



From the President

JEFFREY WRIGHT

AFTER 42 years in the real estate business, I have seen a few things and learned a lot of things. There are buyers' markets and there are sellers' markets, there are up cycles and there are down cycles there are tumultuous markets and there are balanced and stable markets. There are things in life that are essential and there is certainly a long list of non-essential items.



I am currently giving some thought to the non-essential items, which brings me to my Xfinity bill from Comcast.

I am trying to decide if I want to continue paying this \$162 per month bill. It is too much to pay! Granted, I voluntarily signed up for the service many years ago and over the years the costs have continued to increase. Sure, I have HBO MAX and Cinemax and access to "hundreds" of channels that I do not watch, so now it really boils down to the value proposition: is the service bringing me enough benefit and satisfaction to justify the expense? When I was a kid, we had channels 2, 4, 5, 7, 9; and if the little

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Welcome NEW MEMBERS

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Up on the Roof at Cerrito Vista



John C. Stashik

Cerrito Vista, the newest apartment building in El Cerrito at the corner of Jefferson and San Pablo, has a roof terrace. Informally called the "Playland" apartments this five-story, 50-unit building broke ground on May 6, 2019. Studios to three bedroom units with balconies, fitness room, car charging stations, and pet friendly. Now leasing. Details: cerritovista.com. More photos on page 3.

Restaurant 15% Delivery Fee Cap Is Law

BY JOHN C. STASHIK

RELIEF ARRIVED for local restaurant operators on February 2nd when the Contra Costa County Board of Supervisors passed an ordinance limiting fees charged by third party delivery companies to a maximum of 15%. As an urgency ordinance, the law took effect immediately and will remain on the books until 100% indoor dining is again permitted by health authorities.

The fee cap ordinance was supported by this Chamber of Commerce after a member noted that excessive delivery fees charged by DoorDash and similar firms could be as much as 30% of a check wiping out any profit on meals delivered to customers. With business already slow due to COVID-19 dining restrictions, this cap on delivery fees is an attempt to keep restaurants open and employees working.

Public comment from this writer to the El Cerrito City Council apprised city officials of the problem. Immediate support was received from Mayor Paul Fadelli and City Manager Karen Pinkos. A county-wide approach was deemed the best way to enforce the new law and the measure was passed on a 5-0 vote by the Board of Supervisors.

The Chamber printed and distributed multi-lingual flyers to every restaurant in El Cerrito to publicize the new ordinance. In addition, Supervisor John Gioia requested the county health department to assist with publicity.

A copy of the ordinance is available to anyone upon request to this Chamber. In addition, the Chamber office can provide assistance to restaurant operators who have a problem dealing the violations of the law by food delivery services.

It should be noted that customers picking up their own food orders instead of using a food delivery service eliminate the cost of delivery, saving both the customer and restaurant money. Even with patio dining again permitted local restaurants and their employees still have a very difficult time during this pandemic.





Past Prez Palaver

JOHN C. STASHIK

ONE YEAR ago is when it all began. That's when the first *Shelter in Place* orders were announced by state and local authorities. It was something I'll never forget. The coronavirus became very real and very local when the El Cerrito City Council held an emergency meeting on Friday the 13th of March; how ironic. Then on what would normally be a festive St. Paddy's Day, everything shut down on that March 17th.

It seemed as though we were living in a ghost town for the first weeks of SIP. Gradually, traffic increased and more and more people ventured out again.

Here we are, still masked-up, waiting to get vaccinated, and back to normal. However, Dr. Fauci, somebody we'd quickly come to know and trust, says normalcy could come late this year if we're smart and keep the masks on. So do what's right; a half million people have died from COVID-19.

Except for plastic shield and mask manufacturers almost every business in the nation has been struggling and many workers are jobless.

Our restaurants have a real battle with inside dining still prohibited by health order. Patio service back again — for now. That leaves take out meals to generate revenue. What a year is has been.

