The Rockridge News

rockridge.org

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THE GUERILLA FORESTER: *A Rockridge resident turned his backyard into an informal native tree nursery, rescuing thousands of saplings from weed-whackers and concrete, and giving them away for free./ Chris Ayan*
Read our story on Page 8.

"RO" illustration by Laura Serra



Developer Revises Proposal for Trader Joe's Site

by Thomas Lollini, RCPC Land Use Committee Chair

The developer of a major Rockridge project has scaled it back in response to neighborhood priorities, according to its most recent project proposal.

On August 19, Align Development submitted a revised project proposal that includes several key modifications. The new plan accommodates a 13,000-square-foot grocery space facing Miles Avenue, with potential underground parking accessed from Miles, though it remains unresolved whether the store will continue to operate as a Trader Joe's.

The proposal also lowers the two towers by seven stories, reducing them to 26 and 23 floors from the

Proposal, continued page 7

Tickets on Sale Now for the 2026 Rockridge Kitchen Tour

Sunday, September 27

Purchase tickets at RockridgeKitchenTour.com or by scanning this QR code.



by Star Lightner, RCPC Board

Once upon a time, most kitchens in Rockridge probably had Wedgewood stoves and birdcage refrigerators. In the oldest houses, the original stove was most likely wood-burning and, without refrigeration, perishable food was stored in a "cooler," a screened cabinet open to the outdoors on the north side of the house.

These days, kitchen remodels are more likely tackling 1980s or 90s-era remodels, replacing dated oak cabinets, linoleum floors, grout-heavy tile countertops, and inefficient layouts. Contemporary remodels often seek to enhance flow, increase natural light, and create seating in what has become the most popular gathering place in many homes. Other common goals include energy efficiency and sustainability. And of course, "granny units" have evolved tremendously!

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Local Transit and the November Election

by Margaret McCarthy

On their November ballots, Bay Area voters will be asked whether to approve the Regional Transit Measure (SB63). SB63 is a multicounty transportation revenue measure that would provide approximately $1 billion a year in new funding for transit throughout the Bay Area. Revenue would be generated through a 1% local sales surtax in San Francisco and a 0.5% surtax in the other four participating counties (Alameda, Contra Costa, San Mateo, and Santa Clara) for 14 years.

Historically, transit ridership was the bedrock funding source of BART and other transit agencies. Although transit ridership in the Bay Area is steadily increasing, it still has not reached pre-pandemic levels. Local transit agencies have largely closed the gap thus far with federal relief funds, but those funds are sunsetting; BART alone is projecting a $350-400 million per year deficit once emergency aid ends.

Without this measure, major transportation service providers predict the following cuts would be necessary:

- BART would close 15 stations, shut down two lines, and cut train service by 70%.
- Caltrain would run only once per hour, end service by 9 p.m. on weekdays, and eliminate all weekend service.
- Muni would cut services by at least 30%, cancel at least 20 bus routes, end regular evening service, and cut cable car service.
- AC Transit would reduce service by 16%.

Meanwhile, former transit riders will still need to commute. With more limited options, there are likely to be large increases in traffic across the region.

Proponents say passage of the tax would prevent these steep cuts and fund transit improvements to safety, cleanliness, convenience, and the seamless integration of transit services. The measure includes third-party financial efficiency reviews for BART, Muni, AC Transit, and Caltrain as a condition of continued funding.

You can find more information about the measure, including an impartial analysis of its contents and further details on impacts on different transit agencies, at https://mtc.ca.gov/about-mtc/authorities/public-transit-revenue-measure-district.●

RCPC and Connect Bay Area Present: Mobility Town Hall

Thursday, September 10 at 7 pm

Hear about the Regional Transit Measure, local mobility issues, and ask questions.

Rockridge Library, 5366 College Ave.



The Rockridge News

The Rockridge News was founded in 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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Rockridge Library Celebrates 30th Anniversary on Sept. 19

by Alona Rivord

The Rockridge community is invited to celebrate the 30th anniversary of our local library branch building on Saturday, September 19 from 11 a.m.-2 p.m. Branch staff and the Friends of the Rockridge Library (FORL) will host the party, offering fun for the whole family. The theme is "Check it out!"

Activities will include VIP speakers, historical photographs, music from the Rockridge Trio, an adult bounce house, and crafts for all ages, such as stamping your own commemorative tote bag. Guests can also enjoy popcorn and cake.

Additionally, FORL has commissioned original artwork of the Rockridge Library and will be offering a limited number of posters for sale.

The branch building opened to the public in August of 1996. The Rockridge community helped to fund its construction through a 30-year parcel tax, which received an overwhelming supermajority vote of 81.6% on the 1990 ballot.

"On the day we opened, it was a huge party," Children's Librarian Erica Siskind recalled. "The enthusiasm and excitement of the public, and their desire to check out something on the first day made for lots of joy and a wonderful community spirit that has continued."

In honor of the library's milestone anniversary, FORL is inviting the community to join its "$30 for 30" fundraising campaign. FORL is a volunteer nonprofit that supports branch staff with materials and programs not available from the Oakland city budget.

