



## **Kensington Community Services District**

DATE: June 25, 2026

TO: Emergency Preparedness Committee

FROM: Johnny Valenzuela, Consultant/Emergency Preparedness Coordinator

SUBJECT: Recommendation to the Board on rebranding the Fire Plug

### **Purpose**

This memorandum presents consolidated feedback from Emergency Preparedness Committee members regarding the future of the Fire Plug publication, including its name, purpose, cadence, contributors, and content structure. The feedback was gathered to inform a formal recommendation to the Kensington Community Services District Board as the District evaluates how best to strengthen emergency preparedness communications for the community.

The committee's overall direction is clear: the existing publication should evolve into a more purposeful, preparedness-centered communication tool that better reflects Kensington's broader resilience goals. Committee feedback also suggests that the current "Fire Plug" title no longer fully aligns with the publication's expanded scope, which now extends beyond fire prevention to include earthquake readiness, emergency self-reliance, and neighborhood preparedness.

### **Background**

The Fire Plug has historically served as a district communication piece focused primarily on fire prevention and related public safety information. Based on committee input, the publication's role appears to have

broadened over time, creating an opportunity to revisit its branding, editorial focus, and delivery model to better support resident preparedness, community engagement, and potential alignment with related grant objectives.

The committee was asked to provide feedback on six areas: publication name, annual budget, print and digital cadence, publication objective, contributors, and recurring segments. Responses reflected both broad areas of consensus and some differences in preferred format and channel strategy.

## **Summary of Committee Feedback**

### **1. Publication name**

Committee feedback indicates substantial support for renaming the publication if it is intended to cover all-hazards emergency preparedness rather than fire alone. Members noted that “Fire Plug” may feel too narrow or no longer fully descriptive of the publication’s intended role.

Suggested direction favors a title that is direct, clear, and explicitly tied to emergency preparedness. One committee member recommended a name such as an emergency preparedness bulletin or newsletter, while the detailed concept proposal included several alternative titles centered on readiness, resilience, and neighborhood connection.

### **2. Publication objective**

The strongest area of agreement is that the publication should not function as a general community newsletter. Committee members generally believe that role is already served by existing channels such as the Outlook or KCSD newsletter.

Instead, respondents support a publication that serves as a preparedness reminder, reference guide, and community engagement tool focused on helping residents understand what the District, EPC, and partner organizations are doing, as well as what individuals and households should do to prepare for wildfire, earthquakes, and other local emergencies.

Several responses also emphasized that messaging should avoid fear-based framing and instead encourage practical action, participation, and confidence. The detailed concept proposal specifically recommends a community-centered model that combines expert guidance with resident stories and practical, seasonal preparedness steps.

### **3. Frequency, format, and distribution**

Most committee responses support maintaining a limited print cadence, with twice-yearly publication generally viewed as acceptable if the piece remains concise and strategic. Spring and fall were identified as especially logical windows because they align with seasonal hazards and preparedness planning cycles.

At the same time, one committee member recommended reconsidering whether a separate publication is needed at all, suggesting that emergency preparedness content could instead be incorporated into the KCSD quarterly newsletter and supplemented by articles in the Outlook and updates on the KCSD website. This view was grounded in concern about information overload and message duplication.

In contrast, the detailed proposal recommends a quarterly model with a shorter, denser format of approximately 6 to 8 pages, organized around seasonal themes such as spring preparation, summer wildfire and heat, fall readiness, and winter recovery. That proposal argues a quarterly cadence would keep preparedness visible year-round while still allowing adequate production time and avoiding the repetitiveness of monthly messaging.

There is also support for improving the publication's digital accessibility. One response recommends a prominent front-page location on the consolidated website so residents can easily find emergency preparedness content and related resources.

### **4. Budget and production scope**

Committee feedback suggests the estimated budget range of \$2,000 to \$3,500 per issue may be acceptable, although not all respondents felt they had enough production information to evaluate the amount with confidence. One member simply described the estimate as acceptable, while another tied budget appropriateness to page count and publication frequency.