Openings. Pamela and Gayle from Penn-Dell's Bakehouse say they will open for business in the middle of this month at 6491 Portola Drive.

Peter Ellis Construction is the new occupant at 10465 San Pablo Ave. (at Santa Cruz). The building, now remodeled, was for many years the S.A.C. Auto Electric Co. The Ellis firm does general contracting and electrical work. peterellisconstruction.com

Moving to EC. Located in Albany since forever, the popular Norge Cleaners will relocate to El Cerrito. Owner David Yi has a space at 10368 San Pablo Ave., near Stockton, across the street from the Natural Grocery Co.



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□
Ambitious. El Cerrito's own celebrity chef **Lito Saldana**, operator of **Los Moles Beer Garden** on Potrero near San Pablo, doesn't let a worldwide pandemic slow him down. Planned for downtown Walnut Creek is **5 Tacos & Beers**, projected to open this summer. There is a 5 Tacos in Albany on Solano Avenue too.

□
Federal help. A new round of PPP loans are available; this Chamber just got some money. Talk with your lender. Local government has also taken a real beating from the pandemic and hopefully Congress can agree on language to help cities, including El Cerrito.

□
EDC. I heard there are eight vacancies on the City's **Economic Development Committee**. This Chamber has a regular seat on the committee, however, there should be more participation by our members. Granted, a lot of meetings have been canceled lately, COVID-19 you know, but during tough times for business maybe we can use some activity and new ideas to benefit El Cerrito and your own enterprise. **Gabe Quinto** is the City Council liaison; contact at gquinto@ci.el-cerrito.ca.us.

□
Audit. The California State Auditor said they'd release the report on the City of El Cerrito this month. It could be an interesting read if that's your thing.

□
Heads up. A lengthy City Council meeting on February 16th addressed two very different budget scenarios, one of which proposed drastic cuts to public safety. There were comments from 80 people, most of them in support of maintaining our excellent fire and police services. Fortunately, the Council made the right decision and adopted the more sensible version of the two.

But the fact is El Cerrito will need to trim costs to get back to financial sustainability and build a reserve fund. Cops and fire protection are probably #1 in terms of spending priorities for both residents and business owners. Robbery and larceny in local stores is very costly and merchants need quick response when dialing 911.

Laying off police officers is false economy. Just look at neighboring cities. Best to cut the budget elsewhere and keep the city safe.

What to do now? Pay attention as the City Council will be dealing with this tough financial issue in coming weeks. There is talk of a town hall style financial session soon. Stay informed, safe, and protect your business. Communicate with your Council members. They're easy to reach; email addresses are listed at el-cerrito.org.

□
Sales tax. The new rate approved by voters takes effect on April 1st. That will be a half percent increase.

El Cerrito, from Baxter Creek to the Plaza

“To sit in the shade on a fine day, and look upon verdure is the most perfect refreshment.” – Jane Austen

AS THE days extend and we enjoy more light and warmth, it's natural to renew our appreciation for nature and enjoying the outdoors. Certainly, over the last year, nature's constancy and beauty has gifted respite during difficult times. Perhaps you've enjoyed fresh vegetables from a neighbor's garden, taken in the majesty of a sunset, or delighted in an outdoor walk (socially distanced) with a friend.

In El Cerrito, we are fortunate that over many decades, our community, its residents and leaders, have steadfastly protected open spaces, created and supported projects that help us respect, and appreciate this special place. From the

wildflowers lovingly tended to at Baxter Creek, the Hillside Natural Area, the many parks and the Ohlone Greenway, we can refresh in nature during moments of quiet introspection or in vigorous exercise.

