



# COMMON GROUND

*Up-to-Date Information on East Palo Alto's Housing and Community Issues*

*6th Edition, April 2003*

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## FIRE SAFETY 101

Each year in the United States fires kill approximately 6,000 people, injure an additional 100,000, and cause more than \$7 billion worth of property damage. You can help prevent a serious fire in your home by implementing these fire safety measures.

### Free Smoke Detectors

A smoke detector is something you cannot afford to be without. The Menlo Park Fire District will provide smoke detectors free of charge to any East Palo Alto resident. Call Jon Johnson at (650) 688-8431 for further information, or visit <http://www.menlofire.org> online.



## OPINIONS

### QUESTION:

**As East Palo Alto prepares to celebrate its 20th year anniversary since incorporation, what should be the City's vision for housing over the next 20 years?**



**Joan Sykes Miessi**  
Program Director  
for Project Read  
5-year resident

Clearly the City has to include in its vision housing for families with lots of children, safe and affordable housing for elderly residents and greater opportunities for residents to become homeowners. However, it's a challenge because the cost of housing is prohibitive.



**Paini Finau**  
18-year resident

In 20 years I would like to see more local residents be able to afford a new home.



**Gloria Galindo**  
20-year resident

For families with low income to have more opportunities to apply to different housing programs and for the City to have more housing workshops regarding costs of housing and landlord discrimination.



**Arturo Ruiz**  
3-year resident

We need more affordable housing and more improvements in our buildings so the city looks better and improves its image.



**Siosaia Fonua**  
Owner of "Island Market/Restaurant"  
15-year resident

We need more affordable housing for the low income population of East Palo Alto.

### Install Smoke Detectors

Smoke detectors are an essential element of a safe home. They provide early warning of fires, allowing time for families to escape and firefighters to arrive before the fire grows.

- Smoke detectors are relatively inexpensive and may be purchased at any hardware store or home supply store.
- Installing smoke alarms are relatively simple. They normally only require a few tools, such as a small drill and screw driver. You will also need a ladder to reach the ceiling. Please don't forget to have someone hold the ladder if it is not stable.
- Smoke detectors should be installed on each level of your home and in hallways leading to the bedrooms.

### Maintain Your Smoke Detectors

Almost every day, a smoke detector saves someone's life. But a smoke detector can't save your life unless it's in good working order.

- Once a month, smoke detectors should be tested either by pressing the test button or using the smoke of a candle beneath the detector until the alarm sounds.
- Batteries should be replaced twice a year. Take off the smoke detector cover, remove the old battery and insert a new one. Keep a log to remind yourself when it is time to change the batteries.
- Use the vacuum cleaner to clean dust away from the detector's air vents.
- If you have false alarms from cooking or fireplace smoke, relocate the detector.

### Practice Fire Drills

Practicing E.D.I.T.H. (Exit Drills In The Home) will ensure that you know what to do in case of a fire in your home. Don't wait for smoke and fire to surprise you. Plan your home fire escape now. A home fire escape plan is simple, quick and easy.

- Sit down with your family today and make step-by-step plans for an emergency fire escape.
- Diagram two escape routes to the outside from all rooms, especially from bedrooms.
- Locate the enclosed exit stairs in an apartment building.
- Choose a place outdoors for everyone to meet.
- Never return to the building once you have escaped.
- Make sure children can operate the windows, descend a ladder, and lower themselves to the ground.
- If there are window security bars over bedroom windows, at least one window

must have bars that can be opened from the inside.

## PUBLIC MEETING ANNOUNCEMENTS



- EPA CAN DO is planning a Lender's Fair in East Palo Alto. The fair is currently expected to be held May 17, 2003 from 9:00am - 1:00pm. For updates, call EPA CAN DO at (650) 473-9838.
- Community Legal Services in East Palo Alto holds a juvenile law clinic on the first Wednesday night of each month. A lawyer will be available to talk to families and minors who have legal questions. Although the attorneys at the clinic will give general advice, they do not represent families and youths in court. Beginning March 1, CLS will be located at the Brach Center, 2111 University Avenue.

## WORK FOR YOUR CITY!

Descriptions of available job openings can be found at City Hall and at the Library. If you are interested in working for the City of East Palo Alto, please check the job postings found on-line at [www.ci.east-palo-alto.ca.us/hr/jobs.html](http://www.ci.east-palo-alto.ca.us/hr/jobs.html). If one interests you and you have the qualifications, please come to City Hall for an application or call us at (650) 853-3100 and we will mail one to you.

## THANK YOU

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## REDEVELOPMENT NEWS

Two major redevelopment projects are reaching milestones this spring and summer. A groundbreaking is expected sometime this spring for the Four Seasons hotel. And the long-awaited Ikea project is slated to open in late summer 2003.

