



From the President

KEVIN O'NEAL

WHEN I THINK back on 2023, I'm proud with all the Chamber has accomplished. We set out with some ambitious goals, and accomplished most of them; we did a lot! All of the board members were actively engaged in growing our membership, providing programs to members, and enhancing the experience of membership in the Chamber. Some highlights follow.

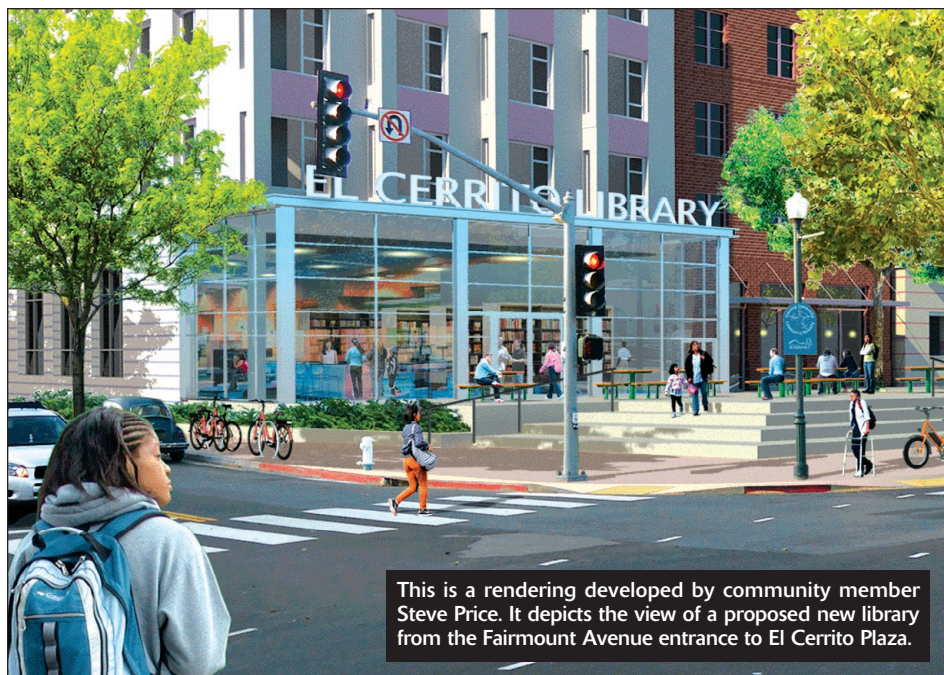
Learning Programs & Networking

Monthly networking mixers, including year start luncheon at Los Moles Beer Garden and holiday lights mixer at Elevation 66 Brewing Company.

Educational Events

Black Owned Business Forum with Detra Harris (Strive Real Estate) and Mario Benjamin (Hella Coastal Brewing), Social Marketing for Small Business with Rachel Melby and Scott Harris, Public Safety & Code Enforcement Q&A with ECPD, BART information.

■ See *From the President*, page 6



This is a rendering developed by community member Steve Price. It depicts the view of a proposed new library from the Fairmount Avenue entrance to El Cerrito Plaza.

The Plan for a New El Cerrito Library

BY GREG LYMAN

IMAGINE BRINGING your coffee into a new library at the corner of Fairmount Avenue and Liberty Street to take your mind on a journey to distant lands, historic times, or imaginary worlds. Modern libraries are active places to gather and learn, to explore, to collaborate, to rest and relax, and to access new ideas.

El Cerrito is planning for a new library in its downtown core at BART's El Cerrito Plaza Station. Just steps from the Plaza shopping district, a new library would be safe and modern for residents to use for years to come. It would be big enough to have areas dedicated to different user experiences, including family reading areas, teen study areas, quiet reading areas for adults and seniors, meeting and tutoring

spaces, and a safe place to provide as a cooling station for residents during extreme heat. This vision is the culmination of 25 years of hard work.

The existing library was built 75 years ago and shows its age. It has significant structural and safety issues including it does not meet seismic standards, it is not ADA compliant, and it does not have air conditioning or adequate heating. Built before the internet, it does not support the access needs of residents—not enough computers, desks, or electrical outlets.