Siskind said many things at the library have evolved and expanded over the past 30 years. "But the most significant thing that has remained unchanged," she said, "is the idea of all of this — that our community supports a vibrant, engaging, welcoming, functional shared space for everyone."

Visit www.rockridgefriends.org/30-years to donate and learn more about the "Check it out!" celebration.●

Fun, Future-Building at Chabot Elementary

by Molly Baker

Have you noticed the joyful buzz of our neighborhood school coming alive again? The Oakland Unified School District welcomed students back in August, and the energy at Chabot Elementary is electric. This fall, two quintessential Chabot traditions are returning. Whether you have a child in a classroom or live just down the block, you're warmly invited to be part of both.

First up: the Chabot Fall Carnival! Mark your calendars for Sunday, October 18, from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. at Chabot Elementary (6686 Chabot Road). The carnival has been a beloved tradition for years, and it's not just for Chabot school families – everyone is welcome. Admission is free, and the day will be packed with games, prizes, pumpkin decorating, music, a bake sale, a costume contest, and more. All proceeds directly benefit the Chabot PTA, making it a great way to support one of our neighborhood schools while enjoying a fun autumn Sunday.

While the carnival brings the celebration, the school's Annual Fund builds the foundation. Many neighbors are surprised to learn that state and district funding falls significantly short of what it takes to run a complete elementary program – leaving about a $1,200 gap per student. You can help bridge that gap by donating between September 3 and October 3.

The Annual Fund directly underwrites essential staff and enrichment that wouldn't otherwise exist at Chabot:

- Weekly art and music classes for every grade
- The school library and librarians
- In-class learning specialists and school psychologists
- Vital equity, inclusion, and safety resources

Whether you drop by for a cupcake at the carnival on October 18 or contribute a tax-deductible gift to the Annual Fund by October 3, every bit of support helps our students thrive.●

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How RCPC Takes a Proactive Approach to Major Development Proposals

by Mark Aaronson, RCPC Board Member and Jana Good, RCPC Board Chair

If you've been following the news, you know that quite a few senior housing developments have been proposed in the Bay Area, several of them in Rockridge. In response, RCPC has been working proactively to engage with the developers and the community on these projects.

For the two most notable projects, 6230 Claremont Avenue and the Trader Joe's site, RCPC reached out early to connect with the developers and engage in discussions as the projects got underway. We've also formed liaison groups, composed of RCPC board members, neighbors most immediately affected by the proposed project, and community residents with relevant expertise. These liaison groups serve as a critical conduit between the community and the project developers.

Given the passage of recent California state housing bills, such as SB330 and SB79, that substantially constrain Oakland political and legal decision-making, RCPC's objectives for most major development proposals will be to identify and present neighborhood concerns and ideas to improve project design and reduce environmental impacts. We will also seek community-wide benefits, such as pedestrian-friendly streetscapes and public open space.

In most cases, RCPC will not take a formal position on a project until we're near the end of the City of Oakland's land use review process.

An example of the value of this approach has been the project at 6230 Claremont. In summer 2025, Ellis Partners and Spirit Living Group, the developers of the senior housing project proposed for the former Red Cross site at 6230 Claremont, met with the RCPC board to explain their project.

RCPC then established a consultation committee consisting of RCPC board members, neighborhood residents with expertise in senior and affordable housing, and adjacent neighbors most impacted by the proposed project to meet with the developers.

The last meeting took place on August 13. The developers presented changes to their first-floor plans, including moving utility and other building equipment away from abutting neighbors on the east side of the property, and confirmed that the City of Oakland has indicated its likely approval to have trash pickups, service deliveries, and move-ins and move-outs off Claremont.

The developers also proposed, for further discussion, changes in building design on the east side. A next step is a meeting between the developers and the steering committee of Rockridge Neighbors for Sensible Housing (RNSH), which is led by neighbors most immediately impacted by the project. Oakland's Planning Director is not expected to make a project decision until this coming November.

From our experience, if agreement is reached with the developer, this type of consultation group, which has been important in the planning stages, can also be critical in mitigating issues that will invariably arise during the construction phase.

For the Trader Joe's project, RCPC is currently forming a liaison group to meet further with Align and with Sequoia Living, its nonprofit, tax-exempt partner, which would own and operate the facility if it is built. This RCPC liaison group will consist of board members and individuals associated with active neighborhood groups, namely Upper Broadway Advocates, Chabot Village, and RNSH. As of this writing, RCPC is finalizing the designation of an additional member who resides on Oak Grove or Miles.●







Engineered Stone Countertops May Face Ban

by Sally Picciotto

As an occupational epidemiology researcher at UC Berkeley, I'd like to bring something to the attention of everyone involved in the Kitchen Tour, especially the designers and contractors, and anyone contemplating a remodel: after careful consideration of all the facts, California is moving toward banning engineered stone as a material for countertops.

Engineered stone, also called quartz, manufactured stone, or artificial stone, is popular as a comparatively affordable, high-quality product with all the properties one wants in a kitchen counter, including consumer safety.

Unfortunately, it is also the cause of a deadly epidemic among the fabrication workers who cut this material into custom shapes to fit in people's homes. Silicosis is progressive, irreversible lung damage caused by inhaling dust containing tiny particles of crystalline silica. It is the world's most common occupational lung disease, with miners, stonemasons, and construction workers at especially high risk.

