



El Cerrito Democratic Club

Newsletter – December 2022 and January 2023

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ECDC
PO Box 192
El Cerrito CA 94530

Newsletter Editor: William Ktsanes

1. El Cerrito Democratic Club General Information

The El Cerrito Democratic Club (“ECDC”) provides a forum for area residents to discuss and take action on issues and campaigns of local, national, and international importance. Our General Membership Meetings are open to all and held on the fourth Tuesday of each month except October and December, when we typically have our annual dinner and holiday party.

Last September we converted our monthly General Membership Meetings from an all-Zoom to a hybrid format accessible both in-person at Hana Gardens Senior Apartments (10860 San Pablo Ave, next to El Cerrito City Hall) and remotely via Zoom. For those of us who’ve been able to come to Hana Gardens, it’s been wonderful to be in community and once again gather in person. It was wonderful, too, to see everyone who came out for the ECDC holiday gathering on December 9th.

Our next monthly General Membership Meeting will be at 6:30 pm on Tuesday, January 24th. We encourage you to come to Hana Gardens or join the Zoom call a few minutes early to mix-and-mingle with fellow ECDC members. Officer elections for the ECDC occur annually in January and are on the agenda this month. (For more information, please see “4. Upcoming El Cerrito Democratic Club Officer Elections” on page 7 of this newsletter.)

If you’re interested in participating more actively in the ECDC, please consider volunteering with the Club. We need volunteers for tasks and projects that arise throughout the year. *Help is always greatly appreciated!*

The El Cerrito Democratic Club and its activities are supported by volunteers and the annual dues of its members. Please see the “Membership Renewal Reminder and Instructions” section towards the end of this newsletter for directions on how to join the ECDC or renew your membership.

- William Ktsanes, VP Publications

2. Information and Zoom Link for the General Membership Meeting on Tuesday, January 24th– *In-Person and on Zoom!*

Our General Membership Meetings are held in a hybrid format, accessible both in-person at Hana Gardens Senior Apartments (10860 San Pablo Ave, next to El Cerrito City Hall) and via Zoom.

Zoom Link to Join the ECDC Meeting: <http://tiny.cc/ECDCmemberMtg>

(<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/87570578180?pwd=MWN0T2hVY0VXeEhubHN0aE9xZGpKUT09>)

Zoom Meeting ID: 875 7057 8180; Zoom Passcode: c5fQKR

Dial in by phone: +1 669 900 6833 or +1 408 638 0968
Meeting ID: 875 7057 8180; Phone Passcode: 468602

Please note that the Passcode is different if you dial in by phone rather than join the meeting through the Zoom link.

Agenda (Tentative)

- 6:20 pm – Assemble and Mingle
- 6:30 pm – Call to Order
- 6:35 pm – Approve Minutes from the November 2022 Meeting (**Action Item**)
- 6:39 pm – Officer Reports: Treasurer, Membership, Programs, Publications, Media, Records
- 6:45 pm – Democratic Party of Contra Costa County (DPCCC) Report
- 6:50 pm – ECDC Diversity Committee Report
- 7:00 pm – 2023 ECDC Budget Overview
- 7:15 pm – Discussion of Possible Topics for 2023 General Membership Meetings
(for example, the development of housing and a library at the
El Cerrito Plaza BART Station)
- 7:35 pm – 2023 ECDC Officer Elections (**Action Item**)
- 7:50 pm – Good of the Order
- 8:00 pm – Adjourn

** Please send calendar events to the Executive Board in advance of the meeting for possible discussion at the General Membership Meeting and publication in the newsletter.*

- Greg Lyman, ECDC President

3. Minutes from the November 22nd General Membership Meeting

(Note: There was no General Membership meeting in either October or December.)

Tuesday, November 22, 2022

6:20 pm – Assemble and Mingle.

6:32 pm – President Greg Lyman called the meeting to order. Recording of the meeting began.

Present: This was a hybrid meeting. Twelve people were present on Zoom. Three people were at Hana Gardens in person.

Minutes

Michael Nye requested that his name be used as the “club member” who asked Dr. Hurst about the charter school differences during the Program portion of the meeting. A motion to approve the minutes of the November 22, 2022 meeting amended with the above clarification was made by Michael Nye and seconded by Champagne Brown; motion passed unanimously.

