I’m sitting at my computer being diligent and studious, looking at statistical data as it relates to the California housing market, then, out of nowhere, I sing out loud “and the beat goes on.” Sometimes I can be easily distracted and this is one of those moments. After singing those five words I then found it necessary to “Google up” the complete lyrics to that Sonny and Cher song.

Sonny Bono wrote that song and it was released 53 years ago in 1967. After reading the full lyrics and “getting my song on” I zeroed in on the sixth stanza with the lyrics.

Grandmas sit in chairs and reminisce
Boys keep chasing girls to get a kiss
The cars keep going faster all the time
Bums still cry, “hey buddy have you got a dime?”
And the beat goes on…

Indeed, the beat goes on! The pacing, the measures and notes may change but the beat goes on. I can attest to the fact and state without equivocation that it certainly applies to the real estate business. Activity has continued but the pacing has been different. There’s a plethora of protocols to follow regarding showing properties, a series of new disclosure forms as well, new rules to follow when operating an office location. Even though there are ongoing concerns about jobs, health and the economy as a whole, the beat goes on.

It makes clear all of the work we still have to do to address racial, ethnic, and gender bias in our society. My job must focus on building trust and creating an environment where all our residents feel safe. I am responsible for establishing standards and selecting professionals to lead our departments and provide our services, and so I have both the opportunity and responsibility to advance equity and inclusion.

We all have a responsibility to dismantle systemic racism and proclaim that Black Lives Matter.

Because racism is learned and built, it can be unlearned and torn down. It won’t be easy, and it requires white people acknowledging our privilege and doing the work to challenge racism whenever we see it, and to always seek racial justice. We must become comfortable being uncomfortable.

“Our City organization isn’t perfect, of course. But we do have a lot to be proud of and to build on. I don’t have all the answers, but I am willing to make sure I am asking the right questions. I am committed to continuous improvement in all areas of my life, and here in El Cerrito I commit to improving how I work and how I learn to ensure that we dismantle racism, do the work, and be intentional in our actions.

As a resident, I am proud to be a part of the El Cerrito community. We come together in bad times, like we did in 2016 when a hate crime happened and we responded with a campaign to stop hate. We come together in good times, like now when we celebrate Pride (which started as a riot) and Loving Day (which started as a crime) and we have turned those into a month where we celebrate marriage equality, racial equality, and human equality, recognizing love is love and that we are all welcome here. Once again: let us all come together as neighbors to take care of one another and stand united against hate.

I want to express that I am proud of the men and women of the El Cerrito Police Department. I believe we are a good example of how policing can be done well. We work to protect and serve with the values of dignity and respect. Again, no organization is perfect, but I have seen the work our team does, and continues to do, and I hope that other police departments look to us as a model and that our residents are as proud of them as I am.

The above comments were made at the City Council meeting on June 2, 2020.
Hearing the heartfelt remarks made by City Manager Karen Pinkos at the City Council meeting a month ago I knew immediately what the lead article on page 1 would be.

What happened to George Floyd in Minneapolis shocked the nation. The outrage is palpable. It doesn’t hurt to read Karen’s comments again. Hence, they’re printed here.

Like others, El Cerritans are upset with the status quo and want change. Demonstrations have been held in our city too. We must learn from this and move on in a positive direction toward equity and inclusion. It’s less stressful that way and a better way to live.

Open for biz. Last month saw several reopenings including Fatapple’s which has a new pop-up patio for customers now that dining outdoors is permitted. Los Moles Beer Garden and El Mono also are serving at their outside tables, all properly spaced for social distancing. Indoor dining remains prohibited for now.

Barnes & Noble at El Cerrito Plaza has reopened after three months, a positive sign for sure. Yes, there is hope! See’s Candies is also open with online ordering and pickup at the door of the store. The City of El Cerrito has developed a nice website with a list of who is open; see page 8 for more on that.

Finally! The best news to report is the ability to again get a haircut. Grand Barber on the theater block is booked solid days ahead of time. A few blocks away it’s shear happiness for Phil the Barber (the mayor of upper Fairmont Avenue), doing what he does best.

Are you covered? With civil unrest comes glass breakage and theft. Our city had a few such incidents during protests. Some businesses here are still heavily fortified with plywood, just in case. Do you own or rent your space? Either way, don’t assume you have coverage. Best advice: read your policy and ask your insurance broker, lest you learn you have no glass coverage when you need it.

