

Letters to the Editor of the Kensington Outlook, MAY 2008

Dear Kensington Outlook Editor,

Bruce Morrow, the president of the Kensington Community Council (KCC), has taken offense at an article in the April issue of the Outlook that was interpreted by him as unflattering toward the Kensington Police Protection and Community Services District (KPPCSD). As a result, at the April 7, 2008, meeting of the KCC, Mr. Morrow demanded that all future articles be screened and approved by him. At that point, John Feld chose to resign as editor rather than compromise his editorial and journalistic integrity. While the KCC may consider the Outlook to be a “newsletter” rather than a “newspaper”, Kensington residents have come to view the Outlook as their primary independent source of local news where they can read about decisions and actions of the KPPCSD Board or any other group that affects their quality of life. Imposing censorship or insisting that only “feel good” articles be published goes against the fundamental principles of a democratic society and is definitely not in the best interests of the community.

There are two questions that I feel need to be answered:

1. Do the opinions and actions of Mr. Morrow reflect a consensus of the KCC Board members or was this action taken unilaterally. While I disagree strongly with the action, I think it is important that the public know if it was supported by the board as a whole or was this decision made solely by Mr. Morrow.
2. Of more fundamental importance, was Mr. Morrow encouraged to apply pressure to Mr. Feld by members of the KPPCSD Board of Directors? KPPCSD Directors are elected representatives of the community and any interference by them in the evaluation, selection or editing of individual articles, either directly or by creating an environment in which editorial decisions are strongly influenced would be an abomination. To date, only one KPPCSD Board member, President Cindy Kimball, has issued a public statement on the issue of John Feld’s resignation. She supports John’s position to be able to edit the Outlook without prior review or consent from the KCC. No other KPPCSD Board member has publically expressed an opinion on the matter and I encourage them to do so. We have a right to know how our elected officials stand on this issue.

Sincerely,

Joseph D. Paola

Letters to the Editor of the Kensington Outlook, MAY 2008

Editor -

In the past several years, Kensington has earned a reputation as a community that does not respect either Freedom of Speech or the rights of individuals. This has been confirmed by court decisions where either the Kensington Community directly, or the County as pressured by the Kensington Community, have lost very expensive legal battles.

To effectively force the editor of the Kensington Outlook to resign by insisting on editorial control over him only perpetuates what many already perceive as an intolerant Community.

I urge you re-hire John Feld and let him do his job as a professional journalist.

Danny Scher

Letters to the Editor of the Kensington Outlook, MAY 2008

To The KCC, Kensington government and community -

There is a great need for people to know fully what the Boards and other Kensington policy bodies talk about, for simple transparency of government. At the present time not enough people run. When a term of office is up, the person just stays on. Without full coverage of meetings Kensington citizens are functionally illiterate about how our town is run: don't understand or follow the issues closely and are disinclined to bring their skills to community positions.

John Feld was scrupulous about not confusing opinion and news coverage; he knew his employers' caveats and worked within them. He hosted valuable breakfasts; made it his business to understand how Kensington worked; went to every meeting. He was hired to put out a lively, full-coverage paper. He has been reprimanded rudely; the future of the newspaper and open communication in Kensington has been thrown into turmoil by the seeming disrespect of one person towards the Editor. And yet I am sure there are two sides to this story, and I wasn't a party to the actual argument. Perhaps a first step might be an apology and a willingness to make the boundaries clear of appropriate oversight.

A planning meeting should be held of people who support the kind of newspaper John knew enough how to run. An Editorial page with Letters to the Editor on significant subjects should be added. By-laws and mission statement need to be updated. It perhaps should have its own Board of people who have background in non-profit management, journalism and publishing, so it is not overly tied to one Council who may try to control it. It may have once been the mouthpiece of the KCC, but its present function is the only means of communication these councils and boards have with the community and has long since left behind its "newsletter" days.