## RENT STABILIZATION REPORT CARD

Each quarter the East Palo Alto Rent Stabilization Program presents a report to the City Council detailing the program's accomplishments and areas of focus. At the end of 2002, the Board proudly presented a long list of achievements for the last quarter of the year.

### Highlights of the last report card included:

- **Outreach:** Through the dedication of the members of the Rent Stabilization Board (RSB), the Community Legal Services (CLS) in East Palo Alto, Inc. was formed to replace the recently disbanded East Palo Alto Community Law Project. CLS was designed specifically to provide legal services for low-income residents.
- **Revenue Generation:** Due to the steadfast efforts of the Program Administrator,

96% of the annual registration fees were collected by year end. The RSB attorney and staff are pursuing delinquent registrants.

- **Policies and Administration:** The RSB formed an Operational Excellence Subcommittee, designed to provide the community, board and staff a vehicle that can be used to voice public opinion geared to help improve the on-going operations of the program.

## HOUSING DISCRIMINATION

On January 11th Bay Area Legal Aid presented a Fair Housing Workshop for East Palo Alto residents. The event was very well attended by tenants, landlords, building managers, and Rent Stabilization Board Members.

Maria Willet of Bay Area Legal Aid presented a series of hypothetical scenarios to help landlords and tenants understand their rights and responsibilities. The workshop participants gained a better understanding of situations

that would constitute discrimination. Landlords and tenants learned first hand about fair housing laws, including their respective obligations under those laws.

Here are some of the questions and answers presented at the workshop.

### Can a Landlord Deny Housing to a Family Because They Have Children?

Larry Landlord has never liked children because he thinks that they tend to cause more damage than adults in his apartment buildings. He is currently interviewing prospective tenants. He decides that he will rent only to couples with no children or single adults. Larry begins accepting and denying applications on that basis. Is this legal?

*No, a landlord cannot refuse to rent to individuals solely based on their familial status.*

### Can A Landlord Single Out Certain Tenants For Different Treatment?

Marta the Manager manages a 50-unit apartment complex in East Palo Alto. Teresa is a tenant in the complex who lives on federal disability benefits. Marta gets frustrated with Teresa because sometimes her rent is late because she has to rely on her government check to arrive. Marta signs off on a new paint job for all of the units except Teresa's, because Marta feels that "since she doesn't have a decent job, she doesn't deserve freshly painted walls." Is this legal?

*No, providing privileges to some tenants and not to others based only on source of income is illegal.*

### Is A Landlord Required To Make A Unit Physically Accessible?

Bruno manages several apartment buildings. One of his tenants, John, is in a wheelchair and has trouble accessing his bathroom because the door is so narrow. John requests that the door be widened. Bruno sees this as an expensive and troublesome change and does not want to do it so he denies John's request. Is this legal?

*No. Bruno must permit John, at his own expense, to make a reasonable modification to the rental unit so that he may get "full enjoyment of the premises." Bruno can request that John sign an agreement that once he decides to vacate the unit, he will restore it back to its original condition.*

The State Department of Consumer Affairs has published a highly informative guide entitled California Tenants: A Guide to Residential Tenants' and Landlords' Rights and Responsibilities. This publication is free.

## MEET YOUR NEIGHBOR: WILLIAM WEBSTER



William Webster has been a highly dedicated member of the Rent Stabilization Board since 1992. He also heads the East Palo Alto Council of Tenants.

Mr. Webster works for Stanford University in the Department of Aeronautics and Astronautics.

Mr. Webster has had a lifelong association with East Palo Alto. Raised in Palo Alto, his best friend lived in East Palo Alto, where his father operated a poultry ranch that was part of the Charles Weeks Agricultural Cooperative.

Mr. Webster moved to East Palo Alto in September 1974. A renter for many years before he purchased his own home in 1990, Mr. Webster has always been concerned about the rights of tenants. In 1989 that passion led him to attend a meeting convened by the East Palo Alto Community Law Project to counter a threat to the Rent Stabilization Ordinance. From that point on, he became a highly active and vocal advocate of rent control. Three years later he was elected to the Rent Stabilization Board.

Mr. Webster is very proud of what he has accomplished during his decade of service

to the Rent Stabilization Board. In particular, he was instrumental in bringing about a reconciliation between the landlord and tenant community. When he was first elected to the board, rent control was a very contentious subject in the community and a major issue in most political campaigns. His main goal was to work to defuse that contentiousness – and he has succeeded. According to Mr. Webster, "There has not been a vocal anti-rent control movement in East Palo Alto since the early 1990s."

As he continues to serve the community of East Palo Alto, Mr. Webster sees challenges ahead for the City. In his opinion, some of the vision and spirit that motivated people in years past has been lost. "The sense of one for all and all for one is not there." He would like to see a return of the spirit of utopian idealism that was so evident during the struggles over rent stabilization in the 1980s and 1990s.

