



## KENSINGTON FIRE PROTECTION DISTRICT

**DATE:** January 23, 2025  
**TO:** Board of Directors  
**RE:** Board Vacancy Interviews of Candidates and Appointment of New Board Member  
**SUBMITTED BY:** Mary A. Morris-Mayorga, General Manager

### **Recommended Action**

Staff recommends the Board follow the Interview and Selection Process and appoint a new Board Member.

### **Background**

At the Board of Directors Meeting held on January 2, 2025, the Board determined that the following would serve as the Interview and Selection Process to appoint a new Board Member.

#### Interview and Selection Process on January 29, 2025

1. Prior to interviews, place candidates in a random drawing to determine the order in which they will be interviewed. After the first question this will then rotate among the candidates where each candidate will have the opportunity to answer a question first.
2. Place Board Members in a random drawing to determine the order in which they will ask questions.
3. Candidates may be present during interviews of other candidates.
4. Board members will ask all candidates one question that has not been disclosed prior to the meeting for a total of four questions for each candidate. Board members are encouraged to bring a list of several questions to select from in the event their question is the same as or similar to another Board member's question.
5. Candidates may make a closing statement in the order established by the random drawing.
6. Members of the public will then be offered the opportunity to provide comment only.
7. The Board will have the opportunity to discuss and deliberate candidates.
8. Following discussion, each Board member will submit their nomination to the Board Clerk (email or preprinted ballot).
9. The Board Clerk will share the list of candidates displaying Board member nominations.
  - a. The Board would have the opportunity to motion that the candidate who received the most nominations be appointed to the Board vacancy followed by a second and voting.
  - b. If this motion does not receive a first/second, the nominations will continue until a motion is supported by a majority of the Board.
  - c. In the case above or if there is a tie, the Board will discuss followed by a second ballot.
  - d. If no candidate receives more nominations than any other candidate after Board discussion and second ballot, any Board member may move to appoint one of the candidates to the Board vacancy which would then require a second and majority vote.
  - e. The selected candidate will take the Oath of Office at the February 19<sup>th</sup> meeting.

**Attachments:** Applications Received for Appointment to Fill A Vacancy on the KFPD Board



## KENSINGTON FIRE PROTECTION DISTRICT

### Application For Appointment to Fill a Vacancy on the Kensington Fire Protection District (KFPD) Board

Application must be completed and submitted to KFPD by **January 21, 2025 at 2 p.m.**

#### Application Process:

1. Candidates are required to submit an application and may include a candidate statement (maximum words 500). Applications are required, or the candidate will be disqualified.
2. All communications with board members shall strictly adhere to all elements of the Brown Act.
3. Applications may be withdrawn at any time; however, if not withdrawn prior to the KFPD website publishing date (expected to be January 22, 2025) will remain on the website and not be removed.
4. Candidate interviews will be held in person at a special board meeting on January 29, 2025 at 7:00pm. Board members will ask each candidate one question for a total of four questions. Candidates may make a closing statement.

Please complete the following information:

Date: 01/19/25

Name: Rodney K. Paul

Home address: [REDACTED]

Business or Mailing address: SAME

Phone (daytime): [REDACTED] Phone (evening): SAME

Email: [REDACTED]

Are you currently at least 18 years of age, a registered voter, and residing in Kensington?  Yes  No

Note: Board members are subject to the Conflict of Interest Policy: [Policy 1040 Conflict of Interest](#)

Please answer the following questions on a separate page with a maximum of 350 words each:

1. Why did you decide to apply?
2. How do you consider the sufficiency of Fire District revenues for expenditures over the next five years?
3. What is your position on consolidating the two districts?
4. If appointed to the Board of Directors, what will be your priorities for the Fire District in the next year?
5. Consistent with the mission of the Fire District, what do you think needs to be done to prepare Kensington better for a catastrophic emergency (wildfire, earthquake, severe weather, landslide)?

I certify that the information contained in this application is true and correct.

Signature [REDACTED] Date 01/19/25

### **Why did you decide to apply?**

It's hard to see the devastation from the current L.A. fires and not think that something very similar can happen here. Global climate change clearly increases the risks our community faces from wildfire. We've been lucky so far. But we'll need to devote more effort to be adequately prepared for a disaster that seems increasingly likely every year.

There are important lessons to be learned from L.A. The firefighting infrastructure there was at times overwhelmed, and many properties were not adequately hardened. So, we must make sure the Kensington Fire Dept. is well resourced. And we need to spur efforts to better prepare properties by increasing defensible space, reducing flammable vegetation and strongly encouraging homeowners to harden their properties against fire.

