

Nutshell

No. 116

Official community newsletter of the City of Walnut Creek

JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2005



Walnut Creek's downtown library as it looks today.

WC loses third bid for grant

Back to drawing board on new library

A lthough Walnut Creek was unsuccessful in its third attempt to secure a state grant to build a new downtown library, City officials plan to renew their efforts to address the community's need for a bigger and better facility.

For the third time in two years, the State Public Library Construction and Renovation Board decided on Nov. 29 not to fund the City's request for \$18.2 million to build a 41,800-square-foot library in place of the outdated, 9,234-square-foot facility that was opened in March 1961.

The decision was made despite the "outstanding" rating given to Walnut Creek's application, which was submitted last January in a final effort to secure some of the remaining \$77 million in Proposition 14 library funds.

The City Council in January is expected to discuss its options with City Manager Mike Parness and other key City staff and library officials to set a fresh course for making a new library a reality.

City leaders are resolute in their commitment to replace the existing



The interior of the library, circa 1962, shows the same chairs and shelves still used today.

library, which was opened when only 10,000 people lived in Walnut Creek. The library is woefully undersized (it's one of the smallest in Contra Costa County) and technologically deficient to meet the needs of today's population of 66,000.

In March 2002, Walnut Creek voters passed Measure Q to expand library hours, collections and services but the outdated building is overcrowded and limits accessibility for elderly and disabled patrons. Further, the building requires safety and technology upgrades, including earthquake safety improvements.

General Plan draft nearly ready for review

Pollowing another productive series of public workshops in November, the General Plan Steering Committee is expected to recommend in February a new draft General Plan for approval by the Planning Commission.

The Steering Committee, which has shepherded the process of updating the City's blueprint for growth since June 2003, is scheduled to take action Feb. 22 to recommend a preliminary General Plan to the commission. The document is expected to go to the City Council in September.

Although major progress has been made in redrafting the General Plan for the next 20 years, Senior Planner Janice Stern acknowledged that because of the strong public feedback generated at a series of workshops and focus group meetings held throughout 2004, final adoption of the plan will likely occur in spring 2006.

"It's taking us longer than we expected," said Stern, who noted that the staff and committee need more time to digest all the citizen input gleaned in recent months.

A combined 110 people attended two community workshops in November. The participants included representatives from a broad range of groups, including neighborhoods, homeowner associations, business owners, Walnut Creek Youth Council, the Citizen's Institute, and City commissions.

Land use changes were the focus of the the sessions as participants broke into small groups to discuss change areas throughout the City and specifically in the

GENERAL PLAN, see page 6

City Event Calendar

January

19 Martin Luther King Day observance

City offices closed Ceremony at noon Civic Park assembly hall (See What's Happening)

February

16 Federal seniors' assistance (See What's Happening)

21
Presidents' Day observance
City offices closed

City Meeting Calendar

City Council V Jan. 4, 18; Feb. 1, 15 7 p.m. City Hall, 1666 N. Main St.

Planning Commission Jan. 13, 27, Feb. 10, 24 7:30 p.m. City Council chamber

Arts Commission
Jan. 18, Feb. 22
4:30 p.m.
Lesher Center for the Arts

Transportation Commission Jan. 20, Feb. 17 7:30 p.m. City Council chamber

Design Review Commission Jan. 5, 19; Feb. 2, 16 7 p.m., City Council chamber

Park, Rec & Open Space Commission Jan. 3, Feb. 7 7 p.m., City Council chamber

City Council meetings are televised live on Comcast Channels 6 and 26 (unincorporated), and on Astound Channel 29. They are repeated the following Saturday at 1 p.m. on all.

Walnut Creek Currents, a City-produced 10-minute video digest on City activities and services:

Comcast Channels 6 and 26

Daily at 6 a.m., 9 a.m., noon, 3 p.m., and Wed. at 7:30 p.m.

Astound Ch. 29 — Daily at noon and 7 p.m.

Dutch paintings, Joyce Hsu artwork at Bedford Gallery

The popular *Waiting for van Gogh* exhibition of 19th century Dutch paintings has been extended to Jan. 30 at the City's Bedford Gallery.