While you reconnect with nature, take the opportunity to notice how accessible our city is and the many businesses you can discover (or rediscover)

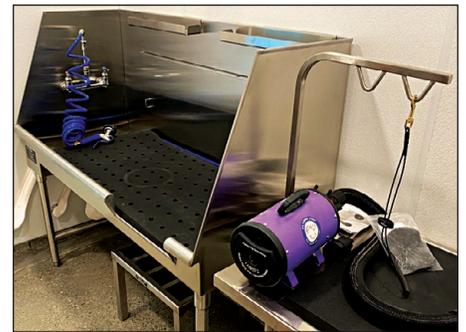
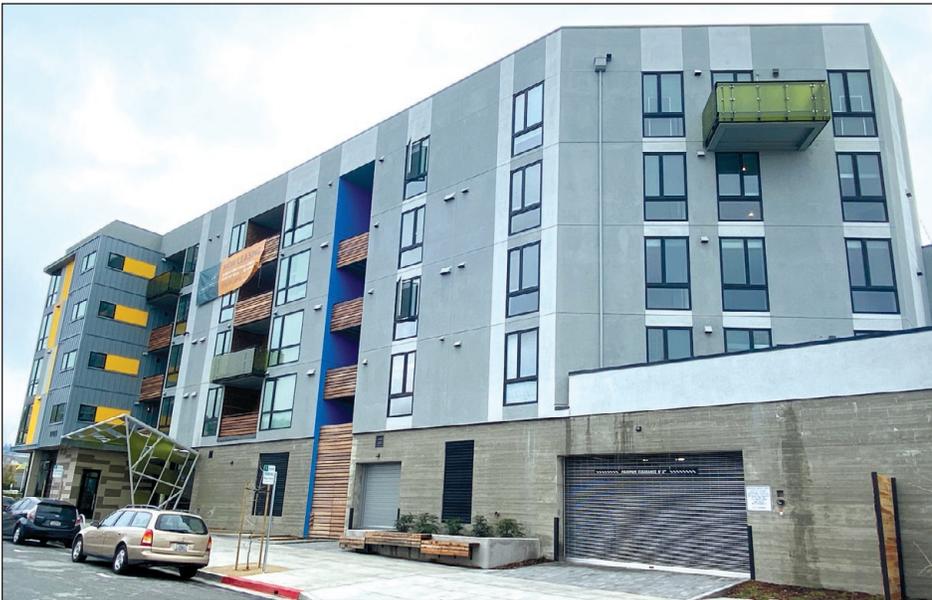
while you venture outdoors. Consider regularly walking, biking, rolling to the Farmers Market at El Cerrito Plaza, the coffee shops, and to run your errands. Take a deep breath, a refreshment gift from nature, and take part in helping business recover this spring.



Community Matters

GEORGINA EDWARDS

A Peek Inside Cerrito Vista Apartments



This is the new El Cerrito. View from Jefferson Street, typical interior with view of San Pablo Avenue, state-of-the-art appliances, dog wash and blow dry station, ample bicycle parking. Automobile parking uses the Klaus Multiparking system which stacks vehicles on moveable platforms operated by a smart phone. A restaurant is planned for the ground floor commercial space.

Photos: John C. Saahik

BY CHRIS TREADWAY

THE LAND and a developer team are in place, but contrary to claims made on social media, residential development on the parking lots at the El Cerrito Plaza BART station is still a number of years away.

Last November, the BART board selected Holliday Development, Related California, and Satellite Affordable Housing Associates as its developer team for the Plaza project. Emeryville-based Holliday is the developer of the market-rate portion of the city's Mayfair project next to Del Norte BART.

Along with an actual design proposal, there are regulatory and other steps still to be done, along with more community outreach in the interim.

"Right now we're working on getting the development team into an exclusive negotiating agreement," said Abigail Thorne-Lyman, group manager of Transit-Oriented Development at BART. "We think it will take roughly two years to go through the entitlement process."

On top of that are resolving two issues important to large segments of the community.

"There are a lot of big decisions like parking and a library to finish this year," Thorne-Lyman said.

While the exact parameters of the project are still somewhat undefined at this point in the process, there is no question it fits the description of transit-oriented development, meeting goals of both the city and the transit district.