Five Star Windows. Power wash, gutter cleaning, and window washing, are a few of the services offered by Vanessa Bell (see previous paragraph). “A hard worker” per a satisfied customer. Contact her at 510-619-5553 or email info@villabella.biz.

Progress. Four large projects are now under construction in El Cerrito. The Mayfair block at Cutting & San Pablo; Village 29, at 5525 El Dorado St.; Credence, located at the former Guitar Center site; and Kevin Wang’s five story building at 10963 San Pablo Ave. (where Playland Not at the Beach formerly was).

The Wang development includes 3000 sq. ft. of ground floor commercial space with 50 residential units on the upper four floors.

What I refer to as the “Playland Apartments” broke ground on May 6, 2019. Here’s what the project looks like now with completion scheduled this year.

License time. El Cerrito Business Licenses are due for renewal on July 1, 2020. With the COVID-19 mess impacting businesses the City will extend the renewal deadline 60 days without any penalty. So the bottom line is you have until September 1st to pay with penalties not accruing until October 1st.

Rental housing operators need to register properties by July 31, 2020. An online process, go to el-cerrito.org.
A as you might know, the Chamber has not been able to run its monthly lunch meetings since the virus hit town. The popular luncheons held at El Cerrito Royale, usually featured an informative speaker, catering from a Chamber food provider, and friendly schmoozing. Many members regard these regular meetings as providing the best value for their annual dues. They believe in the benefits of building good relationships over time that lead to familiarity, trust, and eventually referrals. These members would probably also agree that figuring out what resilience means for themselves, their business and their community, is also a worthwhile endeavor.

When the pandemic SIP order came down the pike, and all in-person events were wiped from the calendar, the absence of this regular meeting created a void that’s had an impact on Chamber networking activities.

It’s taken us a little while to bounce back but resilience is the name of the game now and bouncing back we are. Last month saw the second of our new style online Zoom networking mixers that turned out very well. There were two new features to this mixer that got good reviews from the 15 attendees. First, was a virtual tour of a member location, the hi-tech facility of Great American Dry Cleaners & Alterations. As if we were actually having the mixer there and looking around, owner Ankit Vakharia, held his device and walked around the plant, showing us the procedures and big equipment used for his (normally) high volume laundry and dry cleaning operation.

Due to the virus, business has drastically reduced, but Ankit and his team rebounded with full-on face mask production and are even doing masks with logos. If you know of any organization, business or group that would like to purchase some custom logo branded masks, contact Ankit at: greatamerican-drycleaners@greatamericandrycleaners.com. A fine example of resiliency, I would say.

The second popular new feature, was using “breakout rooms” and creating smaller groups to replicate the “mingle” that would normally occur. That gave attendees a more intimate easy way to connect and share with each other. A big shout out for Mark Sifling, of Simple Life Financial, for guiding and energizing that portion.

Since there’s currently no plan to resume in-person meetings soon, the Chamber is adapting and will continue to offer the online meetings as a way for members to maintain their business networking relationships. We’re planning to keep the two features for future mixers and are looking for members who would like to show off their location in a virtual visual tour.

Using tech tools like Zoom or Webex, for almost everything is the new normal these days, so it’s important to get familiar with them and be using them to your best advantage. These tools are basically required, if you want to keep up with government affairs, webinars on business reopening protocols, stay in touch with far away family, and of course, Chamber events.

It’s easy to feel overwhelmed these days, so let’s keep on incorporating ideas of adapting and resilience in service toward excellent mental, emotional, physical and economic health. In closing, may I say what would be a fantastic outcome from this unprecedented year, to see our local resilient businesses surviving and the City of El Cerrito come through its current financial problems with a better handle on how to be very resilient for future generations.

Let’s Do More Than Cope, Let’s Create Resilience

Zoom Mixer

Tuesday, July 21st
5-6:30 p.m.

Featuring
Small Networking Groups
Raffle Prizes

For information, email: info@elcerritochamber.org
for login and access

CELEBRATING 26 YEARS

Farmers Market

[The market will be closed July 4th]
It started simply enough with a request from Lee Prutton of the El Cerrito Rotary Club sent to El Cerrito Trail Trekkers. “We are looking for a local project and would like to know if we could help your organization in any way?”

That was January 2017. Three years later the Rotary Club and Trekkers installed the 15-sign Rotary Interpretive Walk in the city’s 100-acre Hillside Natural Area. The signs do not merely help Trekkers. They benefit all who walk in the Hillside.