In Berkeley the minutes of each commission appear on the city website, with no discussion. The Daily Planet helps the citizens know more. Such a paper assumes an open press, and ours should too. Requiring an editor to submit all copy before publication is censorship, and breaks several federal laws in this country relative to freedom of the press.

Lindy Hough

Letters to the Editor of the Kensington Outlook, MAY 2008

Dear Editor,

I am saddened by John Feld's recent departure from the Outlook.

John brought a much-appreciated intelligence to bear on Kensington matters, especially those concerning our police protection services and the park. He encouraged our citizens to participate in their community government. He invited and allowed all perspectives to voice their concerns in Letters to the Editor.

A genuinely helpful person, John gave to Kensington far more than he was ever paid to do. His light will be missed.

Sincerely,

Kathy Stein

Letters to the Editor of the Kensington Outlook, MAY 2008

Dear Editor –

It is regrettable that members of the Kensington Community Council Board of Directors have chosen to try to suppress our local press. Having done so has resulted in the loss of a fine editor.

During my years on the KCC Board, it was discussed many times that the Board's role, as publisher (NOT editor), was not to exert control over the content of the articles contained in the Outlook newspaper. Requests to do otherwise were considered taboo.

As editor of the Outlook, John Feld devoted countless hours to attending our community meetings and to disseminating important information. He filled the reporting gap left by other local newspapers – focusing on events in Kensington. He and the role he played will be missed.

Sincerely,

Lynn Wolter

Letters to the Editor of the Kensington Outlook, MAY 2008

Dear editor and members of the KCC Board,

I am writing to you in order to add my support for the reinstatement of John Feld as the editor of the Outlook. He has produced an unusually high caliber paper for our small area. He has shared information and activities that residents need and want to read. He has faithfully attended and written about the meetings, keeping us informed and aware of what is taking place in ALL of the Kensington groups.

I, as a member of the Friend's of the Kensington Library, recently asked our board if we could purchase an ad in the Outlook to publicize our Spring Book Sale which takes place in early May. I was given permission, and money was budgeted for the ad. FKL members expressed their enthusiasm for the idea because of the Outlook's circulation and the fact that, "...everyone reads it," a quote from several of our members.

Now for the hard part of my message to you:

I had heard about the Outlook's difficulties and fearing that the May issue might be delayed I wrote to the KCC president about my concerns. My fears were not unfounded. The response was:

*"Ms. Chafe,
Alma Key is the contact person at the Outlook. She is working with me on coordinating efforts to get the May edition out. However, at this point, we are not able to guarantee a date certain that it will be going out, unfortunately.
Bruce V. Morrow"*

Our ad may not be out in time for the sale. Hopefully, it will, and the money used for the ad will encourage everyone to join us and buy the tons of books that will be for sale. If the sale happens prior to the May Outlook edition the ad money could have been better used to support our children's programs.

Sincerely,
Mez Chafe-Powles

Letters to the Editor of the Kensington Outlook, MAY 2008

Editor -

I received an advance copy of Bruce Morrow's "Letter to the Community" which will appear on the front page of the May issue and I would like to offer my comments.

I have not seen Bruce at a KPPCSD meeting in over a year. Additionally, the KPPCSD Board has not discussed this issue.

I disagree with Bruce's thoughts on the Outlook article. In fact, I thanked John Feld for writing it when I saw John at the KPPCSD meeting Saturday, April 5th.

I support John Feld and his right as the Outlook editor to write for the Outlook without "prior review or consent" from KCC.

Cindy Kimball

Letters to the Editor of the Kensington Outlook, MAY 2008

Kensington Outlook

I was saddened and deeply troubled by the actions of the KCC and its president Bruce Morrow in imposing editorial restrictions on John Feld, the former editor of the Outlook and on his reporting of local news to our community. Both the KCC and Mr. Morrow were effectively requiring that Mr. Feld report the news that they saw fit to publish, rather than give Mr. Feld the necessary editorial independence to report the facts as they occurred. Under these circumstances, Mr. Feld did the only thing he could do, which was to resign as editor. The conduct of both Mr. Morrow and his board here is utterly offensive and has no place in our community.