"We don't have any formal proposals from the developer yet," Thorne-Lyman

said. "We have capacity studies of what could be developed."

The transit district is looking at 600 to 800 units of housing on the station's three parking lots, with about 30 to 40 percent designated as affordable for low and middle income households.

Overall, "We hope to be done in five to seven years. There are so many considerations," Thorne-Lyman said. "It depends on the market and the affordable housing plans."

The Plaza project would help the city provide for that segment of the housing market while meeting BART's goals for transit-oriented development (TOD) at many of its stations with large parking areas.

TOD is defined on the BART website as "well designed, mixed-use, higher density development adjacent to frequent transit. It helps communities and transit agencies increase sustainable transit ridership, revitalize communities,

enhance regional quality of life, and strengthen economic competitiveness. By focusing housing and jobs near transit, communities can accommodate new growth while minimizing associated congestion and environmental impacts."

It also helps with the city's share of the state-mandated Regional Housing Needs Allocation and provides a built-in base of households that

would presumably patronize transit and local businesses, including the El Cerrito Plaza shopping center next to the station.

Thorne-Lyman said she agrees with Mayor Paul Fadelli, who said he envisions Fairmount Avenue becoming a "new downtown" for the city once the project is realized.

"There's so much development planned in El Cerrito along San Pablo Avenue and around BART," she said, adding that the additional residential influx "could boost existing businesses at the Plaza and along San Pablo Avenue. We see it as increasing the community's buying power."

■ Continued on page 5



Affordable housing may be the biggest hurdle to clear.

"It's really hard to build more than 150 units. The developers have to pull together funding sources, usually multiple sources," she said. "That's probably the part that's going to hold us up the most."

While no height is specified as yet, taller projects are allowed under the specific plan near the city's two BART stations.

El Cerrito, which has seen a boom in residential development since adopting the San Pablo Avenue Specific Plan in 2014, has been aggressive in adding low-income units, but to date has fallen short on middle-income housing, Thorne-Lyman said.

PLANNING TRANSIT ORIENTED DEVELOPMENT

With all the projects added or planned in the city, including Plaza BART, “I think they’re projecting a 10 percent population increase for the city, so it’s a big deal,” Thorne-Lyman said. “Once you see the development take off it’s going to be transformative. When all this happens it’s going to have a major effect.”

The ground floor side facing Fairmount Avenue could include commercial space, which is one of the major decisions with the project that the city must resolve. Supporters of a new space for the city’s branch of the county library are eyeing the ground floor for a possible location.

“The city has said Fairmount should have a commercial element to provide balance with El Cerrito Plaza,” Thorne-Lyman said, adding “It’s possible it could be considered to pursue a library if the city wanted that.”

Asked if the choice is one or the other, Thorne-Lyman said, “Maybe. We’re just looking at beginning the design. It could be a library with a cafe, or it could have some small retail component. We’re not thinking there’s going to be a lot of commercial development.”

The amount of ground floor space currently earmarked is 20,000 square feet, which conforms well with what library boosters would like to see, said Tom Panas, a board member of the El Cerrito Library Foundation.

The foundation has long searched for and studied a suitable site and Panas called the Plaza location “the best of not-great options.”

For many people, the biggest issue to be resolved is parking. The station currently has some 740 spaces in its lots

and the amount allocated for parking with the development project will be a fraction of that.

“That’s a pretty critical issue. We’ll be launching a very robust process about parking and what would be needed to replace it,” Thorne-Lyman said.

The transit district conducted a survey of riders in 2019 in preparation for the project.

The survey determined that “Walking is the most common mode of station access” and “Most patrons live within a mile and a half of Plaza Station; over a

station,” the BART survey report said. “Driving is the dominant mode for those living in hilly areas. Parking replacement strategies should consider the practical barrier the hills pose for walking and biking. This will include considering the relative benefit of electric or electric-assist mobility options, as well as the potential viability of microtransit or a carpooling program.”

On-street parking is also being studied.

