggies ($8), and Seared Coho Salmon with Crème Fraîche Mashed Potatoes and Grilled Vegetables and Gremolata ($26). The Kale and Quinoa Salad and the Farro and Veggies were sturdy starts.

What blew me away was the Crème Fraîche Mashed Potatoes. It lent new meaning to the words "comfort food." I believe at first taste I had to sit back in my chair, stop talking, relax, and savor each bite. There were little strips of caramelized onion in it. Oh my. The grilled vegetables that came with the dish were cooked perfectly.

The takeout came in a plastic bag, unfortunately, but the food was in cardboard containers (yay) with two little one-ounce solo plastic cups for the dressings. Their online menu didn't have any identifiers for those with special dietary requirements, but the phone number was prominent at the top. The online ordering system had a place to write instructions to the chef on what looked like nearly all of the dishes.

Head on over to Beer Baron to relax on their lovely patio and enjoy good food and a wide selection of refreshments. ■

Ben & Nick's Is Back Open

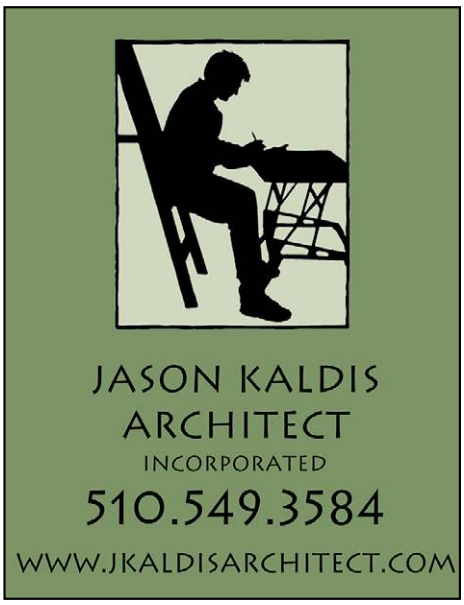


Visit Bartender Erica and enjoy a pint dispensed from their eye-catching vintage ceramic beer taps.

Ben & Nick's, 5612 College Avenue, quietly changed hands last month and re-opened on April 11. Founded in 1997, the pub was named for the son's of the original owner, Mark Graham, now 75 and retiring. Ben Seabury and John Guhl of the 1100 Group are the new owners and look forward to welcoming neighbors back to the establishment.

Ben & Nick's is open Sunday through Thursday, 11am to 10pm; Friday and Saturdays until 12am. ■





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The Romany Post, from page 5

like local kids Tobias Wyer and Nico Ebeid, and launched new features. *The Post* is now replete with hard news (Mia's beat), movie and book reviews, crossword puzzles, a thematic trivia quiz…even poetry.

The 10-year-old editor tackles some heavy headlines in her reporting, including a review of President Biden's inauguration, a summary of the vaccine situation, and a personal account of the impact of school closures and online learning. Suitably, her banner reads "*The Romany Post*: Local and Worldwide News From a Kid's Perspective."

With each edition, Mia has been building out her operation. She now collaborates with an 11-year-old "Outdoors" columnist who traces interesting walks and bike rides around the neighborhood. In the second edition, there's a funny submission about an animated gingerbread man by a Little Leaguer who lives around the corner; plus a tongue-in-cheek bit from Mia's six-year-old sister Annabelle discouraging folks from eating lambs "because they're so cute and they taste TERRIBLE."

The Romany Post is hand-delivered to approximately 30 homes in Mia's neighborhood. "But we also make the rounds by car to reach people further out and we mail to some friends and family," she reports. "I'd guess we're distributing about 60 in total."

What about online traffic? "We don't know right now," Mia replies. "But I've heard good things about Google Analytics, so we're looking into that."

You might think Mia's pandemic project might signal an interest in becoming a journalist, but, no. "I definitely want to work with animals. My career ideas are to be a naturalist or an elephant conservationist. Maybe a marine biologist."

"To her credit, she's done 99 percent of the work without our help," Matt says. "She researched all of the software she uses and taught herself how to edit and do the layouts. With all of the downtime we've had this year, it's great she found a project she's passionate about."

When asked what was her favorite part of running a newspaper… the reporting, the design, or seeing her name in print… Mia offers a surprising answer. "I'd say the best part is getting submissions from other contributors. It shows they like my newspaper and they want to help enrich it." Mia added, "I'd like people to know I really enjoy photography. Having a newsletter gives my pictures a purpose."

You can leave comments, suggestions, or appreciations for The Romany Post *at* www.TheRomanyPost.com.

Got a story tip or comment for Skip? Email editor@rockridgenews.com. ■


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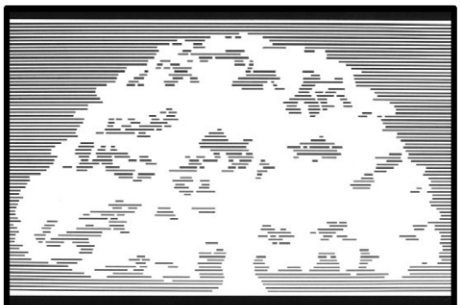
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