The City of El Cerrito still needs to partner with BART to build a new library at the BART Plaza Station Transit Oriented Development (TOD) Project on what is today a parking lot. The project is on track for the City's Design Review

■ See *Plan for a New El Cerrito Library*, page 3

ELECTION RESULTS AND BOARD CHANGES

A Nominating Committee comprised of Aissia Ashoori, Kevin O'Neal, and Robert Rogers delivered its report at the general membership meeting on November 8th by Zoom. The committee's slate consisted of Evelyn Freitas (Guaranteed Rate) and Negar Souza (Red Oak Realty) along with incumbents Robert Rogers (Supervisor Gioia office) and Kevin O'Neal (Well Grounded Tea & Coffee Bar) for seats on the board of directors. Nick Arzio (JunkCat) was nominated from the floor. However, Arzio subsequently withdrew.

Therefore, with no contested seats, the four above members will be installed as directors on January 10, 2024, at a 9 a.m. Zoom meeting. To attend the meeting contact the Secretary for a Zoom link: a.ashoori@elcerritochamber.org.

In addition, Rachel Melby (Little Hill Real Estate) who was appointed as a director on March 1, 2023, to a vacant board seat, has decided to leave the Board of Directors with her final day being December 31, 2023. Early next year a replacement will be named.

Meet the two new members of the Chamber Board of Directors. Evelyn Freitas (left) and Negar Souza (right).





Past Prez Palaver

JOHN C. STASHIK

HELLO DISCOUNTS! Happy hour at Dolly's, El Cerrito's amazing new Italian deli, is Monday-Friday, 4-7 p.m. Small Caesar salad + glass of wine: just \$8.95. Another reason to stop by and say "Hello Dolly" at 10172 San Pablo Avenue.



John C. Stashik

Scam alert. The *Byline* is aware of a long time local business that recently received a demand letter from an out of area ADA mill attorney for a significant chunk of money.

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal civil rights law prohibiting discrimination against people with disabilities. That's all good and every business owner knows the rules.

But the ADA is also used by **unscrupulous lawyers** to extort money from businesses by having "clients" file numerous complaints, the sole intent being to get quick and substantial payoffs, rather than curing any alleged violation. ADA scams are a big business.

Commercial property owners can be a target as they have "deep pockets." Be proactive and ensure your properties are compliant. Post a sign stating "no public restroom" as that's a big gotcha.

Almost finished. The new building on Kearney Street opposite Fairmont School will house the El Cerrito campus of Little Lamb Bilingual Preschool. Construction began early this year.

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Grand Barber Shop



Voted Best Hobby Shop, Anime Island is now located at 4060 El Cerrito Plaza on the Fairmount Avenue side near Dave's Hot Chicken.

□



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(and other places around town)



Let them eat cake! It's the best City Council meeting of the year and it will be on Tuesday, December 19th, 6 p.m. The main order of business is electing a new mayor and mayor pro tem. Then adjourn for cake—and a holiday break.

That said, here's a special thank you to Mayor Lisa Motoyama for being such a delight to work with this past year. She *always* answers her phone, and is ready at a moment's notice to cut ribbons, or just discuss regular City business. More important, she really scrutinizes those financial reports.



John C. Stashik

□

Thank you to an incredible City staff who keep this old town running every day and always have time to make my *Byline* job easier. Holiday cheer to all!

Get Your Ticket at ccct.org



PLAN FOR A NEW EL CERRITO LIBRARY

■ Continued from page 1

Board to review the master plan in early 2024, which includes the conceptual designs for our new 20,000-square-foot library at the corner of Fairmount and Liberty.

The vision for a new library can only be realized if El Cerrito raises \$21 million for the construction and on-going maintenance. In 2023, the City began to explore options to fund the library. The City has held meetings and workshops to discuss the need, the vision, cost, and possible ways to fund the new library. Earlier this year they polled voters to determine if the funding initiative would pass in a possible March 5, 2024 ballot measure.

On Tuesday November 21st, after hearing the polling results, the City Council voted to continue to explore funding options, including a possible funding initiative in 2025. The poll, conducted October 9 to October 17, reflects the anxiety residents feel with inflation, high gas prices and global wars. El Cerrito is not unique in this regard—this anxiety is experienced by

other municipalities across the state. The recent polling did indicate majority support for a library funding measure,