Improved safety regulations caused silicosis rates in the U.S. to decline steadily for several decades—until recently. The fabrication of engineered stone countertops (i.e., the cutting, polishing, and shaping for each kitchen) is responsible for an alarming recent increase in silicosis cases: engineered stone has much higher silica content than natural stone and contains pigments and epoxies not present in natural stone.

These factors cause severe disability much faster. Whereas stonemasons used to die of silicosis in their 60s or 70s after a long, gradual worsening of symptoms, half of the people diagnosed in California since 2019 are under 47—and some are only in their 20s. Many are sick enough to require a lung transplant; some die in their 50s before receiving one. Most are immigrants from Latin America, many are fathers of young children, and few, if any had been informed of the hazards of their job. For up-to-date statistics, see the California Department of Public Health's dashboard: https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CCDPHP/DEODC/OHB/Pages/essdashboard.aspx

One might think that stronger regulations could ensure worker safety without completely banning engineered stone. This is not a realistic hope. Countertops are not mass-produced, since each one has to be custom-cut to fit the individual consumer's kitchen. Most countertops are fabricated in small shops, making consistent enforcement virtually impossible.

Even stronger regulations and perfect enforcement would be insufficient. Australia banned engineered stone countertops last year after concluding that it was the only way to protect the workers—limiting crystalline silica dust exposure to a moderately safe level is simply not feasible otherwise. A regulation banning engineered stone will save lives, but it will take a while to take effect.

Designers, contractors, and homeowners who want to consider other materials even before the law requires it can consult Habitable's guide for alternative materials before embarking on a remodel: https://informed.habitablefuture.org/product-guidance/4-countertops for more information. ●



Kitchen, continued from cover

The eight kitchens and two ADUs on the 2026 Rockridge Kitchen Tour, scheduled for September 27, are a very diverse bunch, ranging from one where the homeowners not only remodeled their dated kitchen but also added an entirely separate "entertaining kitchen" adjacent to the backyard, to a mostly DIY kitchen with a completely updated (and much more efficient) layout, to one that blows out the 1980s sheetrock to reveal an incredible visual expanse.

Other kitchens include one that hides a mudroom within its walls while now opening out to a gorgeous deck, one that incorporates art from around the world, a stunning Craftsman with woven silk wallpaper, and several with exquisite cabinetry. Two of the kitchens have adjacent remodeled bathrooms that extend or complement the kitchen renovation styles. Finally, there are two ADUs on the tour. One is a textbook example of how to achieve the most in a fairly small space, while the other is so spacious it definitely does not feel like an "accessory"! A bonus with many of the houses on the tour is their gardens, which guests will get to observe as they exit each house into the backyard.

Not sure you'll remember all the amazing ideas after the tour? Don't worry, Kitchen Tour guests will receive a copy of the comprehensive Tour Brochure, describing each kitchen and listing resources for those contemplating a remodel of their kitchen. Docents who have learned about the kitchen in advancee will also be on hand to answer questions about each owner's goals and challenges. No matter what you have in mind for your own kitchen, you'll find the design and construction professionals who can make it happen for you.

2026 Rockridge Kitchen Tour tickets are on sale now online for $50 plus service charge (until September 20, when the price goes to $55 plus service charge) and will also be for sale in front of Market Hall on the day of the tour. Purchase advance tickets online at RockridgeKitchenTour.com or by using the QR Code on Page 1. Again this year: you will have the option of purchasing an extra ticket to donate so that we can make some available at a lower cost to those unable to afford the full cost.●

Land Use Q+A: How Are Building Height Limits Decided?

by Kristen Belt, RCPC Board

Answering Community Land Use Questions

This series examines questions that have come up from the community about housing development policy. To begin the series, we look at an aspect of the State Density Bonus (SDB) law that has stirred up a great deal of confusion.

How is it that the proposed project at the Trader Joe's site on College Avenue can be more than 20 stories taller than the 95' zoning limit and still be considered code compliant? (A similar question was posed regarding the senior project proposed on Claremont Avenue.)

State Density Bonus (SDB) is a broad policy instrument aimed at increasing the delivery of affordable homes and senior housing, which is in high demand in California. The policy's impact depends heavily on the underlying zoning of any particular site.

There are two different general categories of zoning when it comes to density. Form-based zoning does not restrict density. Rather, it relies on other zoning criteria such as height, bulk, setbacks, and open space to create a legal building zone. Developers may place as many units within this space as they can fit. Developers are required to demonstrate how many units fit within a code-compliant area and are permitted density increases tied to that "base project." In this scenario, a project that qualifies for a 20% density bonus (such as the proposed project at Trader Joe's) would likely only result in an increase of approximately 20% in height.

In contrast, density-restricted sites have a specific allowable density within the zoning code. Developers calculate the allowable number of units based on the zoning code, then layer the density bonus on top. In this scenario, the allowable height within the zoning code is irrelevant. If the zoning allows for 100 units on a site, then the developer can propose 120 units using the SDB 20% bonus for senior housing, regardless of how many stories are needed. The project is entitled to a waiver of any development standard — including building height — that prevents the project from achieving the number of legally allowed units. In this way, the project is "code compliant" using the underlying zoning and SDB with waivers.