Of course we must also be prepared for a major earthquake. But many of the same steps we should take to address the fire risk will be helpful in that realm, too.

I have been active in Kensington Area K6 disaster preparedness group and am a regular participant in their radio drills and other activities. I have organized my Colusa Circle neighborhood and maintain email lists that enable strong communication. I also have been gathering *Map Your Neighborhood* (MYN) information for Oak View Ave. properties and regularly communicate with my neighbors about these efforts. I've lived for 26 years in Kensington and am seen in my neighborhood as a disaster preparedness leader.

I have a strong technology background and know how to utilize IT tools to enhance communication and capture needed data. I also am an enthusiastic public speaker and a local guide who leads tours of Kensington and knows our terrain well. I have been an advocate for public ownership of the Kensington paths and believe they would be vital for evacuation in the event of a wildfire. We need to give residents every possible means of escape should an evacuation be necessary.

This is a pivotal time for our community to prepare for wildfire, earthquake and other risks. I believe I could use my position on the Board to help us address these issues.

### **How do you consider the sufficiency of Fire District revenues for expenditures over the next five years?**

The recent Consolidation Fiscal Study shows the Fire District projected to have \$1M operating surpluses for the foreseeable future. Clearly, it's important to have funds to satisfy the contract with El Cerrito and maintain reserves for fire engines and other equipment. But I believe I'd be entering a situation in which finances are under control. I'd naturally endeavor to continue this record of success.

I do think we need to be mindful of the increasing costs that are likely to result from Global Climate Change. We may need to bolster efforts to protect our community, and it's good that we are well positioned to make needed expenditures from the annual surpluses. My priority will be the safety of our community and doing everything we reasonably can to prevent loss of life and property.

I spent more than 15 years of my software development career working for Charles Schwab and Advent Software in the financial services industry. While I don't have a background in accounting, I do know a lot about working with numbers and am adept at compiling high-level information that can be used for making decisions. In my current work as a local tour guide and presenter, I also seek to make the information palatable and easy to understand. I will endeavor to understand the Board's finances at a high level and communicate them clearly to the community.

**What is your position on consolidating the two districts?**

I favor consolidation because I think it better serves the taxpayers and should lead to better decision making and use of funds for the entire community. The findings of the Consolidation study make clear the many advantages of this approach and states only limited concerns. This is a strong base from which to move forward with confidence.

A lot of hard work has gone into the consolidation process, and it seems very clear to me that this should continue without obstacles. Residents have made it clear that they favor this change, and I'm fully on board with fulfilling their wish.

**If appointed to the Board of Directors, what will be your priorities for the Fire District in the next year?**

Addressing our wildfire risks by ensuring that the Fire Dept. is well resourced and property owners get good information on ways to remove vegetation and harden their neighborhoods and properties. There are valuable lessons to be learned from the current fires in L.A. and other recent disasters. To address the very real threat we face, we need to bring our "A" game and take every reasonable precaution and preparation step.

Evacuation planning is essential. We must ensure that people have as many options as possible to quickly leave hilly areas with winding streets. We must not assume that everyone will be able to get away by car. We must ensure that paths and sidewalks are passable and safe. We must work with Kensington Police and Fire staff to conduct exercises in evacuation to identify areas needing improvement in coordination and response.

We should look at our options for communicating with the public including phone and text alerts and other early warning systems such as Long-Range Acoustic Devices (LRADs) or other emerging technologies.

We must consider other options including fire breaks and undergrounding utilities. When fire strikes, my hope is that there will be few if any steps we will wish we had taken to make our community safer.

**Consistent with the mission of the Fire District, what do you think needs to be done to prepare Kensington better for a catastrophic emergency (wildfire, earthquake, severe weather, landslide)?**

Kensington property owners need to know the steps they can take to reduce their risks from a wildfire. We need to strongly encourage property inspections and look for cost-effective ways to implement the resulting recommendations.

I am fortunate to live in a section of Kensington with an active disaster preparedness group. K6 is a good role model for other areas of Kensington, with regular meetings and drills and an active network of residents with GMRS and FRS radios. Our group's efforts have spurred neighbors to gather supplies such as tools, water tanks and food caches. Making sure every Kensington area has an active and effective group could prove extremely valuable in the event of an emergency.

We should encourage residents to organize their blocks and use tools such as *MYN* to gather information. We can single out some good models for this and work to replicate this throughout Kensington. I believe I could put together a program in which I show others in the community what I've done to improve communication in my Colusa Circle neighborhood.