Mr. Morrow apparently justifies his actions in part based on his belief that the KCC, as a nonprofit publisher of the Outlook cannot take part in partisan politics in fear of jeopardizing its federal tax-exempt status. Based on my review of these series of articles, Mr. Feld was not engaging in prohibited political activities, but was instead reporting newsworthy events to a concerned citizenry. His journalism shone a bright light into the many dark crevices of our local governing bodies. While such actions may result in news that is unflattering to certain individuals and public bodies, they serve the larger and vital purpose of informing all of our opinions on public matters.

Mr. Morrow is attempting to mold the news into what he and his constituencies feel it should be, rather than allow unfettered factual reporting and let the political chips fall where they may. Such action is wholly inappropriate anywhere in this country and constitutes an unconscionable prior restraint that indelibly stains our First Amendment.

Chuck Toombs

Letters to the Editor of the Kensington Outlook, MAY 2008

Editor –

Marc and I want to personally thank The Dads' Club and everyone who worked at our house Saturday, April 19th. We simply cannot believe how much work got done and we couldn't be more thrilled with the results! While we want to thank everyone on the list below we specifically want to thank Adam Lehman for his awesome project management. Thanks to Adam's hard work the Dads' Club was able to tackle a ton (more including 1 and 1/2 tons of rock) of projects. Thank you to Mark Wijzen for all the pre work on concrete and getting supplies. Thanks to Greg Dower and Adam for the prep walk thru and pre work on the drop down stairs. Also, we want to single out Clay Bartley who installed our tank-less water heater and was under the house for many long hours (long after everyone else was upstairs drinking beer and eating burgers).

Thanks again to everyone in the Dads' Club for the awesome effort!

Trish and Marc

Letters to the Editor of the Kensington Outlook, MAY 2008

Editor:

I understand that John Feld, the former editor of *The Outlook*, resigned as editor as a result of (1) his refusal to allow the KCC president to review and pre-approve all articles to be published in *The Outlook*, and (2) objections raised by the KCC president in response to his publication of an article that could be read as mildly critical of the KPPCSD Board.

These are strange times, indeed. Kensington prides itself, or so I thought, on being an open community. A free press is generally considered to be one of the pillars on which an open community rests. Even had the article been extremely critical of the KPPCSD Board, it should not have led to Mr. Feld's resignation.

While KCC may view *The Outlook* as a "newsletter" as opposed to a "newspaper," a distinction wholly lost on many of us, the community by and large views it as an important source of information, and one that should be free from political pressure directly or indirectly brought by elected officials in our community. The hiring and firing (or pressuring) of editors based solely on their published views of the actions taken by those same elected officials is, simply put, wrong. It would also seem to be unconstitutional—at least in spirit.

The KCC Board, quite frankly, need to rethink its position vis-à-vis *The Outlook*. The members of the KCC Board are supposed to be thinking of the community they serve. The KPPCSD Board members are elected officials who chose to run and to serve. They should, like all elected officials, be held accountable for decisions they make. *The Outlook* had been one of the very few vehicles for providing this sort of accountability. No longer.

Regards,

John G. Price

Letters to the Editor of the Kensington Outlook, MAY 2008

Letter to the Editor

I'm betting that J. Robert Oppenheimer, co-developer of the atom bomb, and later anti-nuclear-proliferation fighter, AND a Kensington resident for years, is craning his neck in his grave to see how Kensington will rise to our current radiation challenge. As an unincorporated community, with no right to enact an ordinance of its own, Kensington has been cleverly targeted by T-Mobile as a dandy site for cell phone towers - - better than those pesky adjoining (and incorporated) communities like El Cerrito, Albany and Berkeley, who have passed ordinances limiting placement of such towers in residential areas. Upwards of 60 homes (one of them mine) in El Cerrito will receive exposure from the tower, and at least as many in Kensington.