Officer Reports

Treasurer: Ed Crowley was absent but his report via email was read by William Ktsanes. The club has \$9,900.44 in the bank account. A debt of \$102.20 is owed to Copy Central. The rent on Hana Gardens is prepaid through June 2023. The only income since the last meeting is \$37.62 from the payment of two membership dues.

Membership: Neil Tsutsui was absent, but Greg reported an addition of two new members.

Programs: Carolyn Wysinger reported that on December 9th there will be an ECDC holiday party in lieu of a General Membership Meeting. In January, the Club will elect new officers.

Publications: William Ktsanes requested that members send articles for the newsletter. No further updates.

Media: Madeline Kronenberg was not present.

Records: Jonee Grassi announced that this is her last ECDC meeting. She expressed her gratitude to the club for over twelve years of membership and working together. She will still be a Contra Costa County Democrat and hopes to continue our work together in that capacity.

DPCCC Report

Champagne Brown reported taking a brief break from politics after the elections but did announce that the DPCCC will have a holiday party on December 16th from 6:30 pm to 9:30 pm in Concord. All are invited to come. Michael Nye raised the issue of clubs donating \$100 to sponsor the event. A motion that the ECDC donate \$100 to the DPCCC party was made by Champagne Brown and seconded by Jonee Grassi. Greg Lyman added an amendment to the motion that the donation is conditional on it not exceeding the club’s allowed political expenditures. Greg confirmed a quorum and sought a motion to waive notice for this action item. A motion to waive club notice was proposed by Champagne and seconded by Jonee. Both the motion to waive notice and the motion to make the \$100 donation passed unanimously. The link for tickets to the DPCCC party is <https://secure.actblue.com/donate/dpccc2022holidayparty>.

Diversity Committee

Y'anad Burrell will continue to chair the Diversity Committee in 2023. She hopes to schedule quarterly meetings outdoors to continue reading books and having discussions about them.

Good of the Order

Michael Nye gave an update on the Richmond City Council race. Cesar Zepeda is only eight votes behind his opponent, Andrew Butt. Cesar is working on curing ballots where issues concerning signatures or other details can be confirmed. Alfred Twu reported on California Democratic meetings concerning policies on Afghan refugees, student loans, Respect for Marriage Act, etc. He said the CADEM adjusts the regions for delegates to their meetings every ten years. The link to the CADEM report is <https://cadem.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/2022-Virtual-November-EBoard-Floor-Report.pdf>.

Program

Katie Ricklefs, Chair, Democratic Party of Contra Costa County (DPCCC), gave an election recap. She thanked the local clubs for all of their hard work, including the ECDC's leadership and membership. She acknowledged Champagne's work as the coordinator and anchor of the "Unity Walks" for the literature drops. Katie noted some statistics of the recent campaigns: forty-one of the sixty-eight endorsed candidates were women; twenty-four were first time candidates; and thirty-nine were BIPOC. The DPCCC walked/dropped over 100,000 slate cards, mailed over 84,000 pieces to "double Dem" households, and sent text messages to more than 270,000 phone numbers. Currently the Democrats have won forty-four elections and some still may change. The win rate is over 65%. One of the priority races was for Board of Supervisors and the DPCCC endorsed candidate Ken Carlson won.

The school board races were a particular concern this year because the Republicans had a play book for electing conservative school board members. The DPCCC set aside funds for critical situations that needed rapid responses. The example she gave involved a mailed flyer by Deborah Allen in the race for Board of Supervisors that made it look like the Democrats were supporting her instead of Ken Carlson. The DPCCC mobilized texting to counter the piece. She credited Chuck Carpenter for raising lots of money to help candidates. Katie, too, has been encouraging donors to give so that local candidates can be assisted. She hopes that in the future some aspects could be done better like training of new candidates and finding new candidates earlier in the process. DPCCC is getting feedback from clubs and candidates for improvements. Katie encouraged everyone to volunteer on committees and participate in the DPCCC.

Y'anad Burrell asked Katie what happened to the DPCCC's Black Lives Matter Committee. Katie responded that committee got derailed by the recall election for Newsom, life in general, and other elections. Katie indicated that she is hoping to get it restarted in 2023.

A question was raised about how to handle Democrats who run against each other. Katie admitted this is a difficult situation especially when a Republican is waiting in the wings to take advantage of a split vote. She suggested that we need to have respectful and tough conversations with all Democratic candidates to work it out in advance.