Two weeks later, the Gallery will present *The World of Joyce Hsu: A Site-Specific Installation of Dogs, Daisies, and Flying Objects*, in a special premiere on Sunday, Feb. 13, 3 to 5 p.m. The show will remain on view through March 27.

Installation artist Joyce Hsu will transform the Bedford Gallery into a fantasyland filled with imaginary creatures that move, charm, and evoke a sense of being in the middle of a cartoon or animated movie.

General admission is \$3; Youth (12-17) \$2;



'Bobby', 1998, created by Joyce Hsu

Children (under 12) free. The Bedford Gallery is in the Dean Lesher Regional Center for the Arts at 1601 Civic Dr.

What's Happening

Martin Luther King Day observance

"Beyond Black and White" is the theme of Walnut Creek's annual Martin Luther King Day Service on Monday, Jan. 17 at noon in the Civic Park Community Center assembly hall, 1375 Civic Dr. This public event is presented by the Interfaith Council of Contra Costa County, in cooperation with the City of Walnut Creek. For more information, contact Rev. David Sammons at 925-934-3135.

Time to recycle your Christmas tree

Pleasant Hill Bayshore Disposal will collect your unwanted Christmas tree for composting the week of Jan. 3-7.
Simply leave your tree at the curbside on your regular trash collection day.
Remove ornaments, tinsel, and other trimmings. Don't leave stands — metal or wood — on the tree; it will not be taken otherwise. Also, don't leave artificial or flocked trees. Call 925-603-1144 for details.

Appraisal event at Gardens at HF Feb. 27

The Gardens at Heather Farm will host its annual Antique and Collectibles Appraisal Event on Sunday, Feb. 27, 1 to 6 p.m. at 1540 Marchbanks Dr., Walnut Creek. The cost of admission and having up to three items appraised is \$15, and there is a \$5 charge for each additional item. For details, call 925-947-1678 or go to www.gardenshf.org.

Tauscher's staff to offer senior assistance

Caseworkers from Congresswoman Ellen Tauscher's office will assist senior citizens with federal issues such as Social Security, income taxes, postal matters, and immigration on Wednesday, Feb. 16, 9 to 11:45 a.m., at the Civic Park Community Center, 1375 Civic Dr. If a ride is needed to the site, Walnut Creek residents age 60 and over may call 925-933-1434 by Feb. 15.

Winter tours offered at Bancroft Garden

Winter docent-led tours at the Ruth Bancroft Garden are being conducted through March 26 on Saturdays at 10 a.m. by reservation only. Admission is \$7 for non-members; members and children under 12 free. The Ruth Bancroft Garden, located at 1500 Bancroft Rd., Walnut Creek, features an extensive collection of cacti and succulents with trees, shrubs and perennials from around the world. January and February are the best months to view the Aloe collection in full bloom. Visit the website at www.ruthbancroftgarden.org or call 925-210-9663.

Call for stories on local creeks

LifeGarden, a nonprofit educational organization, is collecting stories for its new City Creeks program. Walnut Creek residents are being asked to share their personal experiences with the creeks of their city. Photographs of the creeks as they once were are also being solicited. Some of the stories and images will be incorporated into the second edition of LifeGarden's *City Creeks Handbook*, due out in the spring. LifeGarden is also seeking volunteers to serve as interpretive guides for the City creeks program. Training will be provided. For more information, contact Judy Adler at 925-937-3044.

Corrections

In the *State of the City* report issued in the last edition of the *Nutshell*, it should have said the average annual rainfall in Walnut Creek is 20 inches (thanks to James Perry of Walnut Creek for providing this information). Also, the correct figure for the General Fund expenditures in the 2004-2006 operating budget is \$98,240,211. Finally, it should have said that 37 City parks and trees employees put in 76,800 hours a year to maintain parks, medians and greenways.

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Work nearing end on North Main Street improvements

Work is expected to be completed in mid-February on the makeover of North Main Street between Civic Drive and Ygnacio Valley Road. The City is

making the stretch more pedestrianfriendly by widening the sidewalks, installing decora-



tive lights and furniture, undergrounding the utility lines, and bringing the street corners closer together for shorter pedestrian crossing.

Because of the complexities of the project, the City decided to do it all at once rather than in phases. The \$2.4 million cost will be shared by adjacent property owners along North Main Street.