City recreation leaders and the City Council have long identified the need for a nature trail in town. The Rotary Club, which has been serving the community for many years, contributed well over $10,000 for the signs, plus planning, tools and labor during installation.

The signs look great. They provide insight into the plants and animals that inhabit the area, both those you are likely to see and some that keep out of sight. You can learn about the geology of the area too, and its history. The signs are not placed throughout the Hillside, but on one trail.

You can find the Interpretive Walk by entering at the Schmidt Lane trailhead and heading uphill on the Forest Brown Trail. You pass one turnoff to your left near the bottom, pass another to your left just past your view of the recycling center. When you get to the third turnoff, by the eucalyptus trees, you are there.

This is the Live Oak Trail, and the Rotary Interpretive Walk signs span its length. The final sign ("The Rocks Beneath Your Feet") is near the Douglas Drive trailhead. And yes, you will see rocks beneath your feet. The first sign, "Birth of the Hillside Natural Area," is placed where people can view the historic landscape described by the writer of the text.

The signs turned out to be a community effort. Authors of the sign text are Susan Schwartz of Friends of Five Creeks, who wrote about creeks, grassland, oaks and shrubs; Tara McIntire, who wrote about red-tailed hawks and towhees; Keli Hendricks of Project Coyote, who wrote about coyotes; Gary Prost of the Northern California Geological Society, who wrote about rocks and geology; Zara McDonald of the Felidae Conservation Fund, who wrote about mountain lions.

Dave Weinstein of the El Cerrito Historical Society and Trekkers wrote about Hillside history and banana slugs; Eddie Dunbar of the Insect Sciences Museum of California, wrote about dragonflies; and Bev Ortiz of the East Bay Regional Park District, wrote about the Homeland of the Huchiun.

The signs’ designer was Jan Byers. Artist Adam Prost donated his time to do most of the drawings. Tom Gehling and Linda Yamamoto also contributed drawings.

Many city staffers and officials helped out as we proceeded, including Chris Jones, who runs the Parks and Recreation department, Stephen Prée, city arborist, engineer Ana Bernardes, and members of the Park and Recreation Commission and Environmental Quality Committee, both of which considered and approved the sign plan.

“The El Cerrito Rotary Club selected this project because the trail system in the E.C. hills is an under-appreciated and under-utilized gem,” Lee said. “We wanted a project that would enhance our city by bringing focus to the trails.”

The El Cerrito Rotary Club received $10,000 in funding from Rotary International District 5160. A local match was required. Trekkers raised more than $4,000 from several very generous supporters and El Cerrito Rotary contributed several thousand more.

The group Friends of Five Creeks was an early supporter of the sign plan. Their president Susan Schwartz made many detailed suggestions about subject matter, trail alignment, and more. She ended up writing four of the signs.

It’s amazing how many decisions must be made in creating a natural history and cultural trail! Everyone working on it loves the Hillside Natural Area, and many of them know about it in detail. What to include? What to exclude? How can you tell its full story? Can you tell its full story?

“Fire danger is a likely topic,” Susan Schwartz suggested. “Fires will burn upslope fast (and there is the) importance of avoiding fire ladders. Might be a way to fit invasives into this.”

Yep, we got a sign about invasive plants, including eucalyptus trees and pampas grass.

Beyond content there were details about the signs themselves to work out. How wide, how tall, how large the type? And, how many signs should we install?

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See Rotary Signs, page 5
**ROTARY SIGNS**

"Consensus is building that 30 signs is too many for the distance and character of the Hillside Natural Area," wrote Mark Miner, who initially helped plan the trail on behalf of Trekkers. "Fifteen to 18 might be better." By April 2017 we settled on 15 signs.

By May 2017 we decided to use line art, not photos, for illustrations. Adam Prost, a professional artist, volunteered to do the drawings.

It took a while to determine the size of the sign panels. In mid 2018, Tara McIntire, an amazing birder, member of the Park and Rec commission, and author of our bird signs, warned us to be careful.

"Not to throw a monkey-wrench," she wrote, "but having just implemented an extensive sign plan for my job in our open space preserves, are you planning to do a mock-up of these signs and place them at identified locations to field test? Maybe you have already done this, but if not, I highly recommend this before committing to sizes and locations." Our signs ended up being 16 by 10.5 inches.

Lee said the Rotary hopes more people will get involved in the club's work. "The El Cerrito Rotary Club does community service projects every year," he said, "and we are always looking for new projects, new groups to work with and new members to help us."