The subject of building the bench was discussed. In cultivating new candidates, Katie responded to an inquiry about challenging long time incumbents. She said it is tough to unseat an incumbent who has been doing a good job. However, she denies that an endorsement is "already decided" before the process even begins.

Greg Lyman asked for the DPCCC's help in getting all clubs to help in areas of concern even if those areas are outside the geographic area of a club. Cheryl Sudduth encouraged implementing "accountability measures" to hold candidates to their campaign promises.

Greg asked about the deadline for being an ADEM (Assembly Delegate). The ADEM's must announce by December 9th. The link regarding ADEM information is <https://www.adem.cadem.org/>. Katie said this is a separate process from the deadline for DPCCC delegates to go to the State Party. The latter deadline is January 19th.

Good of the Order (continued)

Champagne Brown thanked Greg for his leadership and hard work on the campaign literature drop in El Cerrito. Jonee Grassi announced the availability of proposing new state legislation to Assembly Member Buffy Wicks under the "There Ought to Be a Law" program. The deadline for submissions is November 30. William reminded everyone that the ECDC holiday party is on Friday, December 9th, 6pm to 9pm at Hana Gardens. There will be snacks, desserts, wine, etc. The Board needs a head count of those who plan to attend.

Adjourn – 7:48pm

Respectfully submitted,

Jonee Grassi, VP Records

4. Upcoming El Cerrito Democratic Club Officer Elections

Officer elections for the El Cerrito Democratic Club occur annually and are scheduled for the ECDC General Meeting on Tuesday, January 24th.

Current Officers (2022)

- President - Greg Lyman
- Past President - Janet Abelson
- Executive Vice President - Champagne Brown
- VP Membership - Neil Tsutsui
- VP Treasurer - Ed Crowley
- VP Publications - William Ktsanes
- VP Records - Jonee Grassi
- VP Programs - Carolyn Wysinger
- VP Media - Madeline Kronenberg

The ECDC Executive Board recommends the election of the proposed slate of officers below for 2023. Officers are elected by a majority vote of members who are in good standing (with dues paid for 2023) and in attendance at the January membership meeting. The election of multiple officers running unopposed can be done by a single motion.

Executive Board Proposed Officers (2023)

- President - Champagne Brown
- Past President - Greg Lyman
- Executive Vice President - Carolyn Wysinger
- VP Membership - Neil Tsutsui
- VP Treasurer – Ed Crowley
- VP Publications - William Ktsanes
- VP Records - Leslie Reckler
- VP Programs - Janet Abelson
- VP Media - Madeline Kronenberg

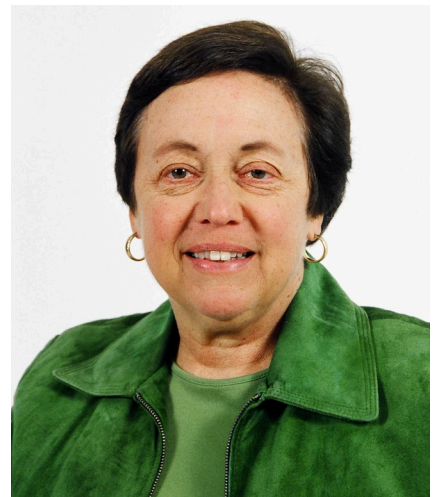
The specific duties of officer positions are described in section “VII. Officers” of the Bylaws posted on the ECDC website at <https://ecdclub.org/club-documents/>.

5. Thank you, Janet Abelson! ❤️

Longtime El Cerrito Democratic Club member and officer Janet Abelson retired from the El Cerrito City Council in December after serving six terms, multiple stints as mayor and more than twenty years as an elected public official.

We are tremendously appreciative and thank Janet for her service to our community and wish her a wonderful retirement!

With his permission, we are reprinting a wonderful tribute that Robert Rogers from Supervisor John Gioia’s office wrote for the September 2022 El Cerrito Chamber of



Commerce *Byline* monthly newsletter. Special thanks to Robert for allowing us to reprint his fascinating interview and profile of Janet.

Amazing Janet Abelson to Retire from the El Cerrito City Council

By Robert Rogers

Nestled in a sofa in her El Cerrito home — walls adorned with photos of smiling family and surfaces stacked with documents — El Cerrito City Councilmember Janet Abelson’s mind races back in time.

