



KENSINGTON FIRE PROTECTION DISTRICT

DATE: February 19, 2025
TO: Board of Directors
RE: Update on Street changes: road widening, parking, one-ways and next steps
SUBMITTED BY: Director Jim Watt
TRANSMITTED BY: Mary Morris-Mayorga, General Manager

Recommended Action

Director Watt has provided recommendations for discussion and consideration.

Background

See attached presentation material from Director Watt.

Fiscal Impact

Costs are not yet known.

Attachment: Improving Fire Safety submitted by Jim Watt

Improving Fire Safety

The Board's mission statement is to protect the community from fires, medical emergencies and other hazardous conditions.

As shown on the attachment, Kensington is approximately a mile in diameter, adjacent to El Cerrito and Berkeley, and shares a 1.3-mile border with Tilden (East Bay Regional Park). Arlington Ave, provides a wide and direct north-south route through the middle of Kensington, but there is no such route for east-west traffic.

Contra Costa County owns the public right-of-way, consisting of the street (often 22 feet including gutter), plus a 15-foot landscape and sidewalk strip on either side of the street, for a typical total width of about 50 feet. The telephone poles and fire hydrant water lines, run close to the curb and are often on opposite sides of the street. The street is maintained by Contra Costa County while the adjacent homes maintain the landscape strip and sidewalk.

Parking is typically allowed on one side of a street and many home owners use the street to park an extra car, reducing street use to 15 feet, or less. When two cars are traveling in opposite directions one car must often pullover to allow the other to pass. If the oncoming vehicle is a bus or fire engine (both typically requiring 10 feet of roadway) this requires oncoming traffic to find a pullout to allow these larger vehicles to pass. In an emergency situation, when vehicle traffic could be very intense, this would affect emergency vehicle access, just as it did in the 1991 Oakland fire and the recent LA fires.

As shown on the accompanying maps and photos Kensington currently has restricted two-way access from Arlington Avenue to Kensington's border with Tilden Park to the east. Should a fire start in Tilden Park backed by Diablo winds this could put all of Kensington at risk of a serious conflagration. Reducing this risk will require quick emergency access to the ridgeline and good residential access from the ridgeline.

The two most logical staging areas for fire-fighting equipment are the parking area at Kensington Hilltop School and Grizzly Peak Blvd. These are also low points along the ridgeline and thus the probably route of the most intense flames. Because of the existing street width fire engines will likely use the routes shown on Map 1. This route, shown in yellow, includes Purdue and Kenyon Avenues, which allow parking on one side thereby making emergency access difficult.

Map 2 indicates the route along Kenyon/Purdue which would be critical in an emergency while the attached pictures show how cars parked on these streets reduce traffic flow. It is assumed that eliminating parking is not an option and a street widening of about 6 feet would provide adequate access in both directions plus parking. Widening just the side without the telephone poles would be the least costly, but the most intrusive on one side of the street. Widening both sides by perhaps 3 feet would reduce the impact on one side and underground utilities but increase the costs. Both should be evaluated with cost estimates.



As of this writing we are waiting to hear back from John Gioia about the county's willingness to work with us on this project. This type of work will need the support of entire Fire Board and El Cerrito fire department, CC County, the cooperation of local homeowners and the financial assistance of PG&E. If implemented it could save lives and possibly eliminate another fire conflagration.

The ad hoc committee also needs to evaluate other temporary or permanent ways to improve emergency access. This includes several possibilities. One would be the requirement that cars cannot park on Purdue and Kenyon during red flag days in the area shown in yellow on the attached Map 1. Another possibility would be the creation one-way streets on Kenyon/Purdue and Beloit below Purdue. Finally, the ad hoc committee should consider implementing some of the recommendations made in the 1/8/20 research project done by U.C. Berkeley.

Map 1



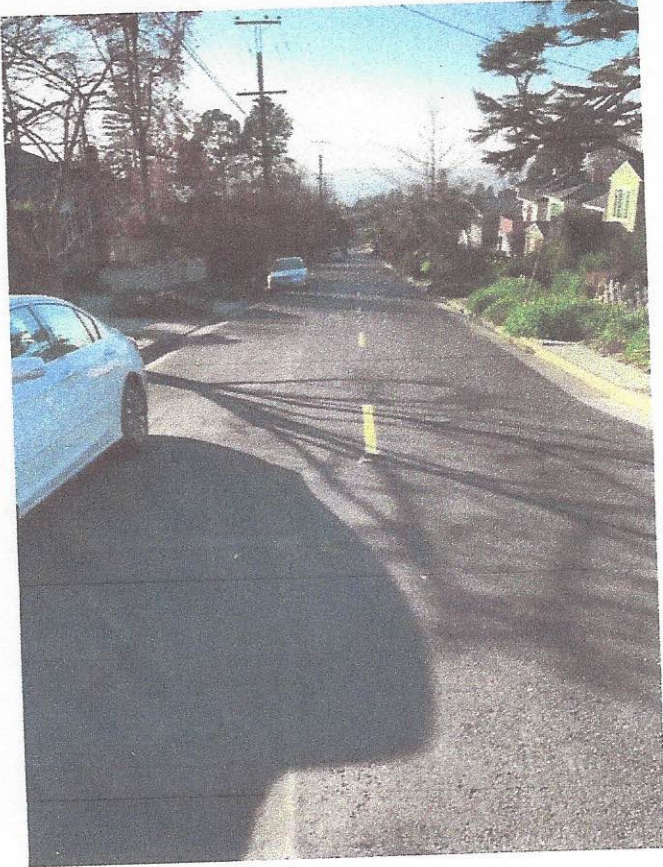
Routes to Tilden Park

-  To Kensington Hilltop School
-  To Grizzly Peak Blvd



Map data ©2025 200 ft

Map 2



Kenyon Avenue



Purdue Avenue