“Parking in the surrounding neighborhood is very important,” Thorne-Lyman said.

According to the rider survey “Over 80% of respondents who drive and park said that they would be willing to pay to park in the neighborhood (within a five minute walk) with a monthly or annual pass to access the station.

This indicates that a well-crafted parking management

program for the neighborhood that serves BART customers would result in a high-level of continued ridership at the El Cerrito Plaza BART station by current riders.”

Outreach and gathering of public input was largely suspended last year due to the COVID-19 pandemic, but will resume this year to reach decisions by early 2022 on patron parking and whether to include a library.

At the same time, BART is looking at the Plaza project in conjunction with development proposals for the parking lots at its North Berkeley and Ashby stations.

“We realized we had to look at the consequences of doing development at all three,” both challenges and opportunities, Thorne-Lyman said.

IMPORTANT POINTS ABOUT THIS PLAN

This proposed project is an opportunity for El Cerrito to realize economic development goals in the Downtown/Plaza area as envisioned in the City’s General Plan, Economic Development Action Plan and Climate Action Plan.

- Development of the El Cerrito Plaza station is a BART plan supported by state legislation.
- Development provides an opportunity for added foot traffic and vitality in the Downtown/El Cerrito Plaza area.
- This article explains the project and plans at the present time.
- The City of El Cerrito will be included in the decision making process with BART as the plan progresses. Station parking is an issue to be evaluated.
- A new library is an idea proposed for the commercial space at the station. However, it is only a concept at this point and no funding mechanism has been determined.
- Watch for communications from BART and the City as this project moves forward.

www.bart.gov/about/business/tod/el-cerrito-plaza

quarter live within half a mile.”

While the Plaza station is not a regional ridership hub, it still attracts passengers from Albany, Kensington, and parts of Berkeley and Richmond. Many riders come from the hills and walking is not considered an option.

BART is looking at a variety of strategies to address the issue and convince as many people as possible not to drive alone to the station.

The district is contracting experts to create a parking management program for what spaces will remain.

“One of the programs we’ll be pursuing is carpool parking” with priority given to those who arrive in groups.

“Few residents who live in the high elevation neighborhoods (eastern El Cerrito, Kensington) walk or bike to the

El Cerrito Royale Unscathed by COVID-19

BY SONJA GIVENS-THOMAS,
ADMINISTRATOR

AFTER eleven months in quarantine, residents and employees at El Cerrito Royale are beginning to see some light at the end of the tunnel.

The 145 bed assisted living facility with multiple levels of care has provided weekly Proactive Surveillance Testing to protect their residents and staff from the deadly coronavirus.

According to the *New York Times*, nursing homes and assisted living facilities have been severely affected by coronavirus outbreaks. One-third of all the United States coronavirus deaths are nursing home residents or workers. These include assisted living, memory care and rehabilitation facilities, retirement and senior communities.

El Cerrito Royale, a Berg Assisted Living Community, is grateful to Contra Costa Health Services and the Medical Reserve Corps Volunteers for assisting with the completion of the first and second round of the COVID-19 vaccine clinics for their residents and staff.



We are thankful for the selflessness displayed by the families, schools, civic groups and other organizations that came together to sew and donate fabric masks and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) to help prevent the transmission of the virus within our community. We

are also grateful for the ongoing love, support, numerous greeting cards, special treats and flowers received to lift our spirits as we continue to work tirelessly to keep our residents safe during this global pandemic!

However, while we wait for the vaccine to build up immunity, safeguards and precautions remain in place. Specialized visits,

Zoom socialization and virtual tours will continue by appointment only. The administration will continue to adhere to their COVID-19 plan of operations during the admission process.

Despite the COVID-19 vaccination distribution at El Cerrito Royale, we ask that you continue to adhere to hand washing, social distancing, face covers and other precautions to prevent the transmission of the coronavirus.