It’s 1964. A time of tumult. Youth are rising. Paradigms are shifting. Abelson is in the center of this moment, at UC Berkeley by way of Phoenix, Arizona. Now she’s getting an education that will last a lifetime.

The Free Speech Movement is in full, chaotic bloom, and the wispy then-18-year-old Abelson is staffing a table on Bancroft Way.

The authorities come for her.

“The word that comes to mind is offensive, it was offensive,” Abelson says. “I remember being on Bancroft and they told us we had to get off ... it didn’t seem fair.”

The umbrage she felt would last a lifetime.

“That experience has been a big part of my life and career,” Abelson says, her usual smile straightening. “I have always believed that people have a right to speak, because I didn’t have one” that day in Berkeley.

Nearly 60 years later, Abelson has had one of the most successful and long-lasting political careers in the Bay Area. She served as El Cerrito Mayor for a record five terms, and when she officially retires in December, she’ll complete her sixth term on the El Cerrito City Council. During her more than 20 years as an elected official and member of innumerable public commissions, Abelson has fought for all residents, especially the voiceless and disadvantaged. Her work has enhanced accessibility of public accommodations, improved transit, fostered development, promoted transparency and inclusivity in government, and protected the rights of free speech and open exchange of ideas.

Abelson, who has used a wheelchair since suffering severe injuries in a 1984 auto accident, is proud of her record and at peace with transitioning into the next stage of her life. She said she’ll prioritize time with her children and grandchildren, but also continue to serve on a few

citizen commissions.

“I think it’s time,” the 76-year-old Abelson said with a knowing nod and smile when asked why she won’t run for re-election.

Abelson’s career in public service hasn’t all been accolades and warm receptions. Known for a keen, inquisitive mind and a tenacity that belies her slight stature, it’s Abelson’s willingness to fight for her convictions and buck conventions that may be responsible for her greatest political successes.

You don’t set a record for stints as Mayor without upending a status quo. She said she continued to run for the City’s top post because she felt it was necessary to see through the agenda she was elected to advance. Prior to her, no one had ever served more than two terms as Mayor.

“I was told that there was a gentleman’s agreement that no one would run for more than two terms (as Mayor),” she said. “I said, well, I’m not a gentleman.”

It was that courage and confidence that allowed her to cut through the groupthink that often infests organizations, leading intelligent leaders to go along with flawed policies, their judgment clouded by consensus.

When asked what she regards as her greatest accomplishment in government, Abelson responded without hesitation.

“The Specific Plan,” she said.

In Abelson’s recounting, the 2014 San Pablo Avenue Specific Plan was years in the making, with countless hours of hard work and hammering out differences among elected officials, departments, contracted consultants, and community stakeholders. While she is careful to point out that many cooks deserve credit for the final meal, she does note that early drafts needed significant work. She said she fought for major changes and pressed consultants to work beyond their initial contract to ensure the public got a quality product.

While the final document isn’t perfect — no policy is — Abelson is proud of what was accomplished. Specifically, Abelson notes the plan has helped increase population and density in El Cerrito with a number of key provisions.

Among them:

- Streamlining Environmental Impact Review processes to enable development.
- Coupling the Design Review Board with the Planning Commission to reduce redundancy.

- Reduced parking requirements.
- Expanding maximum height limitations.

The result has been a City where dense, tall, and walkable development has occurred at a faster pace than in many other cities in the region, especially around its two BART transit hubs.

“Don’t you think we made some significant changes?” Abelson asked.

Other elected leaders have also taken notice of Abelson’s long, successful career. One of those elected leaders is Contra Costa County Supervisor John Gioia, one of California’s leading champions for sustainable development, clean air, and transit equity.

“Over the last 24 years, I’ve had the honor of working with Janet to make West County a healthier and stronger community,” Gioia said. “She will be remembered for her passion to make transit accessible for all and to significantly increase the supply of affordable housing in El Cerrito.”

While Abelson is retiring from her elected seat, she doesn’t plan to stop working for a better future in El Cerrito and the region. So much work remains for a new generation of elected officials. Her beloved City still needs a new public safety building, a library, and expanded recreational and senior services, she said.

But Abelson is content with the work she’s done and the template she has helped forge for the future.

Asked if she has any regrets, she pauses a long time. Maybe regret isn’t the right word. Mistake doesn’t quite fit either. What Abelson wants is better. Better for all. Better, especially, for the mobility-challenged.