Mr. Webster has been personally fulfilled by his volunteer work on behalf of East Palo Alto. "I've stepped up to the plate and filled the obligations of civic service, contributed to the well being of many thousands of men, women and children." A truly devoted and compassionate man, he plans to continue in his commitment to the community indefinitely.

Download online at <http://www.dca.ca.gov>. You can order a copy by contacting DCA Publications, at (916) 323-7239 or (800) 952-5210.

Further Information on Fair Housing:

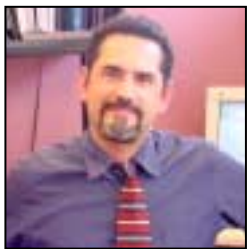
Bay Area Legal Aid  
650.358.0745 (phone) or  
1.800.551.5554 (toll-free)

California Dept. of Fair  
Employment and Housing  
800.233.3212

Midpeninsula Citizens for  
Fair Housing  
650.327.1718

Project Sentinel  
650.321.4161

## CARLOS MARTINEZ IS NEW REDEVELOPMENT MANAGER



Carlos Martinez joined the City of East Palo Alto as Redevelopment Agency Manager on January 6, 2003. Mr. Martinez had previously worked for East Palo Alto as its Redevelopment Coordinator,

before leaving to work in economic development for the City of Hayward. In his new position he will be overseeing the City's redevelopment and economic development activities.

Originally from Nicaragua, Mr. Martinez received an architecture degree in Mexico City and worked on infrastructure projects in that country for many years before moving to Berkeley to obtain Master's Degrees in Architecture and City Planning. Before joining the staff of the City of East

## COUNCIL HIRES INTERIM CITY MANAGER

Following a lengthy search for a new City Manager, the City Council has announced that Mr. Ted Gaebler has been hired to serve as Interim Manager for four months, beginning on March 1st. Mr. Gaebler is a 43-year veteran of government management, formerly serving as a County Manager in Nevada. He has also taught business at Stanford University and is the author of the highly regarded "Reinventing Government," a book which focuses on making government more customer-friendly. The City Council is continuing its search for a permanent City Manager.

Palo Alto, he conducted planning and economic development work for a broad range of companies, including the Mission Economic Development Association and the Oakland Commerce Corporation.

Though he had only been on the job for two weeks when interviewed for this issue of Common Ground, Mr. Martinez already had a strong sense of purpose and vision for his new role at the Redevelopment Agency. Among his priorities will be a focus on creating an environment where regional issues impacting East Palo Alto can be discussed and resolved. In particular, he would like to work with neighboring cities to find a resolution to the traffic problems that impact our community.

Another major priority for Mr. Martinez is the development of the Ravenswood Business District. As one of the last areas of underutilized acreage to be developed in

East Palo Alto, Ravenswood will serve as a major engine of economic development for the City. The area needs enhanced infrastructure such as water and sewage before it can be fully developed. The business owners are willing to tax themselves to pay for new infrastructure, because they see this as a critical investment in the long-term prosperity of the area and the city as a whole. To achieve this goal, the City is working closely with the Ravenswood area property owners to help them form an assessment district.

In the coming year, Mr. Martinez will focus on the current budgetary constraints facing the State, which will "require everyone to be creative and figure out how to maximize diminishing resources." He looks forward to working to help the City get through this bump in the economic road and to move forward with its redevelopment plans.

## EPA'S IMPRESSIVE HOUSING ACCOMPLISHMENTS

On March 3, 2003, Housing Services Director Lisa Hamburger presented the city's housing development accomplishments. Since November 2000, 711 new East Palo Alto homes were completed or are in the works, of which 30% will be restricted to affordable sales and rental prices serving on average households at 60% of median income. These new developments represent a 9% increase in the overall housing stock for East Palo Alto and an increase of almost 100% in the number of affordable units.

DEVELOPMENT	TOTAL UNITS	TOTAL UNITS RESTRICTED FOR LOW INCOME HOUSEHOLDS
<b>Completed Projects</b>		
Robin Court	2	0
Myrtle Place	8	1
Clarke Court	7	1
Peninsula Park	129	65
University Square	217	22
Woodland Creek	90	12
<b>Subtotal Completed</b>	<b>453</b>	<b>101</b>
<b>Projects Under Construction</b>		
West Palms Condos	28	6
1200 Beech Street	20	3
81, 85, 89 Buchanan	3	0
756 Runnymede	32	6
2031, 2035, 2309 Vines Ct.	3	0
<b>Subtotal Under Construction</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Projects Proposed or Approved</b>		
Nugent Square	32	32
841 Donohoe	7	1
877 Donohoe	3	0
872 Runnymede	7	2
1010 Runnymede	8	2
1060 Weeks Street	28	5
1160 Weeks Street	12	6
1730 Bay Road	45	45
2332 University	30	6
<b>Subtotal Proposed or Approved</b>	<b>172</b>	<b>99</b>
<b>GRAND TOTAL</b>	<b>711</b>	<b>215</b>