Following is an update on other projects in Walnut Creek:

Skate park groundbreaking set

The City Council will break ground on

A pedestrian strolled the new sidewalk on the east side of North Main Street at the corner of Civic Drive as the City's street improvement work continued in December.



the new skate park at Heather Farm Park on Saturday, April 9. Construction is expected to be completed by late summer.

EBMUD water pipeline

Installation of the East Bay Municipal Utility District water pipeline to San Ramon Valley is currently suspended, although construction of a trenched pipe from Civic Park ballfield to Newell Avenue should be completed by mid-2005.

Rossmoor detention basin done

Work was completed in October on the Rossmoor detention basin, a project that was done by the Contra Costa County Flood Control District with \$300,000 and engineering support from the City.

Approximately 26,200 cubic yards of soil was removed so that less water would flow down Tice Creek during large storms.

Arts Vision Task Force report

Council seeks to beef up support for arts

A renewed commitment to beef up more stable private sector funding support for Walnut Creek's arts programs won a major endorsement from the City Council in November.

The Council-appointed Arts Vision Task Force spent more than two years preparing a 10-year vision for City arts programs.

The heart of the vision is that "Walnut Creek is acknowledged as the leading regional center for the arts in the Bay Area, outside of San Francisco."

The task force issued its report in June, complete with 32 recommendations on ways to develop stronger community support for arts programs.

The Council on Nov. 16 adopted 22 of the recommendations; the rest, to be considered in the future, require policy direction or require resources that aren't currently available.

The recommendations call for

increasing marketing and promotion of

programs and events at the Dean Lesher Regional Center for the Arts, which is operated by the City. The recommendations also deal with how budget allocations for the arts programs are made and how the Diablo Regional Arts Association will continue its

mission as the City's fundraising arm for the arts programs.

The task force said it hoped that by developing stronger community support for excellence in the arts programs, the City will be able to strengthen the breadth and depth of participation in these programs as well as the financial base for them.

The task force members were Gary Fisher and Loella Haskew, DRAA; Lisa Hotchkiss, Tom Donahoe and Jim Pezzaglia, Arts Commission; and Council Members Gwen Regalia and Sue Rainey.

Citizens Institute seeking participants for spring 2005

Registration for the Spring 2005
Walnut Creek Citizens Institute is under way.

Now in its fourth year, the Citizens Institute is an ideal way to learn how the City works and to meet the people who make that happen. Classes include presentations by City Council members and Department heads, inter-active exercises and tours of the City facilities. There's even a bus tour of the highlights of the City, past, present and future.

Classes are held one evening a week for seven weeks, with two Saturday morning sessions at the beginning and the end of the series. There is no cost to participants.

The Institute will begin Saturday, March 5 and conclude Saturday, April 23, with evening sessions each Thursday beginning March 10.

Applications and detailed course information are available on the City website at www.walnut-creek.org, or by calling Community Relations Officer Gayle Melvin, 925-943-5899, ext. 189.

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Advise & A primer on Ci

oday, more than ever, citizens desire a greater voice in determining policies and procedures at all levels of government. It is the City Council's policy to encourage the broadest possible public participation in the conduct of the City's operation and development of public policy. The City has established five advisory commissions to review City programs and special community problems. City commissions are composed of five to seven members. Commission members must be registered voters living within the City of Walnut Creek boundaries, with the exception of the three architects serving on the Design Review Commission and three Arts Commission members. Commissioners serve without compensation.

This primer is designed to give you a short course on these vital advisory groups and what valuable services they provide the City Council and the community at large.

Planning Commission

Members: 7 Term: 4 years

Meetings: Second and fourth

Thursdays, 7:00 p.m.,

Council Chamber, City Hall,

1666 N. Main St.

The oldest advisory body in the City, established in 1930, provides the City Council with information and recommen-

Commissioners

Commissioners

Brian Kilian

Joseph Gorny

Mark Lopez

Robert Becker, Chair

Thomas Bassett, Vice Chair

Richard Larsen, Chair Robert Jorgensen, Vice Chair Allan C. Moore Jerry Kaplan Cindy Silva **Robert Simmons** Robert Pickett

dations on planning matters. It also prepares and recommends to the Council a General Plan as a blueprint for development of the City and its surrounding sphere of influence.