I'm hoping that the spirit of Oppenheimer, along with our neighborhood's testimony, will inspire KMAC to make their advice to the county be a clear "NO cell tower in Colusa Circle. Kensington concurs with her neighboring communities. Cell phone towers don't make good neighbors."

Jan Dederick

Letters to the Editor of the Kensington Outlook, MAY 2008

Editor –

KMAC reviewed a permit for a cell tower at 367 Colusa. It will emit RF radiation to everyone within 1500 feet. Ordinances were passed in El Cerrito, Richmond preventing installations within 300 feet of homes, yet this was ignored by TMobile when they approached the building's owner.

Health issues related to cell tower radiation exposure are in dispute, a situation felt by many to be due to the fact that research is often funded by the cellular industry. Nevertheless, there is mounting evidence it is a danger to children who are the most vulnerable, with higher incidences of blood disorders/leukemia and other disorders in adults as well. U.S. firemen will not permit towers on their facilities until there is proof of no danger. The tower would be 230 feet from a nursery school, 300-400 ft from Semifreddie's, The Pub, and offices. While the federal government has guidelines regarding the safe amount of exposure, there is controversy within the scientific community if the guidelines are too lax. Frankly, basing guidelines on behavioral changes in rats would call them into question. Simple prudence would dictate caution in the placement of these radiation sources.

Since 1992, appraisers' and urban planners' research find home values near towers and power lines decrease 2-20% or more, due to perceived dangers.

This means lost value to owners and lost county taxes. There are about 800 homes within 1500 feet, 65 homes and commercial property within 300 feet .

Is it worth it to risk being exposed? RF's cumulative effects on the body are unknown. Many people will avoid the Circle, if it's installed. Do we want to see our property devalued?

Mr. Caruso needs to do the right thing and break his contract with TMobile.

Marilyn Stollon, Member/Facilitator, Tower Opposition Group
Len Schwartzburd, Ph.D., Member

Letters to the Editor of the Kensington Outlook, MAY 2008

Dear Editor,

I am against the cell tower proposed for the Colusa Circle neighborhood. A cell tower facility does not belong within 300 feet of residences and a nursery school. This facility will be on top of an apartment building, next to other apartment buildings, homes, and stores. I do not want myself, my son, family, friends, or visitors exposed to the potential dangers of radiation. Yes, it is radiation, any way you slice it.

Amber Crowley

Letters to the Editor of the Kensington Outlook, MAY 2008

Dear Outlook Editor and Todd Hodson, KCC board member,

I write as a former member of the KCC board (1989-1994) appalled by the recent action of the current KCC President to exert his personal position over the editorial content of the Outlook.

During my board term, two attorney members of the KCC board, John Vlahos and Barrie Engel, advised that KCC board NOT to interfere with journalistic freedom. During those days, the community was involved in campaigns both to purchase surplus property from the WCCUSD to create a park as well as to pass an assessment to fund the police department. The Outlook editor at the time, Diane Gossard, attended all the various K-group meetings and reported in each issue of the Outlook summaries of the conversations and decisions made by those groups. Both measures passed and today Kensingtonians have a beautiful park and a fully staffed police force.

In reading the recent issue of the Outlook I appreciated the editor's articles about the current KPPCSD budget shortfall and the possibility being discussed by concerned citizens that assessments to fund Park improvements and the police department may be needed. Had I not read this issue of the Outlook I would have been unaware of the current fiscal situation.

I hope the KCC board will reconsider its actions and attempts to silence editorial opinion. The Outlook has grown to be more than a newsletter of the KCC and serves an important journalistic purpose to keep Kensington residents informed and involved in matters that impact our town.

I leave you with this: Shortly after World War II, Martin Niemoller, a German Lutheran pastor active in the Underground, wrote of what happens when the spirit that binds us together as human beings is ignored. "They came for the Jews but I didn't say anything because I wasn't a Jew. They came for the Gypsies but I didn't say anything because I wasn't a Gypsy. They came for the homosexuals but I didn't say anything because I wasn't a homosexual. They came for the mentally retarded but I didn't say anything because I wasn't mentally retarded. Finally they came for me and no one said anything because no one was left to speak."