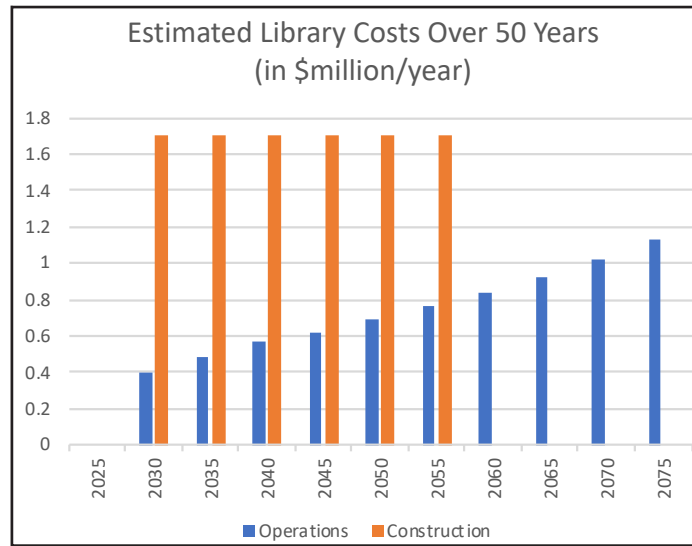
for community outreach. The Council directed staff to continue participating in the planning for a library at the Plaza station, including public outreach, preliminary design and detailed cost estimates. The exact language of a future library funding initiative will be determined at a later time. As described by the City Attorney, such a measure could allow adjustments over time for both one-time costs of construction and on-going costs for maintenance and similar expenses.

To build the library El Cerrito needs, wants, and deserves, we will likely need to pass a funding initiative. A library at the BART Plaza Station, which saves more than \$10 million over a stand-alone library, is our

best chance to have that cup of coffee at a new library in 2028.

Join the journey to a new library by supporting the Committee for a Plaza Station Library: www.c4psl.org.

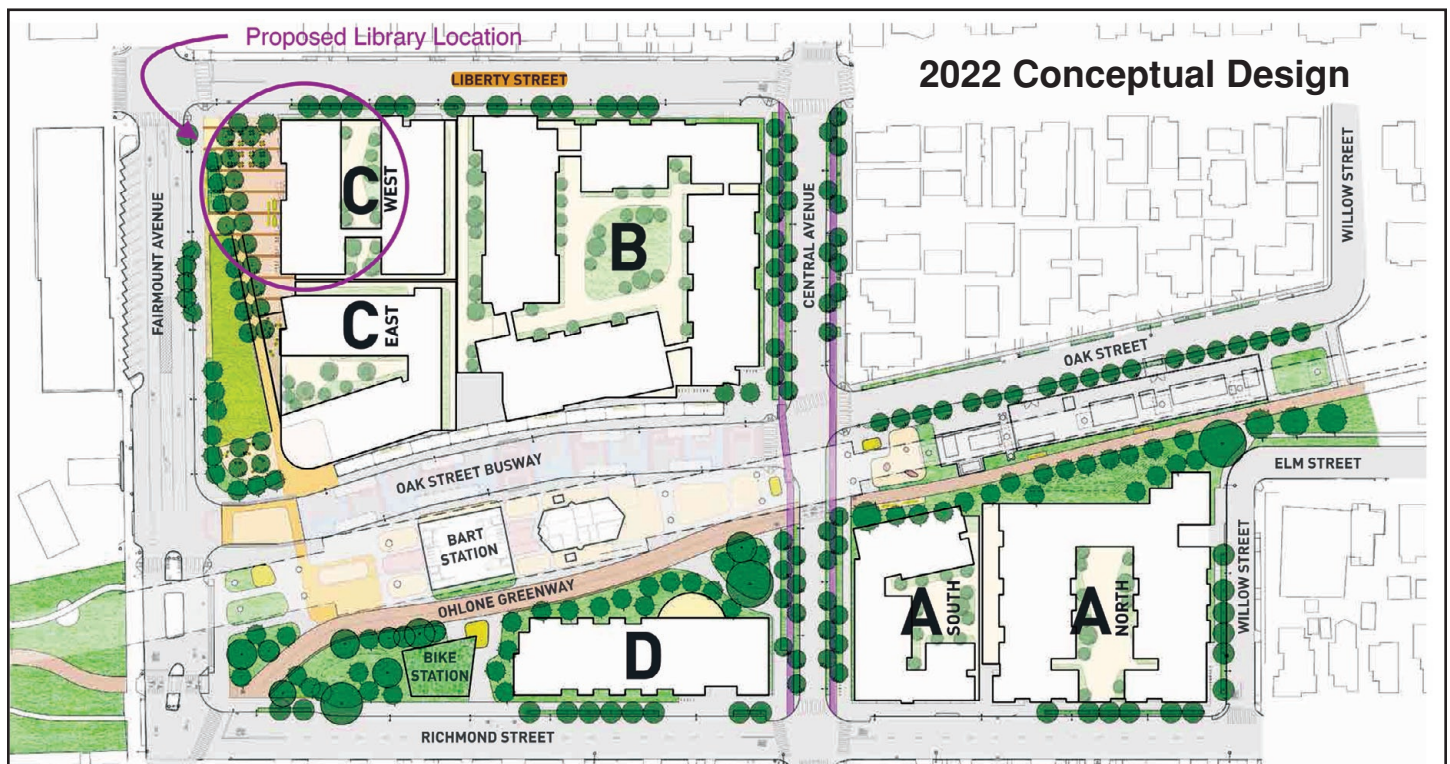
Greg Lyman is a 34-year El Cerrito resident, a former Mayor and City Council member, and is the current Treasurer and Chair of a campaign committee supporting a funding measure for the library.