Across the responses, there is a clear preference for a concise format rather than a long publication. Suggestions ranged from a maximum of two pages to approximately two to four pages per issue for a twice-yearly print version, while the more detailed quarterly concept proposed six to eight pages if the publication were redesigned for a different cadence and format.

### **5. Contributors and editorial approach**

Committee members generally support a multi-contributor model rather than a publication written solely from a district perspective. Recommended contributors include District staff, Fire and Police personnel, EPC

representatives, CERT, Firewise and Firesafe participants, community organizations, and subject matter experts.

There is also support for some form of editorial oversight, whether through an EPC or Board subcommittee, to ensure the publication remains concise, aligned with its purpose, and disciplined in tone and topic selection. The detailed proposal further recommends adopting a set of editorial principles to guide future content decisions and prevent the publication from drifting into a generic newsletter format.

## **6. Recurring segments and content priorities**

Committee members consistently pointed toward recurring segments that emphasize practical preparedness and shared responsibility. Examples include what the District is doing to prepare for wildfire and earthquakes, what residents should do to prepare, seasonal reminders, Firewise updates, evacuation information, and community preparedness spotlights.

The detailed proposal expands this concept considerably, suggesting recurring segments such as a Letter from the Chief, CAL FIRE, and grant information, a Neighbor Spotlight, Skill of the Season, a simple “Ready in 30 Minutes” action item, Ask the Experts, a community calendar, and resident go-bag or kit profiles. It also recommends that final recurring segments be selected only after the publication’s core editorial principles and mission are formally defined.

## **Key Findings**

Several conclusions emerge from the committee’s feedback.

- First, there is strong support for clarifying the mission of the publication before finalizing name, format, or recurring sections. The most consistent view is that the publication should exist to promote household and neighborhood preparedness, not to serve as a general community newsletter.
- Second, there is meaningful support for rebranding because the current title does not fully reflect an all-hazards preparedness focus.
- Third, there is broad support for concise, high-value content with a practical orientation, even though members differ on whether that content should live in a dedicated publication or be folded into existing district communications.
- Fourth, the more detailed proposal demonstrates an opportunity to reposition the publication as a stronger community engagement tool that builds capability, visibility, and measurable participation over time.

## Recommendation

Based on the committee's feedback, the District may wish to consider the following course of action:

1. Confirm the publication's mission as a preparedness-focused communication tool dedicated to resident readiness, neighborhood resilience, and public awareness of local preparedness efforts.
2. Direct staff and the EPC to develop a rebranding recommendation, including title options that clearly communicate an all-hazards emergency preparedness purpose.
3. Maintain a concise publication format and evaluate two viable operating models:
  - a dedicated preparedness publication issued twice yearly with strong digital support; or
  - a redesigned quarterly preparedness format if production capacity, budget, and editorial resources can support it.
4. Establish editorial principles and an oversight process to ensure content remains practical, resident-centered, and aligned with the publication's mission.
5. Build the content model around a small number of recurring segments that combine district updates, resident actions, seasonal preparedness, and community participation.
6. Strengthen digital integration by placing the publication and related preparedness resources prominently on the KCSD website.
7. Incorporate measurable engagement tools, such as QR code surveys or reader response mechanisms, so the District can evaluate whether the publication is improving awareness, preparedness behavior, and community connectedness.<sup>[1]</sup>

## Attachment and Acknowledgment

One committee response stands apart because of its level of detail and strategic development. The submission titled **Kensington Fire Plug – Rebranding Suggestion 2026** by Laura Westphal provides a comprehensive concept proposal addressing naming, editorial direction, cadence, audience engagement, recurring content, and performance measurement.

Because of the depth of that contribution, it should be acknowledged separately and included as an attachment to the packet rather than folded entirely into the general summary. This approach gives the Board a concise synthesis of overall committee feedback while preserving the full detail of a substantive individual proposal for separate review.