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**CofC Supports Positive Housing Policies**

**BY JEFFREY WRIGHT**

At the June 6, 2020, Board of Directors meeting, the Chamber board voted unanimously to join a coalition of several groups including, Affordable Housing, Seniors, Veterans, Civil Rights, Labor and several Chamber of Commerce organizations throughout the State of California. The intent is to be aligned with groups that are interested in preserving as well as growing the rental housing stock.

In 2018 this Chamber took the same action when we were invited to join a coalition in opposition to Proposition 10, which in the opinion of many economists and housing experts, had it passed, would have had an adverse affect on the housing stock by repealing the Costa-Hawkins Rental Housing Act, a California state law passed in 1995 that excludes certain classes of properties from local rent control measures, including houses, condominiums, and apartment buildings with a certificate of occupancy dated after February 1, 1995.

In 2018 the voters resoundingly defeated Proposition 10 with 59% voting in opposition. The promoter of Proposition 10 has gathered enough signatures and has qualified to place a very similar measure on the November 3, 2020, ballot. The current version is being referred to as Proposition 10-2.0, in part because it has not yet been assigned a proposition number.

The current version of Proposition 10, Prop 10-2.0 is fundamentally flawed and does not meet our standard with regard to positive housing policies. The El Cerrito Chamber of Commerce supports positive housing policies as well as our local housing providers.

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**City of El Cerrito Budget Update**

**BY JOHN C. STASHIK**

In June the El Cerrito City Council passed an interim budget for the 2020-21 fiscal year which begins July 1st. General fund expenditures and revenues have been reduced by about $4 million (or 10%) due to COVID-19 and the major hit to city tax revenue caused by the pandemic.

Sales tax receipts will be greatly reduced based on the shelter in place directives that shut down many businesses in the city. Restaurants, for example, generate a large amount of sales tax. At this time, they can only sell take out or patio dining, severely reducing sales and the sales tax remitted to the city. When COVID restrictions can ease is anyone's guess.

Most of the El Cerrito city budget reductions have come from employee furloughs or deferred cost of living adjustments with the balance of cuts from other operating expenses in every city department.

Over the summer when city revenue projections hopefully become clearer, City Council and staff will finalize a 2020-21 budget and adopt that by October 1st. To rebuild the general fund reserve and set forth on a path of fiscal sustainability for the future, an additional $1.5 million will need to be cut from expenditures. This could eliminate some services residents and businesses have until now long used and enjoyed.

A public meeting to discuss these cuts sometime this month is planned, the date and format of which depends on county health orders. Watch the El Cerrito website at el-cerrito.org for actual announcements.

The ultimate goal of the City is to build and maintain a healthy reserve fund and to operate in a fiscally sustainable manner in the future. The use of Tax Revenue Anticipation Notes (TRANs) as loans to provide cash flow to the general fund has been a necessity for several years. Many other cities use them as well. Moving forward the plan is to phase out TRANs, eliminating that interest expense, as those loans will no longer be needed.
By Lisa Martinengo

It’s rare to meet a native Californian, but Chamber member Scott Harris, owner of ClientClicks, is also a true San Franciscan. He still has family in the city, though he long ago made Richmond his home base. Scott has a B.A. in Political Science from UC Santa Barbara.

He began his career working for a legal publishing division of Thomson-Reuters where he was responsible for marketing legal research software and for conducting software training sessions for attorneys and judges. He also worked for over a decade in IT management roles for several large international law firms, where he helped implement technology processes to create efficiencies for firms with over 1000 lawyers.

In 2006, an attorney friend asked Scott if he was interested in administering a startup law office where he could bring his big firm technology automation skills to the small firm world. Scott accepted the new gig, and was responsible for many details of the then small firm, including technology, marketing and accounting.

Scott’s interest in the tech side of business marketing led him to research and try out all available tools in the new-fangled areas of digital advertising including SEO, or search engine optimization, and social media. He was an early adopter of Google Adwords which was Google’s then new foray into paid advertising and within a few years, mastered a marketing and intake process that helped grow the law firm to support 10 lawyers and three million dollars in annual revenue.

In 2015, he decided to strike out on his own, launching ClientClicks, dedicated to helping local businesses grow by using his wealth of knowledge and experience in tech automation and analytics for digital online marketing and advertising. For many small or micro businesses, effective online marketing requires constant attention or is too overwhelming and ClientClicks provides a huge value in relieving that stress.