As described by the City Attorney, such a measure could allow adjustments over time for both one-time costs of construction and on-going costs for maintenance and similar expenses.

although support did not exceed 60%, below the needed two-thirds support to pass.

In their decision to postpone, the Council highlighted their optimism that a possible funding initiative would succeed in the future, citing growing trust in the City's management of public funds and the opportunity of additional time



New Book Highlights Chris Strachwitz and His Down Home Music

BY ROBERT ROGERS

LOCAL FAVORITE, the Down Home Music Store, at 10341 San Pablo Avenue, hosted a major book release on November 11th.

The event celebrated the publication of *"Down Home Music: The Stories and Photographs of Chris Strachwitz."* The 240-page book was authored by local music critic Joel Selvin, best known for his column that ran in the *San Francisco Chronicle* until 2009.



The book, which has drawn rave reviews, is a visual storytelling celebration of American roots music in its rich variety. The book features never-before-published photographs by the founder of the legendary Arhoolie Records, Chris Strachwitz.

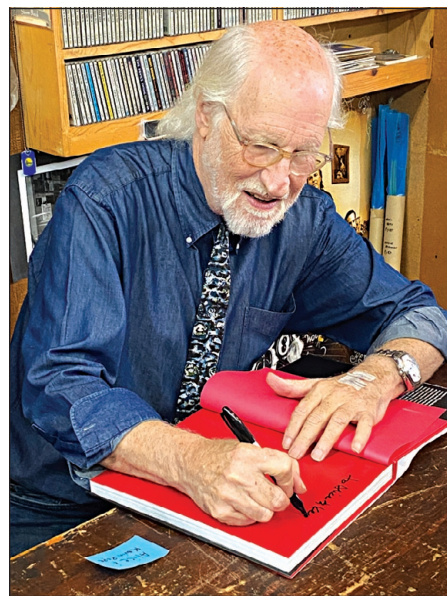
Strachwitz passed away in May at the age of 91. He was the founder of El Cerrito-based Arhoolie Records and had a deep passion for documenting eclectic American music through writings and photographs.

The event was hosted by renowned author and music journalist Joel Selvin, who worked with Strachwitz to document the stories behind the pictures. Selvin also contributed his own interpretive writings about Arhoolie Records and its cultural legacy.

Strachwitz's talent and interest in photography allowed him to document musical history for decades. His voice and recollections are captured by Selvin in the notes that accompany each invaluable image.



Joel Selvin hosted the book signing event at El Cerrito's renowned Down Home Music Store



Selvin signed copies of "Down Home Music" with the inscription "The Blues Is Forever."



Chris Strachwitz documented history while running a very successful business. Founded

in 1960, his Arhoolie Records went on to produce more than 400 albums in genres like gospel, blues, Cajun, zydeco, hill-billy, and more.

Strachwitz often toted his camera and audio recording equipment, capturing the sights and sounds of legendary artists including Lightnin' Hopkins and Mississippi Fred McDowell.

This book collects more than 150 of the most intimate and irreplaceable images of the era. You can find the book at Down Home Music Store or on [amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com).

STATE OF THE CITY



A Special Event with Mayor Lisa Motoyama

STAY INFORMED!