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Please complete the following information:

Date: January 21, 2025

Name: Arjun Singh

Home address: [REDACTED]

Business or Mailing address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone (daytime): [REDACTED] Phone (evening): [REDACTED]

Email: [REDACTED]

Are you currently at least 18 years of age, a registered voter, and residing in Kensington?  Yes  No

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I certify that the information contained in this application is true and correct.

Signature [REDACTED] Date January 21, 2025

Dear KFPD Board Members,

My name is Arjun Singh, and I've been in the East Bay for 20 years, with the past two years in Kensington. I hold undergraduate and PhD degrees in computer science and artificial intelligence from UC Berkeley. I co-founded Gradescope, an educational technology company that streamlines grading processes for instructors, serving millions of students worldwide. Following its acquisition by Turnitin, I served on their executive team. Through these experiences, I have honed my ability to work effectively with diverse teams, from startups to large organizations.

A neighbor once remarked, "Last night's meeting reinforced for me my conclusion last month that you are a singularly able planner, organizer, leader, and detail-oriented person." I am eager to apply these skills to help prevent catastrophic fires in our community.

I will help us:

- **Prioritize Initiatives:** Focus on strategies that effectively prevent and mitigate fires.
- **Learn from Past Incidents:** Analyze previous challenges, both locally and statewide, to inform our approach.
- **Leverage Technology:** Utilize AI and other technologies to educate residents and reduce fire risks cost-effectively.
- **Foster Partnerships:** Develop collaborations to enhance prevention efforts.
- **Enhance Awareness:** Ensure all local institutions understand and fulfill their roles in maintaining Kensington's fire safety.

I have observed a lack of urgency from some local leaders, outside of the KFPD, regarding community safety. This mindset must change. Additionally, many neighbors were unaware that certain foliage lining our street, such as juniper, is highly flammable. We can address this through targeted education.

As an expert in applying technology to achieve cost-effective solutions, I am committed to using my expertise to enhance the safety and resilience of our community.

Thank you,

Arjun Singh

1. Why did you decide to apply?

Although we've been in the east bay for nearly 20 years, my wife and I have only been in Kensington for two years. We plan to stay here. My wife knew people when growing up that lost everything to a house fire. We know we're in a very high-fire-risk area. We know there are several people, both within Kensington Fire and outside of it, that have made substantial progress making things safer. However, as the devastating fires in southern California have shown, we also know we're not ready, and we may not even know what the biggest risks are.

I want to make sure we learn everything we can from other emergencies and apply those learnings here. I also want to help the district run more efficiently and effectively.

2. How do you consider the sufficiency of Fire District revenues for expenditures over the next five years?

I think there are sufficient revenues to make substantial progress, but clearly we can do much more with more resources, and I think we should consider how to generate more resources without increasing taxes, including potential grants and private partnerships.

3. What is your position on consolidating the two districts?

First, this does not seem like the highest priority thing for Kensington. When there is this much controversy about an issue, it becomes easy to get dug in and continue spending substantial time on it. But neither consolidation nor staying separate are going to be the largest factors that help prevent and mitigate future fires in Kensington. Unfortunately, it seems that this has been the primary focus recently.

That said, I don't have a strong opinion, but I do think that before making a long-term decision that's based primarily on reducing administrative overhead, we should consider how the world will change as new technologies help reduce that overhead.

If there were no substantial cost savings, it would seem better to have a separate districts, particularly given how the fire risk in Kensington is such an outlier.

The current projections go out several years, and do not take into account how much of the work done by contractors will go down in price.

4. If appointed to the Board of Directors, what will be your priorities for the Fire District in the next year?

Learn everything we can about what failed in southern California so we can prevent similar failures here. Ensure all parts of our local ecosystem appreciate the fire risk and do their part to prevent fires and enable the best possible response if and when one occurs.

I'd also like to increase educational efforts. We can use a combination of satellite and street images and AI to provide every resident an audit of their current home and risks, for little cost (< \$5000). For example, several of my neighbors had no idea that the juniper that used to be in front of our homes was highly flammable.

5. Consistent with the mission of the Fire District, what do you think needs to be done to prepare Kensington better for a catastrophic emergency (wildfire, earthquake, severe weather, landslide)?

1) Continue to expand educational efforts for residents



- 2) Audit all critical systems to ensure we don't have failures like what was seen in other parts of the state
- 3) Educate all relevant local committees and boards about their role in keeping Kensington fire safe
- 4) Explore funding options to expand preventative measures (whether that is on a neighborhood or home basis).