Most sincerely,

Chris Sorensen

Letters to the Editor of the Kensington Outlook, MAY 2008

Dear Editor,

We were extremely disappointed to learn that John Feld has resigned his position as Editor of the Kensington Outlook. The Kensington Community Council (KCC), owners of the Outlook, do not approve of his recent coverage of community events. KCC president, Bruce Morrow, has demanded that all future articles be pre-approved by KCC before publication. John chose to resign rather than compromise his integrity as editor.

Given the lack of press coverage of Kensington events by the Contra Costa Times and The Journal, we have grown to depend upon the Outlook as our primary source of news about local issues. Over the past three years as editor of the Outlook John has worked tirelessly to provide a thorough, accurate, fair and unbiased account of news that directly affects Kensington residents. He attended every meeting of local Kensington groups and genuinely cares about the people of Kensington. It appears that the KCC has now chosen to screen the news and allow residents to read only what the KCC approves. If we give up editorial independence, then the Outlook becomes nothing more than a brochure with lots of advertising. As owners of the Outlook, the KCC certainly has the ability and legal right to exercise strict control over what is reported, however, we do not feel that this is in the best interests of the community. The residents of Kensington who disapprove of KCC's editorial policies have the ability, and indeed an obligation, to express their disapproval directly to the KCC. We would also encourage the members of the KPPCSD Board of directors to let their opinions on this matter be made public.

Valerie Paola

Letters to the Editor of the Kensington Outlook, MAY 2008

Editor –

Re John Feld's "resignation" - Maybe it's time to start thinking about having the FKL (Friends of Kensington Library) publish the Kensington Outlook. Take the politics out of it – so the community can get unbiased news – not the news that either KCC or KPPCSD wants to filter for their own best interests.

One doubts that those who have the highest regard for the printed word and for freedom of speech would ever seek to censor and demand prior approval of what is written concerning Kensington meetings.

Let your voice be heard. Turn the publishing of the Outlook over to FKL – then we could trust what we read instead of wondering who "approved" and/or rewrote articles that would show them in a more favorable light.

Arthur Curry

Letters to the Editor of the Kensington Outlook, MAY 2008

Editor -

I have read the Kensington Outlook thoroughly for years as well as advertised in it for years for Marvin Gardens, and I am writing to express my distress at the loss of a great editor, John Feld.

Under John's hand, the Outlook not only looked great, but was unusually well written for a small-town paper. John was always such a pleasure to deal with, stopping by the office from time to time like a good local editor to see how things were going and if there was any news, and just generally keeping in touch with everyone.

I will miss him very much.

Laurie Swiadon

Letters to the Editor of the Kensington Outlook, MAY 2008

Editor,

I am disgusted and appalled by Bruce Morrow's "Letter to Kensington Residents" that was published in the May edition of the Kensington Outlook. I would have expected that if Morrow disagreed with the "controversial" article about the KPPCSD Board, he could have written his own article delineating the aspects of the story that he felt were inaccurate or unfair. Instead, he and KCC Board chose the censorship route, forcing out John Feld. Even more offensive is Morrow's opinion that he and the KCC Board have the authority and judgment to decide what information can "serve the greater good of the community." Thank you Mr. Morrow, but this long-time Kensington resident would prefer to read news stories that have not been submitted to you and the KCC Board for approval prior to publication!

Obviously something is very wrong in the Kensington Police Department and the KPPCSD Board, as recent resignations, unfilled positions, and lawsuits demonstrate. Censorship is a tool used by those with something to cover up. Dick Cheney would be pleased. I for one will not be voting for either the park assessment or the special police tax until all relevant facts are thoroughly revealed to Kensington residents. Moreover, I will not be contributing to KCC as long as Bruce Morrow is President.