John C. Stashik

That Mystery Lot

BY JOHN C. STASHIK

IN OUR February issue an item about Potala Palace appeared in the *Past Prez Palaver* column. That is the name of a new food trailer business that plans to build and operate on the vacant lot between the Turnabout Shop and Noodles Fresh on San Pablo Avenue.

It was mentioned that nobody seems to know what was ever on that lot. It does have what appears to be remnants of a concrete foundation.

Reader David Kiefer sent the following information to the *Byline*.

The lot adjacent to Noodles Fresh has always been vacant! The original Grand Barber Shop brothers (they sold the business to Jerry) had a name for it which I think meant alley in Italian. This lot has always had obstacles to development. The Rexall Drug Company (where Noodles Fresh is) backed out of expansion plans. In an era of expanding retail storefronts, this lot could not find an economically viable purpose.

Before the electric utilities were placed underground, on San Pablo Ave., the City of El Cerrito would string traditional holiday lights across the street from Central to Fairmount Ave. The manual switch to activate the lights was located on the northern wall of the lot. My father would allow me to switch on the lights. A big thrill for a four year old!

Thanks for sending me the *Byline* and keeping me in the loop.

David Kiefer is the son of Harry, who ran Kiefer's Furniture for years at the corner of Central and San Pablo. Before it closed, the furniture store was located in what is now Nôg Thôn restaurant. Kiefer's Furniture also occupied a former movie theater which is today's Rialto Cinemas Cerrito. Harry Kiefer was a long time Chamber member and served as President in 1985.

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FROM THE PRESIDENT

■ Continued from page 1

antenna was hooked in position on the back of the television, channels 20, 36 and 44 were also accessible. We had eight channels and we were good to go. There was no remote, we got up and changed the channel ourselves! Society has been lulled into believing that the non-essential is now essential. We “need” hundreds of channels to select from, we “need” Amazon Prime next day delivery, we “need” Uber Eats and the list can go on and on.

I acknowledge that my arrangement with Comcast was mutual, we both agreed to it. If I no longer believe that the relationship is win-win, as all good business relationships should be, then perhaps I need to have a discussion with Comcast. Years ago, I was going to terminate the service and the representative on the phone transferred me to the retention department and they cut me a better deal in order to retain my business.

In my opinion, that is the way business should operate. If parties voluntarily enter into agreements, and the terms of the agreement are being met, however one party is no longer satisfied with the terms, then the parties need to come together and work the situation out amongst themselves even if they ultimately have to discontinue the business relationship.

Sometimes it is necessary to make adjustments and/or find other avenues to achieve what we are after. In my case, the Comcast decision will not result in nervous “hand wringing” and sleepless nights. There are always options. We have a Smart TV with internet access, Netflix, Prime and a host of other programming totally outside of Comcast. My home office has a small TV that is *not* connected to cable or the internet. I have an “old school” antenna attached to it, discretely located and this TV still receives over 60 channels *for free*, and for whatever reason, it has the sharpest picture out of all the television sets in the house!

Invariably, there is usually a way to fill a void. Somebody comes up with a better service or builds a better mousetrap. In my opinion our society has become too dependent and reliant

on non-essential services to the extent that we treat them like essential services and put ourselves in vulnerable positions. There is nothing wrong with going old school and limiting the number of channels, manually changing the channel on the TV, provided that we still know how to do it, actually going into the store to make a purchase, and picking up take-out instead of relying on third party delivery services.

When it comes to my mutually agreed upon business relationships, including Comcast, I will either continue to justify paying at the current rate, renegotiate a better situation or discontinue the

service and exercise other options. I will work it out with those who are a party to the agreement. I *will not* ask a non-related party to the business arrangement to intercede on my behalf and force Comcast or any other business to reduce their fees because I feel that they are too costly.

Perhaps after 42 years in the real estate business my thinking is a little out of step for the times. I can live with “being out of step” easier than I can live with being a party to unsheathing the double-edged sword of “interference and regulation” knowing full well that it cuts both ways.





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