Aligning base zoning parameters with neighborhood design intention is challenging. Local planners must address State-mandated housing production goals, while housing legislation is expanding regularly and shifting the planning landscape. Evaluating compliance for large-scale projects such as the proposed Trader Joe's site is complex.

RCPC will closely monitor the planning approvals process for the site, advocate for community benefits with both the developer and the City, and count on our neighborhood land use attorneys to verify alignment with zoning and housing laws. ●

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Best Restaurant in Rockridge? Ramen Shop is a Contender

by Galen Wilson

With the sad announcement that Wood Tavern will close at the end of the year after a nearly two-decade-long run of excellence, it got me thinking about which restaurant owns the proverbial title belt of "Best Restaurant" in Rockridge.

Wood Tavern has likely held that distinction for a long time, although for my money Oken briefly took top billing before closing abruptly (despite putting out some of the best food anywhere in the Bay Area). So when Wood Tavern closes, who takes the belt? Belotti and Sfizio are in the discussion, but I think Ramen Shop (5812 College Ave.) has a strong claim to leap to the top and start

Best Bites on College Avenue

2027 as the best in the neighborhood.

What has elevated Ramen Shop is everything other than the ramen. Don't get me wrong, the ramen is excellent—they have an awesome veggie broth option to complement more traditional shoyu and miso offerings.

But if you go to Ramen Shop and only get the ramen (as I have admittedly done), you are missing out. The bar program is excellent for starters, with creative and unique cocktails and fun highballs that are not your momma's highballs.

The appetizers are the real standout for me. The pickled and fermented offerings are always unique (I particularly enjoyed the Moroccan pickled beets on a recent visit), and the dumplings immersed in a Meyer lemon ponzu may be the best non-ramen thing on the menu.

I'd be remiss if I didn't mention the turnip cakes (a dish I have shared my affection for in previous editions of Best Bites). To top it off, all three desserts are standouts, though the black sesame ice cream sandwich is particularly extraordinary. If Ramen Shop can sustain this level for anywhere close to 20 years, we can count ourselves lucky. ●

Proposal, continued from cover

originally proposed 31 and 25 stories. The design also eliminates a potential dead zone along College Avenue by adding public-facing retail spaces and a café, widening and improving sidewalks along the project's perimeter, and adding trees for shade.

The Rockridge Community Planning Council (RCPC) has been actively working to ensure the neighborhood's voice is heard by both the City and the developers. RCPC prioritized its advocacy based on more than 100 resident emails received to date, alongside guidelines established in its Community Vision Plan published in April.

The RCPC board has met with the project developers twice, in mid-June and mid-August, to create a constructive dialogue and advocate for residents' interests. While many aspects of this project cannot be challenged under recently enacted state density bonus laws, RCPC is examining technical elements to ensure density calculations strictly comply with local ordinances and State laws.

During initial discussions, RCPC board members presented a framework of four core priorities essential for maintaining the character and livability of the community. The changes in the developer's latest submittal directly address each of these areas.

Preserving Trader Joe's as a vital neighborhood grocery store remains a top priority. Reducing the vertical scale helps ensure that the two towers will blend more harmoniously with the Rockridge district.

RCPC has also stressed the importance of providing ground-floor retail that is welcoming and accessible to the entire neighborhood, not just project residents. Additionally, widening surrounding sidewalks improves safety, walkability, and foot traffic, while creating space for conversation amidst trees and planters to green the area streets.

Another advocacy item remains on the council's agenda: exploring ways the project can give back to the community. Potential initiatives include joint programs with Claremont Middle School, Chabot Elementary or the Rockridge Library, investments in community open spaces along College Avenue, programming for Rockridge's large senior resident population, and initiatives accessible to the broader public due to the site's proximity to BART.

RCPC is currently forming a neighborhood liaison group (as it has for other recent projects) to work through design and planning details (see article on Page 4). RCPC will continue to provide updates as discussions progress, and thanks residents for their continued engagement in shaping the future of the neighborhood.●

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The Backyard Nursery of a Neighborhood Guerilla Forester

by Chris Ayan

A handmade sign sits outside a house on Chabot Road offering free trees.

Behind the sign are rows of young redwoods, oaks, buckeyes, and milkweed in various stages of growth. Some of the trees will end up in schoolyards. Others along the hillsides beside Highway 24. Others in nonprofit planting projects or private yards throughout the East Bay. Over the last five years, somewhere between 1,000 and 2,000 trees have passed through this small stretch of this neighborhood.

The operation is run by Hervé Bruckert, a 59-year-old UC Berkeley budget office employee who has quietly built what amounts to a decentralized native tree distribution network. There is no nonprofit, no formal organization, and no business model beyond handwritten signs offering saplings for free.

Forests, at least in Oakland, apparently begin with recycled pots, backyard incubators, and a retired UC Berkeley budget employee biking around town collecting redwood seeds at dawn.

"Every spring, I go around and look for baby trees," Bruckert said. "I had a little redwood growing in the wrong spot on the property, and I knew eventually I would have to remove it. I felt bad about it."

That small act of guilt gradually evolved into something much larger.