Beverly Russell

Letters to the Editor of the Kensington Outlook, MAY 2008

Editor:

I was stunned to see more than 100 entries in the Police Log of the May edition. I cannot imagine a more compelling argument for recruitment and retention of an adequate number of first-rate police officers in Kensington. The beauty of our town is belied by the reality of the crime-plagued region in which we live.

I signed a petition for the reinstatement of Mr. Feld as editor of the Outlook because he is apparently hardworking and dedicated to the community. However, if he returns I hope he will no longer ignore three quarters of police activity in a given month in order to write lighthearted accounts of the hard work of our police force. As a resident who has called to report three incidents of auto vandalism and one stolen (and totalled) car, I never had much patience with his humor about matters that hold no amusement for the person who dials 911. The tone of the Police Log has for years been at cross purposes with the needs of the community it serves.

Dale Robards

Letters to the Editor of the Kensington Outlook, MAY 2008

President Morrow & Members of the Kensington Community Council,

I am writing to express my extreme dismay over the sudden departure of John Feld as the Editor of the Outlook.

First, I ask that everyone recall the poor quality of the Outlook before John. I have been a member of this community since 1995 and the Outlook was not always as great as it is today. When John took over he significantly upgraded the quality of the Outlook layout as well as editorial. I also appreciate the light that John brings to the Outlook. If I want hard news I can read the SF Chronicle. This is not the Wall Street Journal nor is it the New York Times. If the KCC believes that the Outlook should be serious news you need to rethink this. Seriously! Out of all the people that I know in the community I cannot think of a single person who does not love to read the Outlook and in fact looks forward to getting it. I know that there have been many wonderful discussions about the Outlet and its content at dinner parties and other gatherings over the years and I know many others can say the same!

Second, as I understand it John left because the KCC is demanding more control over the content in the Outlook. While the KCC may be the controlling entity for the Outlook, the most important concept at play here is censorship.

Third, John is a good man. John took the Outlook and turned it into something great. John has given freely of his time for many years and has been involved in our community at a deep level that no one else can claim. John is the one-and-only member of this community who attends every meeting, every event, and is always visible within the community. In addition, John has brought disparate groups with common interests together. For example, I am a member of the Dads' Club at the Hilltop School. At the March meeting John brought Chief Harman and Val Paola to the Dads' Club meeting to make introductions and hopefully get more people involved in the safety and security of our community. John is one of the most selfless people I have ever met.

As members of the KCC the goal is to serve the community. However, each one of you should look to John Feld for what it really means to serve the community. Driving John out of his role as Editor of the Kensington Outlook is an incredible disservice to us all.

John should be immediately reinstated as Editor of the Kensington Outlook and the KCC board should issue John a formal apology at the next public meeting. People make mistakes every day, but the best people immediately fix their errors and I am confident that you will do the right thing.

Jim Thomsen

Letters to the Editor of the Kensington Outlook, MAY 2008

Editor –

I must state right off that I appreciate the contribution and hard work of the KCC and KPPCSD. I respectfully point out however that Kensington isn't a private business with a house organ newsletter. I feel queasy at the idea that negative feedback of even a mild sort would result in censorship. As a matter of fact, I believe the Outlook should indeed serve as a forum for citizens to outline their disaffection and/or ideas and/or questions given that there's really no other forum available. It's a key means of communication for a small town! Please don't let's make it into a flyer with ads and a few announcements!

Jodie Schoenhard

Letters to the Editor of the Kensington Outlook, MAY 2008

Dear President Morrow & Members of the Kensington Community Council,

I have had my house on Coventry since 1990. I feel that John Feld has done an excellent and balanced job as editor of the Outlook. I am deeply concerned that John's being forced out reflects a move by KCC to exercise censorship and control over the Outlook so that it may be used as a political organ with an agenda rather than as a means of objectively informing our community of issues and events. I request that John be reinstated.

Very truly,

Leonard Schwartzburd, Ph.D.
