

Director Virginia Chang Kiraly's Director Report July 18, 2017

As the Atherton and County liaisons, there are a few important issues that I want to highlight: discussing public issues in an open meeting, the Fire District's relationship with The Town of Atherton, and respecting each director's role on our fire board.

The fire district's relationship with the Town of Atherton is at a crossroads now. More than ever, the fire district needs to have open communication and transparency to represent our constituents, which include Atherton residents. The backdrop of my concerns is two different meetings that were scheduled less than one week apart. One happened last week that included the Cities of Menlo Park (Mayor, Vice Mayor, and City Manager) and Redwood City (Mayor, Vice Mayor, and City Manager), and the Town of Atherton (Vice Mayor, Transportation Commissioner, and Town Manager). The second meeting took place yesterday at the fire district's office, and the attendees were representatives from the County Board of Supervisors' office (Supervisor Warren Slocum and a staff member), the Fire District (Directors Carpenter and Silano and Chief Schapelhouman), and Atherton (Councilmembers Wiest and Widmer and Town Manager George Rodericks). No policy decisions were made at these meetings, although discussions were not open to the public.

The big-picture issue is discussing public business in open meetings. Both meetings had discussions on issues that are important to the public, such as bike lanes on Middlefield Road, development, and traffic mitigation concerns. These issues were discussed in an unnoticed meeting. Given the importance of these topics to San Mateo County residents, I am urging our fire board to continue promoting transparency by making these types of meetings open to the public, who deserve to know about the discussions on topics that are important to them. I also hope that other jurisdictions will do the same. I know that in the future, I will be more encouraging of open meetings discussing public business. And, I know this board will do the same, and I hope they will.

With regard to the Fire District's relationship with Atherton, the meeting that the Town of Atherton organized with Menlo Park and Redwood City is no different from yesterday's meeting with the Fire District, Atherton, and San Mateo County. Both discussed public business, both had no quorum of their respective elected bodies, and both were closed to the public.

Nevertheless, I was asked by the fire board president to "ascertain why the Town refused to answer the simple question" he posed in his PRA request to the Town before he resubmitted his PRA request as a private citizen. From what I have seen, the Town Manager has shown that the information can be obtained by the public via the Town's website, and that is the response the Town Manager has given to the fire board president. Whether it is sufficient for the fire district is not an issue as the fire board has not directed anyone from the fire district or fire board to submit a PRA request to the Town of Atherton, nor was the fire board put on notice that a PRA request was going to be filed by the fire district. Peter Carpenter, an Atherton resident and private citizen, has every right to submit a PRA request to the Town, and the Town's response must be given to him as a private resident of Atherton, treating him the same way as any other Atherton resident. At the same time, the Town of Atherton has every right to conduct a meeting without inviting the fire district. Would it be nice to include the fire district in these meetings? Unquestionably, yes. However, given the contentious relationship that started in 2016 until now, moving forward, I understand that the Town and Town Council will be viewing the board president as one-in-the-same as the fire board and fire district, which is unfortunate. Therefore,

if the fire district and/or fire board is not invited to participate in various meetings that MIGHT be important to the fire district, it is because I, as the Atherton liaison, am not allowed to do my job to rebuild the collaborative relationship that we had in 2015. My hope is that I will be allowed to do my job so that the Fire District can move forward with working with Atherton on issues of mutual concern. For Atherton, our fire board's collective goal should be that we will regain the trust of a jurisdiction and the fire district constituents we serve. That includes Atherton councilmembers, who are also Fire District constituents.

Finally, my success as a liaison to two jurisdictions is best achieved by respecting my role as a fire board director and the responsibilities I have as the Atherton and San Mateo County liaison.

Yesterday's meeting at the Fire District was scheduled as an action item that resulted from the Fire District-Atherton joint committee meeting of the liaisons on June 5. The attendees at this meeting were Director Carpenter, Chief Schapelhouman, and me representing the Fire District; and Atherton's Fire District liaisons Councilmembers Wiest and Widmer and Town Manager George Rodericks. To my surprise, I, as the liaison for both jurisdictions was not notified of nor invited to yesterday's meeting, even though I presided over the joint liaison committee meeting on June 5, and encouraged a meeting to with Supervisor Slocum as an action item. I understand that mistakes happen, but I'm not convinced that this was just a mere oversight or mistake.

Therefore, I am reminding the board that at the beginning of the year, I was approved to be the liaison for Atherton and San Mateo County. At our fire board meetings, I have also given updates on my interactions with both jurisdictions. The board liaison assignments are all stated clearly in our board's policies and procedures, which we are currently reviewing and voted on today. In my opinion, there is a very small chance that my exclusion could have been an oversight or mistake, especially when I presided over the meeting where Councilmember Widmer offered to help schedule the meeting with Supervisor Slocum. Given this entire situation, especially my exclusion from yesterday's meeting, I want to remind the Chief and our board that every director's vote is equal. No single director is more important than another. We, as a whole board, represent the residents in the fire district as a whole. I believe that we have a great mix of directors on the board now. I want us to work together to do what's best for the fire district by respecting all directors' views, taking them into consideration, and voting our conscience to do what's best for the entire fire district without directors feeling like they have not been respectfully heard or feeling marginalized.