Hervé Bruckert has replanted thousands of native trees through a self-run backyard operation.| Chris Ayan

At first, Bruckert simply rescued seedlings and placed them in pots outside his house for neighbors to take. Then COVID arrived, landscaping crews stopped regularly clearing lots and hillsides, and suddenly hundreds of saplings began appearing throughout the neighborhood.

"The trees were no longer being weed-whacked," Bruckert said. "You could actually see them."

What began as an attempt to save a few unwanted saplings slowly turned into a larger realization: native trees were appearing all over the East Bay with almost no chance of surviving. Left alone, many would eventually be cut down, mowed over, or pulled out before they had a chance to mature.

So Bruckert started collecting them.

At first, he moved seedlings into pots outside his house beneath handwritten signs offering them away for free. Then came backyard incubators. Seed collection routes. Volunteers. Planting experiments along Highway 24. Partnerships with schools and nonprofits.

The work operates in a strange middle ground between a community gardening project and a low-level guerrilla reforestation campaign.

Forester, contiued next page

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Bruckert described scouting north-facing slopes near the freeway where moisture holds long enough for young trees to survive. Volunteers monitor which species thrive in which conditions. Oaks, buckeyes, and redwoods are tested in different soils and exposures. Some planting sites fail completely. Others quietly turn into thriving pockets of native canopy.

"It took me maybe five years to figure out how to properly grow redwoods," Bruckert said. "They are very particular."

Behind the house on Chabot Road, the project becomes easier to understand. The yard itself feels less landscaped than accumulated. Monarch butterflies drift around milkweed planted near the sidewalk. Rose bushes climb through dense patches of greenery. Saplings sit in clusters waiting to be transplanted elsewhere.

The entire property functions almost like a prototype for how Bruckert thinks neighborhoods should feel: shaded, layered, and slightly reclaimed from concrete.

"People see others planting trees, and then they plant trees too," Bruckert said.



Hervé Bruckert and his tree categorizing sign.| Chris Ayan

The network around the project has expanded mostly through word of mouth. Neighbors with mature "mother trees" allow Bruckert to collect seeds from their yards. Volunteers build secondary incubators. One former volunteer moved to the Central Valley and began creating what Bruckert described as "mini forests" on family ranch land using techniques learned through the project.

Gilles Masselot, who has known Bruckert for more than a decade, described him as "surprising," with "a deep sense of respect for everyone," adding that "the best part is his humor."

The project remains intentionally non-commercial. Donations occasionally come in, and the funds are sent to support tree-planting efforts in Tanzania.

"I always wanted this to be non-commercial," Bruckert said. "I think it's important to give back to the community when you can."

There is also an almost philosophical attentiveness behind the work. Bruckert describes unconsciously scanning for seedlings while running through the hills.

"I call it my second brain," he said. "Sometimes I stop while running and realize I stopped because I noticed small trees growing somewhere."

One of Bruckert's favorite trees is an aging buckeye near UC Berkeley's Faculty Club, partially hollowed out but still alive.

"There is beauty in age," Bruckert said. "Nature often helps you better understand situations in your own life."

For now, the work continues quietly. New saplings appear beneath handwritten signs offering them away for free. Along stretches of Highway 24, small native trees continue taking root in places most drivers never notice. ●

Frog Park Clean-Up and 25-Year Celebration

by Theresa Nelson,
Frog Park Co-Founder

In October 2001, more than 1,300 volunteers came together over 10 days to build two wooden, custom play structures that became the anchors of Frog Park along Temescal Creek.

Nearly 25 years later, our community will gather for our semi-annual park clean-up and to celebrate this milestone, sponsored by FROG, the Friends of the Rockridge-Temescal Greenbelt.

On Saturday, September 19, everyone is invited to join the cleanup, which starts at 9 a.m. and goes until noon. FROG will supply gloves and tools, coffee, and pastries. Please bring your own water. We'll trim the ivy, clear weeds, fluff the fibar (shredded wood for play structure surfacing), sift the sand, pick up trash, paint graffiti, and more.

After the cleanup, around noon, we'll have refreshments, games and crafts for kids, and recognize volunteers who have served the community and Frog Park over the years.



The playstructure at Frog Park.| Theresa Nelson

Please join us to celebrate this special event and celebrate this beloved community park! More information available here: www.frogpark.org. ●

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Oakland Rents Are Rising Because We Haven't Built Enough Housing

by Garrick Monaghan Beyer, RCPC Board

Note:The author's opinions do not necessarily reflect those of the RCPC board.

Oakland is just beginning to undergo what might become a generational rent increase. The San Francisco Chronicle recently reported that Oakland's rents rose 3.4% in July. CoStar, a real estate industry data provider, is forecasting over 10% year-over-year rent growth by the end of this year – more than they've tracked in 25 years.

Opinion

Renters have benefited from a lot of new market-rate apartments built between 2018 and 2024, but those units have now (finally) been rented. The big apartment towers that were half-vacant during COVID-19 filled up in just the past few months, and rents are starting to rise again as demand spills over from San Francisco.