Over the past five years, Scott has increased his business line of services by building a team of relevant content-creating partners, such as website content writers, graphic designers, video specialists and photographers. ClientClicks helps a variety of industries with digital marketing and public relations including law, real estate, health care, senior care, bookkeeping, automotive repair and restaurants. His team works primarily with solo entrepreneurs and small businesses.

He understands Google’s local search algorithms, and tricks of the trade, to ensure his client’s site will be favored in a search. Scott agreed that SEO can be a cat and mouse game because over-optimizing a site can backfire and cause it not to appear in Google’s top level listings. According to Scott, Google “rewards” business sites that have the most detailed or in-depth content focused on a given topic, so ClientClicks’ goal is to create the most comprehensive sites in their respective niches.

Not only does Scott know Google’s search games inside and out, he also understands how Facebook, LinkedIn, Yelp, and Google My Business can be best utilized to help a business engage with its potential customers. It is clear Scott has an extensive wealth of knowledge, tips and tools literally at his fingertips, to bring leads to your door. He also employs many types of tracking tools, that inform which techniques are working and which are not. The most important thing, he says in digital marketing, is to draw the line between marketing efforts and new business.

Scott’s ClientClicks is very easy to work with. Clients are charged on a month-to-month basis; there is no long term contract to be locked into. If you are looking for a very experienced hand in the world of digital marketing, advertising and public relations, I suggest you connect with Scott as soon as possible. ClientClicks knows how to create and cultivate customers for you!
As far as real estate is concerned, at the present time the market is not experiencing any catastrophic declines with regard to property values. Countywide, the statistics indicate that real estate prices are holding their own. The median price for a single family residence in May of 2020 was $690,000. In May of 2019 it was $700,360, a year to year reduction of –1.5%.

In April 2020 the median price for a single family home in Contra Costa County was $710,000 whereas in May 2020 it was $690,000 or a decline of –2.8%. Understanding what buyers are thinking is of tantamount importance. The California Association of Realtors has an online Market Minutes report, available to members, that they update weekly. The June 11, 2020, edition had a survey whereby Realtors reported that 67% of the buyers that they were working with were expecting lower prices. The June 18, 2020, edition reported that only 54% of the buyers were expecting lower prices. Depending on the location and neighborhood, some areas are still showing tremendous strength and resilience regardless as to what the general market statistics indicate.

Market data and statistics will provide a framework and a basis to work from, however, the individual circumstances of the parties will dictate the outcome. It’s not a one size fits all business. The motivation and individual needs of the parties are the ultimate determinants.

As a case in point, I recently closed a transaction whereby the seller was liquidating the family home. The parents were deceased and the son who was in charge had recently, and unexpectedly, passed away, right in the midst of updating the house in preparation to sell it. The kitchen had no lower cabinets, counters or sink. A new bathroom was going in at a location where none had been before and no building permit had been obtained to do the work. Overall it was a nice house but it did have some issues. After meeting with the family member who was now in charge and after evaluating the property, I offered her some options including exposing the property to seasoned investor buyer(s) before listing it for sale to get a “right now as is all cash offer.”

I compiled market data, outlined scenarios as to what different buyers might pay in an open market situation and also sent her a verbal figure offered by a credible, seasoned investor that I’ve worked with in the past. This package of information was sent to the seller and I confirmed that it was received. We met at the property a few days later and even though the other options that I outlined would have netted the estate more money, the simplicity of an all cash, as is sale with a 10 day closing period was the most appealing to this senior citizen seller who lived about 50 miles away and was concerned about a number of issues relating to that property as well as the added responsibility of now having to settle another estate that included more real estate.

I structured a transaction with the investor buyer and within two hours the purchase agreement was signed by all parties and on the 10th day the transaction was closed, over and done with. Again, regardless as to the state of the economy, business environment, health concerns and the multitude of other factors, real estate transactions are still moving forward because people still have needs, situations and circumstances that have to be taken care of. Simply said, “the beat goes on…La de da de de, la de da de da…”

The beat goes on, the beat goes on. Drums keep pounding a rhythm to the brain. La de da de de, la de da de da da.

Written by Sonny Bono © Warner Chappell Music, Inc.

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Reaches EVERY address in El Cerrito

Next Deadline: July 29, 2020

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What’s Open El Cerrito?

The City of El Cerrito has created an online directory of local restaurants, retailers, and other businesses that are currently open.

Proprietors should ensure their business is listed in the directory and add or update information as needed.

Email citymanager@ci.el-cerrito.ca.us with any questions about this directory.

To access the directory go to: el-cerrito.org/1495/whats-open-el-cerrito