## **Kensington Fire Plug – Rebranding Suggestion 2026**

-Laura Westphal

### **Publication name:**

Does "Fire Plug" still resonate, or should we rebrand with a new name that better reflects the publication's purpose?

Yes, if the intention is to not only focus on Fire, the title is constraining and maybe a little misleading. Looking back on past publications, it seems like the intent was originally focused solely on Fire prevention and evolved into a larger scope.

One question raised during the last EPC meeting was, "What is the mission or objective of the publication?" If given creative freedom, I would envision a publication focused on helping residents become more prepared, connected, informed, capable, and resilient through practical guidance, community engagement, and local expertise.

The past publications came from people that represent the District like the Fire Chief, Fire District staff, Board member and had a more here is information from the District a top down approach. I think there is an opportunity to evolve towards a more here is how our community prepares (community centered) model or could prepare that combines expert guidance with resident stories help guide that effort.

Personally, I'm not a fan of fear-based preparedness messaging. Fear and obligation often lead to disengagement. Instead, I would like the publication to inspire curiosity, participation, and capability. The message should be that prepared people are interesting, capable, creative, connected, and engaged in their community. That kind of positive encouragement is what helps people move from awareness to action. The only fear I would want to push is a FOMO (fear of missing out) and a spark desire to be a participant of our community efforts.

Suggested Titles: **The Kensington Readiness Exchange** / The Neighborhood Signal /The Readiness Journal / The Resilience Report / The Resilience Signal /Kensington Ready / The Neighborhood Dispatch

Sub Titles:

Practical Preparedness for Everyday Life.

Information, Preparedness, and Community Action.

Kensington's Preparedness & Resilience Quarterly.

Tagline: Every issue helps you learn one skill, complete one action, and strengthen one connection.

### **Annual budget:**

Estimated range is \$2,000–\$3,500 per issue, depending on page count; is this appropriate given our goals?

I would need more information on how it's currently being produced. The proposed budget may be appropriate, but I'm not sure what is being outsourced and where it's printed, pictures or not or how it's distributed etc..

If the publication moves to a quarterly cadence, I would consider exploring a more streamlined format with denser content and a page count closer to 6–8 pages rather than 12–16 pages. This may allow us to increase frequency while remaining mindful of budget and volunteer capacity.

**Print & digital cadence:**

Currently mailed twice a year; should frequency or format change?

I would recommend moving it to be a quarterly publication with the thought that it is to keep preparedness visible year-round which is a stronger framework for encouraging ongoing action, if it's just to get more information out then we have the Outlook for that.

With quarterly issues, I would want it to align with seasons and preparedness cycles, also it helps people to focus on one seasonal priority at a time, example;

Spring = Theme: Build & Prepare

Summer = Theme: Wildfire & Extreme Heat

Fall = Theme: Readiness Month & Self-Reliance

Winter = Theme: Recovery & Community

Reasons:

- Allows enough time to create quality content.
- Gives people time to actually act.
- Aligns with seasonal risks.
- Doesn't overwhelm staff and volunteers.
- Differentiates from the Outlook.

Monthly preparedness content often becomes repetitive.

National Preparedness Month is September, wouldn't it be cool to introduce the rebranding with a first new addition for Fall?

**Publication objective:**

Should this function as a community newsletter, an editorial, a preparedness reminder tool, a community engagement piece, or some combination?

I envision a community publication supported by expert contributors, so a combo of both and like I mentioned before not a District directive. Something to help Kensington residents build practical preparedness skills, stronger neighborhood connections, and greater self-reliance through actionable, seasonal guidance.

We are fortunate to have a lot of significant professionals with technical knowledge, as well as well-educated residents, older adults with deep expertise, and a community that generally

responds better to competence. I think there is a foundational desire to have positive impact growth and participation.