I've spoken with some neighbors recently who deny the role supply and demand play in setting rent prices. As Rockridge debates recent proposals to bring hundreds of new homes to our neighborhood, I encourage you to observe the natural experiment playing out before our very eyes. We built over 10,380 units of housing in Oakland from 2015-2025. For the first few years, demand kept pace, and rents tracked inflation. When COVID struck and demand declined, all that supply kept coming, and real rents fell for over 5 years straight.

I heard a surprising claim recently: that recent foreclosures of new construction buildings in Oakland, like The Baxter, The Logan, or Telegraph Arts, prove that market-rate buildings can't address the housing crisis. That these buildings' owners would rather keep the buildings vacant than offer more affordable rents. This claim is either a misunderstanding of economics or an intentional contortion of the facts. These buildings are struggling financially exactly because the market rents have declined – i.e., become more affordable. Using foreclosures as evidence that supply doesn't decrease rents is like claiming that vaccines cause illness—people can insist it's true all they want, but it's an anti-evidence position.

The companies that operate these buildings have been doing everything they can to attract tenants for the past five years, including leasing apartments at prices below what it costs to operate and maintain these properties. The only way to bring rents down further is to reduce the cost of building and operating apartment buildings, and unfortunately most of the community advocacy we've seen in the past 50 years in Oakland (and specifically in Rockridge) has focused on adding costs instead of removing them. As for The Baxter specifically, a recent market report by the broker Walker & Dunlop shows the building had 1 vacant unit out of 130, for 99.2% occupancy in Q2 of this year.



Garrick Monaghan Beyer

Remember that our market economy operates on simple logic. Things must sell for more than they cost, or they will never be sold at all. If you truly care about housing affordability, then care about reducing the cost to build it. That means reducing fees, streamlining permitting, and simplifying local requirements. That means getting out of the way of new housing as much as possible, not loading every proposal with onerous requirements.

Market-rate apartments aren't being proposed for Oakland today. Buildings are selling for $300,000 per unit, and it costs $1 million per unit to build here. But one kind of housing makes financial sense today. It can command a higher price, it has a demographically growing customer base, and Rockridge is exactly the type of neighborhood best suited to its residents. Can you guess what it is? Senior housing.●





That Gold Family Heirloom May Actually Be Worth Something

by Ella Smith

A gold coin tucked away in a drawer may not seem especially valuable in a world dominated by digital assets and investments. But as gold prices have surged in recent years, many people are discovering new attractions in old jewelry and family heirlooms.

Suddenly, a simple gold coin becomes a sunshine pendant made from 24-karat gold, designed and created by in-house designers at Pavé Fine Jewelry Design on College Avenue. Rising gold prices are driving customers to trade in, redesign, and repurpose old gold jewelry at Pavé.

Customers can bring in their gold pieces and, in exchange, receive store credit or even a check. However, Pavé's designers can also work with the customers to create new pieces, refurbishing the gold they simply had sitting around.

"Huge, it's been huge," said Pavé founder Michael Endlich regarding the influx of customers looking to refurbish gold pieces.

The last two years have brought volatile, fluctuating gold prices. The metal peaked at $5,586 per ounce in late January and now sits above $4,000 dollars per ounce. Gold has historically been a traded commodity; however, its characteristics set it apart from other investments.

The metal's limited supply and tangible nature make it a long-term way for investors to store wealth, allowing it to hold up well against currency devaluation or economic instability. Gold prices are largely influenced by supply, central bank reserves, and the stability of the United States dollar.

"There is this destabilizing influence in the world, no names," said Deborah Simmons, who works in sales and design at Pavé. "But it's created a profit-taking situation because it's created this commodification of gold."

According to Simmons, people are now looking to take profit, making the gold market increasingly volatile. "There's an incentive for people to trade it in," she said.



A sunshine pendant made from a gold coin, at Pavé Fine Jewelry Design on College Avenue.| Ella Smith

Simmons recounted a customer she worked with earlier this year. "Over Christmas I had this beautiful story: this woman came in, she was in her 40s, and her mom had just said, ' Take this and buy yourself something,'" Simmons said. "She had no idea that she had $30,000 worth of gold." The woman then used her credit to purchase a three-diamond ring.

According to Endlich, around 80% of customers trade in their gold for store credit in order to get new pieces. However, other customers create entirely new pieces. A recent customer, Stephanie Ong, traded in her mother's jewelry and made several custom pieces. She said the jewelry "helps her feel closer to her mom."

Customers range from couples looking to purchase wedding rings to senior customers looking to consolidate their wealth before retirement, Simmons said. Those exchanges bring a range of emotions.

"If it's a divorce ring, sometimes it's a relief," Endlich said. "But if it's beloved, let's say your mother passed, we can use that metal and make something new for you." Customers come in with a range of jewelry, along with the emotions they've attached to it.

"It's a way you can transfer feelings," said Endlich. "Because I think that jewelry holds feelings."●



Mark Your Calendar Now for Rockridge September Events

by Jody Colley,
Rockridge District Association

In a world of last-minute plans, there's something wonderfully old-fashioned about events that ask you to commit in advance. This month, Rockridge offers plenty of reasons to mark your calendar now — from intimate tastings and hands-on classes to author events and conversations on topics that matter. Registration is required for many of these events, so reserve your spot while space is still available on their websites or where indicated.