Know what's happening in El Cerrito

Tuesday, December 19th • 5:00 p.m.
(Before the regular City Council meeting)

City Council Chamber at El Cerrito City Hall



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Andrew Melendez

BY ANDREW MELENDEZ

WHEN THE lights go down at the iconic Kensington Circle, the nightlife of the neighborhood comes alive at the Kensington Circus Pub.

Stepping inside, I immediately found myself within a welcoming environment

adorned with a delightful blend of old British paraphernalia and modern televisions broadcasting the latest local sports events. From the Beatles-inspired decor around the walls to the contemporary LED lights illuminating the adjacent bar, the contrast between these two generations of aesthetics resulted in an exciting yet cozy



Andrew Melendez

Cheddar Chuckburger with Fries

ambience, complemented by a diverse and joyous crowd representing residents of all ages and backgrounds.

Kensington Circus Pub offers a wide variety of foods to pick from, but it was the description of the “Famous Cheddar Chuckburger” that instantly grabbed my attention. From the initial bite, it was clear that this burger lived up to its renowned status. The perfectly seasoned beef patty was cooked to a juicy perfection, with a distinct smokiness that added an extra layer of flavor to the savory taste. Nestled between the soft, toasted torta rolls, the burger was gen-

America Meets Britain At the Kensington Circus

erously adorned with a layer of gooey white cheddar cheese alongside a stack of crunchy pickles, savory tomatoes, thinly-sliced red onions, and fresh lettuce.

Accompanying this culinary delight was a hearty serving of thick, crispy fries, which contributed a satisfying crunch to each bite of this delightful meal. Each fry boasted a golden, crispy exterior that gave way to a fluffy, perfectly sea-

soned interior. The delightful taste of these fries served as an ideal counterpart to the richness of the Cheddar Chuckburger, resulting in a harmonious balance of intense flavor.

Whether you’re a local resident or a visitor passing through, the Kensington Circus Pub promises a savory experience, enveloped in the warmth and vibrant spirit of the Kensington neighborhood.

BY JOHN C. STASHIK

“IT’S THE real deal. Authentic Shepherd’s Pie, just like at home.” So said a visiting Brit next to me at the bar while I was enjoying my dinner entrée. That’s quite an endorsement.

But there is more British fare at this local pub. The Fish & Chips are absolutely perfect, with Icelandic Cod deep fried in beer batter with a side of cole slaw. Bangers & Mash are made with with locally sourced sausage.

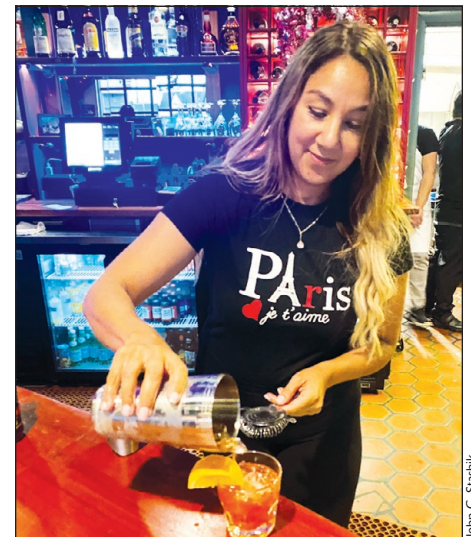
The menu is extensive. American components on the list include a thick pork chop, the aforementioned Cheddar Chuckburger, and my go-to Tuna Melt with fries.

The bar offers a wide selection of craft beers, ciders, wines, and expertly made cocktails.

Atmosphere in this neighborhood hangout is super friendly. Live music is offered several nights a week; never a cover charge. Monthly, there’s a Beatles night with karaoke, and that’s a real kick.

With screens all over the room it’s a perfect place to watch sports, too. Give it a try.

Hours are 5 to 10 p.m. every day. Location: 389 Colusa Avenue in Kensington, right at the circle. On the web: kensingtoncircuspub.com.



John C. Stashik

Heidi crafts a perfect Negroni



John C. Stashik

Live music performers at the Pub include “The Beatles Thingy” who appear on the last Sunday of the month. Headcheese queen Schatzie Frisch took the mic to sing “Eight Days a Week.”



John C. Stashik

Mr. Hospitality, Scott McFadin, is the owner of this popular pub and grill. He also runs McBears Social Club at 10458 San Pablo Avenue in El Cerrito along with the Rancho Sports Bar in El Sobrante.