Design Review Commission

Members: 5 Term: 3 years

Meetings: First and third Wednesdays, 7:00 p.m., Council Chamber, City Hall,

1666 N. Main St.

The members consist of three registered architects and/or registered landscape

architects, and two residents at large. They are responsible for improving the general standards of orderly development of the City. The commission reviews design of buildings, structures and signs.



commission ope

s many as four vacancies on City Andvisory commissions will need to be filled in March, and applications for those seats will be accepted in January.

Commissioners whose second terms will be expiring are Allan Moore and Jerry Kaplan Planning Commission; and Kevin Wilk and Phyllis Ceaser, Arts Commission.

The City Council is scheduled in January to interview four first-term

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Present ty commissions



visory body to the City Council, meets twice a month in the Council Chamber at City Hall except for the Arts Lesher Regional Center for the Arts.

w accepted for enings in 2005

commissioners whose terms expire in 2005. Appointments will be made in February and new commissioners will be sworn in on March 1.

Applications for remaining vacancies will be accepted from Jan. 5 to 27, 2005.

Citizens may obtain an application from the City Clerk's Office at City Hall, 1666 No. Main St., by calling 943-5818, or by going online to www.walnut-creek.org.

Arts Commission

Members: 5 Term: 3 years

Meetings: Third Monday, 4:30 p.m., Encore Room, Regional Center for the Arts

The Arts Commission annually reviews the City's cultural program, short- and long-term capital improvement program needs for facilities, and policies and procedures. The majority of members

Education and Gallery Exhibition.

procedures. The majority of members
must be Walnut Creek residents. The commission also appoints advisory councils of
seven members each to assist it in monitoring and evaluating the program areas of Arts

Park, Recreation and Open Space Commission

Members: 7
Term: 3 years

Meetings: First Monday of

month, 7 p.m.

Council Chamber, City Hall,

1666 N. Main St.

The Park, Recreation and Open Space Commission assists the City Council and Planning Commission in developing longrange plans for parks and recreation development.

Commissioners Lisa Hotchkiss,

Lisa Hotchkiss, Chair James Pezzaglia Vice Chair

Ann Clementi Flynn

Patricia Pava Phyllis Ceaser Sheila Wilkins Kevin Wilk

Commissioners

Barry Slavin, Chair Neil Gerstner, Vice Chair Robert Brittain June Kirske Ed Montgomery Tracy Murray

Richard Underwood

Transportation Commission

Members: 7
Terms: 3 years

Meetings: Third Thursday of

month, 7:30 p.m.,

Council Chamber, City Hall,

1666 N. Main St.

Commissioners

Ben Bryce, Chair

Emily Chang, Vice Chair

Ron Chesney David Powell Dan Lawrence

The Transportation Commission develops

policy on transportation matters and encourages the use of mass transportation and other alternatives to the private automobile. It also makes recommendations to the City Council on parking and traffic control devices.

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City Council Update

Mayor honors local servicemen

In a Veterans Day ceremony on Nov. 11, Mayor Charlie Abrams presented commendations to six Walnut Creek servicemen who recently returned from tours of duty in the Middle East.

Those recognized for their "courageous service" to the country were: Lt. Col. Tim Barrett, U.S. Marine Corps; Maj. David Burke, U.S. Air Force; 1st Lt. Jon Kirkham, U.S. Marine Corps; Lcpl. Christopher Ritthaler, U.S. Marine Corps; Sgt. Jeff Silva, U.S. Army; and Lt. David Yuers, U.S. Air Force.

City honored for Veterans Plaza

The City Council accepted awards from the Walnut Creek Action for Beauty Council on Nov. 16 for the new Veterans Memorial Plaza and the traffic roundabout at Oak Grove Road and Walnut Avenue.



2004 City Employees of the Year: Ricco Lorenzi, left, and Edmund Suen

City Employees of the Year honored

City Manager Mike Parness on Nov. 17 announced Ricco Lorenzi and Edmund Suen as co-recipients of the Rosie Coan Employee of the Year Award for 2004.

The award, created in 1989 and named last year in memory of the City's late Administrative Services Director Rosie Coan, honors those staff members who exemplify excellence in the organization.