On September 12, beloved science writer Mary Roach brings her trademark curiosity and fascination with the wonderfully weird to **Local Economy** (6028 College Ave.) for a special show-and-tell, The Mobile Museum of Mary Roach. Roach will share a selection of odd and mysterious objects she has collected during years of reporting, along with the stories behind them.

If Italian food is your love language, **Enoteca Molinari** (5474 College Ave.) has a three-part cooking series beginning September 13. The Holy Trinity of Roman Pasta, presented by Istituto Italiano Scuola and Emilia Aiello of Cittavino & Co., explores three iconic Roman dishes: Cacio e Pepe, Carbonara and Amatriciana. Participants will learn through hands-on cooking, history, Italian culinary vocabulary, and, naturally, wine. Registration is available through Eventbrite.

At **The Breema Center** (6076 Claremont Ave.), September brings two opportunities to explore the mind-body connection. Bringing Harmony to Life takes place September 15, followed by Being With the Body, We Are Supported on September 18. Breema is a gentle, natural bodywork practice designed to encourage relaxation, flexibility, mobility, and greater awareness.

Beer lovers and foodies are invited to an evening of creative pairings at **The Monk's Kettle** (5484 College Ave.) on September 20, when they welcome a special beer dinner featuring Sante Adairius Rustic Ales. The evening will showcase a thoughtfully curated lineup of Adairius beers paired with a family-style menu designed to complement each pour, offering guests an opportunity to explore the flavors and craftsmanship behind both the food and beer.

And for those who prefer their events served with a side of dinner, **Millennium** (5912 College Ave.) offers a monthly Supper Club. The program provides subscribers with chef-prepared, plant-based meals inspired by seasonal, organic ingredients and the restaurant's globally influenced cuisine. Founded by chef Eric Tucker, Millennium is a pioneer in plant-based fine dining. Members simply pick up their prepared meal, reheat it when convenient, and enjoy a restaurant-quality dinner at home. Curated wine options are also available à la carte.

Whatever your interests—or your appetite—Rockridge has plenty of reasons to make a plan, put something on the calendar, and commit. Find more events at:
www.RockridgeDistrict.com

Rockridge News Seeks Volunteers to Fill Delivery Positions

by Susan Montauk

We love seeing family teams pitch in to serve their neighbors. Our community is strong because of the individuals who actively support it, and delivering the local news to our doorsteps is one of the important ways we continue to persevere as a vibrant community.

Molly Porter and her husband, Dare Porter, have been staunch supporters of the Rockridge News since its inception, and one way they have shown that fidelity is by delivering the newsletter to their neighbors, both as Marshal and Block Captain. Dare has been delivering the paper to his block of Hudson long before Molly took on the Marshal position upon her professional retirement. Now, they both need a break. Who will do the honors and step forward to fill their shoes?

- Block Captain Route 19E: Both sides of Hudson between Boyd and College
- Marshal Route 18: 8 bundle drops on 5300 blocks between Claremont and College

Duties: Block captains receive the bundle from their District Captains or Marshals and deliver the newsletter door to door on their prescribed route. Marshals pick up their box of bundles at the bundling site in the neighborhood and deliver them to their District Captain or Block Captains.

We hope to have new volunteers for these positions before the October issue, so please contact Susan at smontauk@gmail.com or 510-547-3855.



Dogs of Rockridge

illustration by Laura Serra

Louie and Chanel (aka Butter Ball) are 15-year-old Chihuahua/Pomeranians who have lived in Rockridge for the past three years. Originally hailing from Vallejo, where they were found in a cardboard box, they spend their days sunbathing, sniffing things, and on crumb patrol. Louie loves jumping and meeting doggy friends, while BB cherishes her spot on the couch. They both enjoy people, parties, and treats.





Minky is the most popular kitty on the block. She joined her new family on Halloween night in 2022, strolling into the house while while they were passing out candy. The moment she spotted the fireplace, she decided to stay. Minky adores being pet and soaks up everyone's attention. She's an adventurous spirit who loves climbing trees and happily accepts pets from friendly strangers on the street.●

Does your furry friend live in Rockridge? If so, send a photo of your four-legged companion and short commentary to: editor@rockridge.org

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Dear Editor,

I write to bring to your attention to two inaccuracies in a recent article by Thomas Lollini and Ryan Phillips. Both appear in the third-to-last paragraph found on page 9.

First, while a Chan Family entity owns the site, and has for decades, TRC has not developed it under a "development agreement" but rather under the terms of a long-term ground lease. Second, TRC is not in any way a subsidiary of Albertson's. A quick review of that firm's website would reveal that Safeway is TRC's tenant, not its parent company.

What might not be evident, unless one went to the trouble of calling TRC, is that the firm would be very motivated to develop the balance of the site for residential, including senior living, but the Chan lease precludes TRC from doing so.

Therefore, though the site is unquestionably ideal for much-needed housing, for that to ever occur, change needs to happen on the Chan Family level, not by impeding, or implicitly criticizing, TRC.

The City can zone, and site designate all it wants, but absent some sort of condemnation, or other arrangement with the Chan Family, a residential use cannot occur. In sum, developing a residential project is not under the control of TRC. Of course, given the "community's" resistance to the College of the Arts residential approvals, that use on the Ridge site would face its own set of hurdles.