If our desired outcomes are that we want our residents to become, more prepared, connected, informed, capable, and less dependent on outside rescue, then the publication should consistently reflect and reinforce those values.

Rather than focusing solely on risks, it should focus on building capability, encouraging volunteerism, strengthening neighborhood networks, and helping residents understand both what they can do and what their community is doing.

**Contributors:**

Who should be writing and contributing content — staff, community members, partner agencies, fire departments?

I would encourage a mix of contributors, including District staff, CERT members, EPC representatives, community members, subject matter experts, partner agencies, and local organizations.

A diversity of contributors would help ensure the publication remains informative, relevant, and representative of the broader community.

**Recurring segments:**

What standing components should every issue include? For example, a Firewise Community Spotlight highlighting local Firewise USA recognized neighborhoods, seasonal preparedness reminders, evacuation updates, etc.

Before defining recurring content, we might want establish and to anchor into a set of Editorial Principals to help give guidance to future content decisions and maintain consistency over time. Then it also keeps focus on the objective and prevents drifting into something it shouldn't be. 3-6 at most, like; Shared Responsibility (what agencies are doing and what individuals can do) and place a segment based on that. This is something I would want a collaborative vote on with the EPC.

Preparedness is not one-size-fits-all. Different households have different needs, resources, and priorities. The publication should acknowledge that reality while helping residents take practical steps forward.

I also believe transparency is important. Many residents do not know what preparedness efforts are already underway at the District, EPC, CERT, or community level. While that information may be available elsewhere, many people will not actively seek it out. The publication provides an opportunity to bring those efforts directly to residents in an accessible format.

People remember stories far more than checklists, but I still think checklist are helpful and giving a reference for resources will cast a broader net of enabling different learning and action types. I think people want to know how to prepare, but without turning their home into a bunker.

Some suggested segment:

## **Letter from the Chief (love this, don't change!)**

### **CAL FIRE & Grants**

Information and reminders for eligibility for CAL FIRE and related grant programs. Maybe comments and feedback from those who have participated and its impact

### **Neighbor Spotlight**

Feature:

- CERT/Firewise volunteers
- Block leaders
- Local preparedness champions
- Senior Residents- Aging in place preparedness

### **Skill of the Season**

Examples:

- Fire extinguisher use
- Water purification
- Shutting off utilities
- First aid
- Radio basics

### **Ready in 30 Minutes**

One simple preparedness project.

### **Ask the Experts**

Fire Chief, CERT, EPC, Public Works, PG&E, Red Cross.

Ask the community to send in question to be addressed and answered for the next publication

### **Community Calendar and Due Dates**

Grant programs

Training.

Drills.

Volunteer opportunities.

Events.

### **Ready Like Me/Go Bag Spotlight (3 people)**

What's In Your Kit? Showcasing actual residents and what they have/love.

Gear, organization, personalization, and a chance to peeking into other people's systems, helps others solve problems that they might have

Could feature:

- Go bags
- Pet kits
- Car kits
- Medical kits

- Kid kits
- Mobility devices

### **What's New**

Tech, Gadgets and latest Devices

Reviews, with a rating system (give it blank out of blank things- )

What would social media engagement look like other than making an online version? Instagram, Nextdoor and maybe Facebook?

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Lastly, one thing I would like to propose is to find a way to measure success metrics of this change with the community (not a few opinions based on individual bias or anecdotal feedback).

Awareness, are people seeing it? Engagement, are people interacting? (reader submissions/surveys, go bag volunteers, event registration.)

QR Polls and see what the submission rate is.

Example:

#### **Annual or Quarterly Community Survey**

Ask:

- Do you have a go bag?
- Do you have 2 weeks of water?
- Do you know your evacuation zone?
- Are you signed up for alerts?
- Have you attended a preparedness event?

Then repeat.

Now you can show:

Go bag ownership increased from X% to X%.

Or Poll

#### **Community Connectedness**

Ask annually:

Do you know at least three neighbors you could contact during an emergency?

Yes / No