Suen, the City's finance manager, joined the staff in 2002. He was recognized for his leadership and professionalism following Ms. Coan's death in February 2004. Lorenzi, a 14-year veteran of the Police Department, led the effort to upgrade the department's technology systems.



Library quilt a stitch in time for Walnut Creek

Orinda's Liz Piatt, right, chatted with Stephanie Denman of the Friends of the Walnut Creek Library at a reception Nov. 13 to unveil her new quilt on the history of the community that is on permanent display at the downtown branch library, 1644 N. Broadway. Piatt spent one year creating the quilt, which depicts various historic moments in Walnut Creek in 63 hand-stitched squares.

City wants to know of returning troops

The City Council wants to honor all Walnut Creek military personnel who have served a tour of duty in Iraq, Afghanistan or other areas of conflict around the world.

The Council will present an official commendation to those residents who served their country as a member of the U.S. armed services.

If you know a returning veteran who should be recognized, please send an e-mail to manager@walnut-creek.org or call 943-5895, Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Please include the person's name, address, phone number, branch of service, rank, and date he or she returned to the area.

General Plan

From front page

downtown core area.

Among the areas discussed were the downtown retail area, west Mt. Diablo Boulevard, Newell Avenue, Broadway Plaza, the Walnut Creek BART station, and the Shadelands Business Park.

"All the land use changes being proposed are relatively small," said Planner Terri Payne, noting that people are saying "tinkering at the edges is all right — just don't overdo it."

The workshops zeroed in on three alternatives for how land development might occur in the next 20 years in Walnut Creek: 1) Maintain the status quo, 2) Emphasize housing 3) Emphasize jobs.

Stern said the idea of having a boutique hotel downtown has gained support in the

workshops, although participants said downtown should remain largely as it is.

Among the land use change areas studied, Broadway Plaza was determined to have reached its maximum size under current planning regulations, but that it needs to grow and evolve to remain competitive.

A transportation analysis done for the City found that future traffic growth rates will be similar to the past 10 years, although public transit usage is expected to increase slightly.

A new Growth Management Plan that will replace the 10-year growth limitation plan that was enacted in 1993 will also be folded into the new General Plan.

For General Plan updates, check the City's website at www.walnut-creek.org.

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By Officer Mitchell Rebello

Which way is the "right" way to go?

Have you ever been in a situation where an emergency vehicle (police,

fire or ambulance) is coming up from behind you in traffic, and they are sounding their siren and displaying their emergency lights?



As a motorist, you must decide where to move your car in the road so the emergency vehicle can pass through traffic safely.

Many motorists seem to get confused during this brief moment of anxiety. The drivers of emergency vehicles are trying to respond to an emergency as soon as they can with the safety of the other motorists in mind. That's why it is very important not to panic. Once you recognize that an emergency vehicle is coming up from behind you, take a second and plan a safe way to move out of their way.

The California Vehicle Code states, "Upon the approach of an emergency vehicle sounding a siren and exhibiting a red light, the driver of every other vehicle shall drive to the right-hand edge or curb of the highway and shall stop and remain stopped until the emergency vehicle has passed."

So, in the future, don't panic...move safely to the right side of the road.

This column first appeared in the July/August 2002 issue of the Nutshell.

City now providing free sandbags at WC parks

Whith the rainy season upon us, the City is again providing free sandbags at stations located at the north end of Heather Farm Park on N. San Carlos Road and at the Larkey Park parking lot.

Sand and bags will be available, although users must bring their own shovel. Call 943-5855 for details.



PIPE BLAST BRIEFING — Walnut Creek Police Sgt. Lanny Edwards, right, briefed the Bay Area media on Nov. 9 after the explosion at the Kinder Morgan petroleum fuel line on South Broadway. The accident killed five workers who were working on the EBMUD water pipeline near Las Lomas High School. Walnut Creek Police and Public Services workers joined other agencies in responding to the emergency.

Sign up now for emergency training

hen disaster strikes, you may be on your own. The Nov. 9 pipeline explosion in downtown Walnut Creek was a reminder that emergencies can happen anywhere, at any time. In the event of a major catastrophe, such as an earthquake, experts say that residents are likely to be on their own for the first 72 hours.