A Reader's Testimonial

BY FRED FASSETT

AS A LONG TIME Chamber member, *Byline* advertiser, and business owner, it is my pleasure to give a big shout out to Center for Better Hearing, which exactly is what its name suggests.

Recently, I made an appointment at their office based upon a referral from a good friend and existing customer. Joanne Bremner welcomed me and was very empathetic when I told her how I had been struggling to hear at my workplace and in regular meetings and conversations. Joanne quickly outfitted me with a pair of Phonak hearing aids and it was a transformative experience.

She finished our meeting by setting a follow-up appointment with Inessa Rubinshteyn, her very skilled associate, who assisted me with the nuisances of my new devices and helped to understand how to use them for the best effect. The wonderful effect these devices has had on my relationships with my wife and my workplace has been really amazing.

I would encourage anyone who is having difficulty hearing to make an appointment at Center for Better Hearing in El Cerrito.

Fred Fassett is the owner of Minuteman Press of Berkeley, the company that prints this Byline.

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FROM THE PRESIDENT

■ Continued from page 1

Promotional Support & Campaigns

Best of El Cerrito 2023 thanks to the "Best of" workgroup led by director Scott Harris. More than 20,000 votes and engagement; 150 winners in a diverse range of categories. Leveraging the warmly and enthusiastically received Best of El Cerrito program, inaugurated a multi-channel (print, social, email) shop local holiday marketing campaign expected to reach 20,000+ shoppers.

25,000 business owners and community members reached each month through our email platform, with an above the 50% industry average open rate. Thousands reached each month via our invigorated and expanded social media reach (thanks to director Robert Rogers).

Many new businesses opened this year, many welcomed to El Cerrito with official Chamber ribbon cutting and social media splash, including: Anime Island, California Fish Grill, CapeQueen Cosmetics and Salon, Dave's Hot Chicken, Dolly's, Freddie's Shop, Ike's Sandwiches, Jason A. Russell (Edward Jones), Plank+Power, Sola Salon, Stiizy, Super Slice Pizza, Yammy Sushi.

Community Outreach Events

CCTA Presto at Farmers Market; 4th of July Festival; Best of El Cerrito celebration at Honda; holiday lighting downtown.

Operational Achievements

Board retreats to establish priorities and form workgroups to explore and implement the work.

New Chamber website with member access and nimble and deep functionality, thanks to Georgina Edwards, our manager.

Our Chamber grew by 38 new members, exceeding our goal and expectations.

But, beyond all of that achievement, El Cerrito Chamber is on an upward trajectory. We are doing well by our members and making a positive impact within our community. Let's continue the momentum into 2024, building on what we've accomplished together to strengthen El Cerrito's business vitality.

Artist Residency

El Cerrito Creative ReUse

THE ARTS AND CULTURE Commission invites all artists to apply for the El Cerrito Creative ReUse (ECCRU) Residency. The nine month term will begin April 1, 2024. Applications are due by 4 p.m. on December 15, 2023.

The program is intended to support local artists who work with recycled materials, and to encourage environmental stewardship—specifically, *resource conservation, recycling, and upcycling*—in the community through art that inspires people to think about sustainability and consumption.

The ECCRU Artist Residency provides the artist with access to certain materials at the El Cerrito Recycling Center for use in artistic projects, as well as the opportunity to host an exhibition at the end of the residency. A storage bin for salvaged materials will be provided; however, the artist should have their own workspace.

Visit el-cerrito.org/ECCRU for details and to apply.



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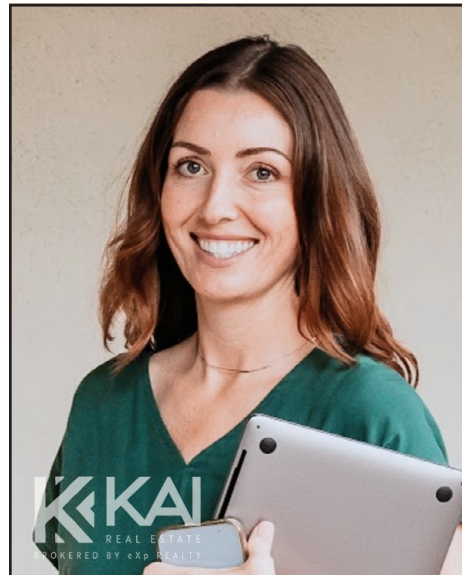
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—El Cerrito Economic Development Committee

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