I would be happy to discuss this further with the authors should they be so inclined.

Dan Wald

Dear Editor,

More fast-food at Broadway and Coronado? The existing shopping plaza, College Avenue and Broadway already has food options and empty space for fast food. What's needed is more walkable access to nature and open space.

This is not just my opinion but based on data from over 30 years of documented information from the City of Oakland. (That information can be found in The City of Oakland Draft Land Use Framework released in March of 2026, which highlights several parcels in Oakland that would increase walkability to nature if they were transformed into green spaces).

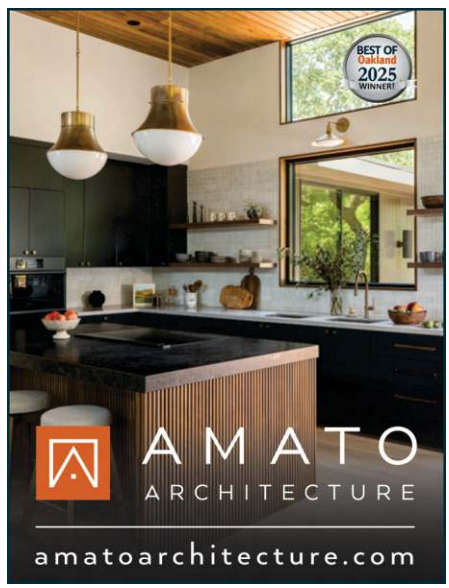
I visit The Ridge Plaza often and see people using Coronado Avenue for dog walking, jogging, biking and accessing the plaza using mobility devices. Yet they use the bike lanes and street for access, competing with vehicular traffic. The City of Oakland portal has a plan for transforming the former CCA campus into a mixed-use residential development.

Rather than intensifying vehicular traffic at an already congested intersection, why not create a park-like plaza or vegetated community space with paths that improve safer accessibility between the adjacent neighborhoods, senior living and residential buildings to the existing businesses by foot, mobility device or by bike?

Patricia Yusuf









For All Ages (Red = September-only events)

The Rockridge Branch Turns 30!: Saturday, September 19 from 11 a.m. - 2 p.m. Join us as we celebrate 30 years of service to the Rockridge community and beyond. Live music, guest speakers, crafts for all ages, and cake!

For Children

Art with MOCHA: Third Tuesdays from 3:30-5 p.m. Kids and tweens explore fun projects with a teaching artist.
Storytime: Thursdays and Saturdays, 10:30 a.m.
Chess Club: Wednesdays, 4 p.m.
All ages & skill-levels welcome.
Making Stories Club: Second and fourth Tuesdays from 3:30-5 p.m. Ages 8-12 are invited to write, illustrate, make, and tell your own stories.
Read to a Dog: Thursdays, 4 p.m.
Practice reading aloud alongside a dog trained to listen.

For Teens, ages 12 – 18

New After School Schedule:
Mondays: Board game day
Tuesdays: Homework Help
Wednesdays: Trivia/Kahoot
Thursdays: Crafts
Fridays: Video Games

For Adults

Meet the Author: Kayoko Akaboria and Yoko Kumano of Everyday Sake: The Go-To Guide for Choosing, Pairing, and Serving: The proprietors of Umami Mart will be in conversation with Shawn Conway, CEO of Niente Wine Estates, former CEO of Peet's Coffee. Book copies on sale. Wednesday, September 16, 6:30-7:45 p.m.
Rockridge Book Club: Every second Saturday, from 3:30-4:30 p.m. Please call 510-597-5017 for more info and to get a copy of the book. September's book is The Bee Sting by Paul Murray.
Graphic Novel Group: Every fourth Tuesday, 6:30-7:30 p.m., starting September 22.
Adult Crafting Series: Every second Tuesday from 6-7:30 p.m. Starts September 8. Draw like Andy Warhol using a blotted ink line technique.
Chair Yoga: Every first and third Monday, 10:30-11:30 a.m.Refresh your body in a joyful atmosphere. Library closed on Labor Day.
Ask Your Area Home Experts: Every second Friday, noon–2 p.m. Get answers, tips, and connections from a Senior Loan Advisor and a Realtor. Have questions answered about homeownership, maintenance, finance, investing, ADUs, downsizing, moving, and more.
California Writers' Club 5-Page Critique:
Every fourth Saturday, 1–5 p.m. Bring 6–8 copies of your work to be critiqued in half-hour sessions.
Needlework Circle: Thursdays, 1–3 p.m. Bring yarn and fiber arts projects to Rockridge Library. Build community, share your passion, learn and have fun!
1-on-1 Technology Help: Tuesdays, 5:30-7:30 p.m. and Saturdays, 10 a.m.–noon and 1-3 p.m.Come with your devices and technology questions and our volunteer tech guru will help. Signup recommended. ●

Rockridge Library Hours:

Holiday closures: Labor Day, September 7
California Admission Day, September 9
Mon., Thurs., & Sat.: 10 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.
Tues. & Weds.: 10 a.m. to 8 p.m.
Fri.: Noon to 5:30 p.m.
See calendar for events: oaklandlibrary.org/events

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