You can be prepared to take care of yourself, your family, and your neighbors through Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) training.

Through CERT, you will learn how to shut off utilities, extinguish small fires,

perform light search and rescue, carry out first aid, and much, much more. These free classes are usually held once a week for six weeks, for a total 20 hours of training, and are coordinated by the Contra Costa Fire District in partnership with the City of Walnut Creek.

New classes will be offered this spring. To put your name on an interest list, call Community Relations Officer Gayle Melvin at 925-943-5899, ext. 189. More information about CERT can be found on the City website, www.walnut-creek.org/community.

Tantalizing tandem pays off

Re-Cycling

By Michelle Mellon

I'm an avid shopper, but parking downtown usually gives me the blues. My husband's solution? Bike! My reaction? Yeah, right.

For years he argued a tandem would solve a basic problem—he's a seasoned rider and I'm not. I resisted, until a broken ankle this spring meant biking as part of my therapy.

We borrowed a tandem from a friend and took our first ride to Shell Ridge. I reveled in the quiet and scenery, forgetting the seat and sore muscles that initially plagued me. We had a lovely lunch downtown, courtesy of ample parking at the bike racks in Plaza Escuela and, since then, have had many subsequent rides along the Iron Horse, Lafayette, and

Contra Costa Canal trails.

From a bike you experience the community you can't see from the streets or shopping centers: open spaces, adorable neighborhoods,

and camaraderie with others enjoying the weather, exercise, and sense of freedom.

Soon I'll get my own bike gear, including a cute backpack for those shopping trips downtown...

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Council to consider new developer's fee to pay for low-income housing

The City Council will consider in ■ January a new fee to be charged to commercial development that would help pay for affordable housing.

If the new fee is adopted, Walnut Creek would become the first city in Contra Costa County to impose such a charge on commercial developers to partially underwrite the costs of low income housing.

The Planning Commission in Novem-

ber voted to recommend that the Council adopt an ordinance to enact the \$5-persquare-foot fee for commercial development. The first 500 s.f. would be exempt.

City Housing Manager Laura Simpson estimates the new fee could generate \$400,000 — enough to pay for a 20-unit development every two years.

The new revenue source would help Walnut Creek meet its affordable housing needs as mandated by the state.

Council selects new mayor for 2004-2005

The City Council on Dec. 7 selected ■ Gary Skrel to serve his first term as mayor of Walnut Creek in 2004-2005, succeeding Charlie Abrams.

The Council also picked two-time former mayor Kathy Hicks to serve as mayor pro tem. She will be in line to become mayor in 2005-2006.

Skrel, a registered professional civil engineer and Walnut Creek resident since 1986, is the 43rd person to serve as mayor of Walnut Creek since 1914. He was first elected to the City Council in November 2000 and re-elected in November 2004.

A registered professional civil engineer, Skrel is a former member of the Park, Recreation and Open Space Commission (1997-2000). He is also co-founder of the Northgate Community Pride Foundation.

Hicks, also a former member of the PROS Commission (1990-94) and the Planning Commission (1994), was first elected to the Council in 1994 and was reelected in 1998. She served as mayor in 1996-97 and in 2000-2001.

The City Council traditionally selects the mayor, a largely ceremonial position, from among its members each year.

Directory

Arts Education classes	943-5846
Bicycle registration	943-5844
Building Division, permits	256-3549
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Cable TV questions	943-5895
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City Manager's office	943-5812
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Police/Fire emergency	911
Police (non-emergency)	943-5844
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Public Information	943-5895
DLRCA Ticket Office	943-7469
Senior citizen activities	943-5851
Street light outages	943-5854
Tree removal permit	943-5854



CITY COUNCIL

Gary Skrel, Mayor* Kathy Hicks, Mayor pro tem **Sue Rainey Gwen Regalia Charlie Abrams**

* For appointment: Call 943-5812.

ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF

CITY MANAGER **Michael Parness** CITY ATTORNEY **Thomas Haas** CITY CLERK Cathleen McKay CITY TREASURER **Ronald Cassano**

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Nutshell

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> **Editor: Brad Rovanpera**

We welcome your comments and questions. Please call 943-5895 or 943-5800 Monday-Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

For past issues, go online at www.walnut-creek.org



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