Abelson passionately believes people should be able to fully participate in their communities and live complete lives regardless of their health or bodily abilities, and infrastructure is key to realizing that lofty vision.

Abelson invested a life and career toward that end. The progress is real, but work remains.

“Our City is still not as accessible for all as I would like it to be,” Abelson said.

Thank you, Janet, for your many years of service to El Cerrito!
Thank you, Robert, for allowing us to reprint your moving tribute.

- William Ktsanes, VP Publications

6. Help Fight Hate Crimes – *El Cerrito Stands United!*

Last October, El Cerrito’s City Council declared a “United Against Hate Week” — just as it has every year since 2017. An incident that year on Arlington Blvd. against an African-American family spurred the city to take action, put our police on high alert and encouraged the public to put up signs condemning hate.

Sadly, it is even more important now that our city take a similar stand, because local hate crimes have not decreased — but increased. Recently, incidents in our community have included a disparaging symbol on a Jewish family’s home and abuse toward a transgender employee at the Plaza. Other hate crimes are sadly on the rise in our state and across the nation.



We must fight back. Our police remain on alert to find and prosecute those who commit hate crimes here — and they ask residents to be watchful of suspicious behavior to help identify individuals. But to proclaim hate crimes out-of-bounds once again in our city, our Mayor and City Council have asked residents and businesses to show that El Cerrito will not put up with such illegal actions.

Please join the campaign against hate by putting an “El Cerrito Stands United Against Hate” poster visibly in your window. Let everyone see! Posters can be picked up in City Hall or I can deliver a sign to you if you contact me at:

pfadelli@ci.el-cerrito.ca.us

Thank you.

- Paul Fadelli; ECDC Member, Former El Cerrito Mayor and Current City Councilmember

7. Future Events – *Mark Your Calendar!*

ECDC January General Membership Meeting – 6:30 pm, Tuesday, January 24th (4th Tuesday of the month); annual ECDC Executive Board nominations and elections; hybrid format, in-person at Hana Gardens Senior Apartments (10860 San Pablo Avenue, next to El Cerrito City Hall) and remote via Zoom link <http://tiny.cc/ECDCmemberMtg>

ECDC February General Membership Meeting – 6:30 pm, Tuesday, February 28th (4th Tuesday of the month); hybrid format, in-person at Hana Gardens Senior Apartments (10860 San Pablo Avenue, next to El Cerrito City Hall) and remote via Zoom link <http://tiny.cc/ECDCmemberMtg>

ECDC March General Membership Meeting – 6:30 pm, Tuesday, March 28th (4th Tuesday of the month); hybrid format, in-person at Hana Gardens Senior Apartments (10860 San Pablo Avenue, next to El Cerrito City Hall) and remote via Zoom link <http://tiny.cc/ECDCmemberMtg>

- William Ktsanes, VP Publications

8. Membership Renewal Reminder and Instructions

We've corrected the renewal links and information on the [ECDC webpage](#), **so now is a great time to renew your membership!** We will also be voting for ECDC officers at our January 24 membership meeting, so your up-to-date membership will allow you to vote. You can renew at: <https://ecdclub.org/join/>. We will be issuing refunds to those who paid for their renewals at the previous rates. If you have already renewed since August 1, you do not need to do so again.

You can also mail a check to:

ECDC Membership
PO Box 192
El Cerrito CA 94530

Membership rates for 2023 are \$5 for students, \$15 for individuals, and \$23 for two adults at the same address. Please note that the cost for a printed hard-copy of the newsletter is now \$18, in addition to the membership fee.

If you have questions, please email Neil Tsutsui at membership.ecdc@gmail.com.

Thank you!

- Neil Tsutsui, VP Membership

9. Call for Newsletter Submissions

The El Cerrito Democratic Club Newsletter is published monthly in advance of the General Membership meetings. ECDC members, friends and supporters are invited to submit articles and announcements regarding local issues and events of interest. Submissions should be emailed to me, William Ktsanes, at wktsanes@gmail.com for review and editing.

- William Ktsanes, VP Publications

10. Link to the ECDC Website and Bylaws

Periodically the Club updates our Bylaws. The bylaws were changed in October 2018 to meet DPCCC requirements; revisions were proposed and adopted during the January 2021 and August 2022 ECDC meetings. The ECDC Bylaws are posted on the ECDC website at <https://ecdclub.org/>.