



ATHERTONIAN

AN ATHERTON COMMUNITY NEWSLETTER

2025 SPRING EDITION



CONNECT WITH US

@Town of Atherton across platforms



Scan the QR code or visit
[atherton.news/social-media](https://www.atherton.news/social-media)

IN THIS EDITION

3 Atherton Library
Children's Garden

5 Heritage Association
Spotlight

8 E-Leaf Blower
Rebate Program

CITY MANAGER UPDATE



Welcome to the Spring 2025 edition of the Athertonian Newsletter! There's a lot to look forward to in this issue as

we share exciting updates, community highlights and upcoming events shaping life in Atherton.

Meet our newest Town staff, discover the story of local inventor Leon F. Douglass (courtesy of the Heritage Association) and check out what the Library has to offer for residents aged 55+. We're also sharing progress on the Housing Element, a sneak peek at the 2025 Sounds of Summer series and the latest on the soon-to-bloom Children's Garden.

In this issue, we spotlight recent environmental efforts, including updates to the Reach Codes and the Electric Leaf Blower Program. Plus, the Atherton Tree Committee is kicking off the 2025 Tree Awards — don't miss the full feature to learn how you can nominate a tree that deserves recognition!

As always, public safety is top of mind — be sure to check out the newly released Police Department Annual Report for the latest updates.

Happy reading!

HOUSING ELEMENT UPDATE

The Town is making significant strides toward finalizing its 2023-2031 Housing Element and anticipates state certification in the coming weeks.

Recent revisions address feedback from a comment letter received in late December 2024 from California Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD), which identified remaining element items that require revision before certification by the State. The Town recently approved these updates to the Housing Element and submitted its revised 2023-2031 Housing Element to HCD for review on Thursday, March 6.

The Town also presented the Housing Element 2024 Annual Progress Report (APR) to Council for approval at the March 19 meeting. The APR covers the status and progress of:

- Local general plan implementation
- Meeting regional housing needs
- Adopted Office of Planning and Research (OPR) guideline compliance
- The date of the last revision to the local general plan

Council reviewed and accepted the report, determining that the Town is meeting its targets, noting Housing Element progress, the Town's robust ADU program public outreach and OPR compliance.

The state's final review of the update element is currently in progress and any outstanding additional updates to the element are expected to be minor. Stay tuned for further updates and confirmation of the 2023-2031 Housing Element's certification.

For meeting materials from the City Council and Planning Commission, visit: atherton.news/agendas-minutes

For more details on this initiative, visit our Inclusionary Housing Ordinance page: atherton.news/inclusionary-housing-ordinance



For more information on the Town's Housing Element update process, scan here or visit ci.atherton.ca.us/627/housing-element-update

UPCOMING EVENTS

SOUNDS OF SUMMER CONCERT SERIES

Dates: June 19, July 17, Aug. 21
Location: Holbrook Palmer Park
150 Watkins Ave.
Time: 6 – 8 p.m.

ATHERTON SUMMER MOVIES

Dates: June 27 and July 25
Location: Holbrook Palmer Park
150 Watkins Ave.
Time: After sunset

SUMMER MOVIE MATINEE

Dates: July 27
Location: Council Chambers
80 Fair Oaks Lane
Time: 4 p.m.

COMING SOON: CHILDREN’S GARDEN BEHIND THE ATHERTON LIBRARY

The Atherton Library is set to receive a major new addition to its children’s amenities — the Atherton Library Children’s Garden, a unique, nature-inspired outdoor play space designed to foster exploration and creativity.



Unlike traditional playgrounds with swings or monkey bars, this garden will encourage imaginative play using natural structures such as a willow hut and a tunnel made of branches. The space will be built sustainably, using recycled materials gathered in Atherton. In a special tribute to the Town’s heritage, the garden will feature oak wood from the Town Hall Oak Tree, which was sadly taken down in 2024. Not only do the reused tree remnants provide a fun playground for children, they can still serve as a shelter for birds, small mammals and insects.



Designed with inclusivity in mind, the Children’s Garden will be accessible to children of all ability levels, featuring wheelchair-friendly pathways and play areas to ensure everyone can enjoy the space.

Public Works Director Robert Ovadia presented the project at the Feb. 19 City Council meeting, emphasizing the town’s commitment to supporting biodiversity and providing nature-based play opportunities for children. He estimates that construction will begin in July, with full completion expected by the end of 2025.



Once finished, the Atherton Library Children’s Garden will provide a welcoming and enriching space where children can connect with nature, engage in creative play and develop appreciation for the local environment. In Atherton, the end of an old oak tree’s life marks the beginning of its next chapter, repurposed to enhance and benefit the community.

ICE CREAM SOCIAL AND FREE BOOK EXCHANGE

June 14, 1 – 3 p.m., Atherton Library, Library Deck
2 Dinkelspiel Station Ln., Atherton

Join the Friends of Atherton Library and enjoy free ice cream while exchanging books with your neighbors. You’re welcome to bring a book to share or simply bring yourself. Stop by for this delicious and fun event!

For more upcoming events, visit:
athertonlibraryfriends.org/friends-events-calendar

NEW STAFF INTRODUCTIONS



Sergeant Douglas S. Richardson, Patrol Sergeant, Police Department

Douglas Richardson brings 25 years of law enforcement experience to the Atherton Police Department, where he now serves as a Patrol Sergeant.

In this role, he supervises a nightshift patrol team, reviews and approves crime and incident reports, provides training on current laws and law enforcement trends, and is excited to actively engage with the Atherton community to ensure residents receive the highest level of service.

Doug holds a Bachelor of Science in Criminal Justice Management and has dedicated much of his career to crisis intervention. As a trained Crisis and Hostage Negotiator for approximately 15 years, he currently serves as the Vice President of the California Association of Hostage Negotiators (CAHN). In this capacity, he plays a key role in training and debriefing hostage negotiators worldwide, facilitating discussions on critical incidents for professionals across North America, Europe, the Middle East and Asia.

Doug is excited to join the Atherton Police Department, where he looks forward to mentoring the next generation of law enforcement professionals and contributing his extensive experience to their career growth.

Outside of work, Doug and his wife of 35 years, Angela, share a passion for traveling the world, immersing themselves in diverse cultures, histories and cuisines.



Alexis Garcia-Dawson, Management Analyst, Police Department

Alexis Garcia-Dawson serves as the Police Management Analyst for the Atherton Police Department, where she oversees

department training to ensure compliance with regulations and standards. In addition to managing training programs, she provides key administrative support to department leadership and facilitates collaboration across various units to ensure smooth communication and workflow.

With a background in public safety, management and community engagement, Alexis brings over eight years of experience from her previous role as the Training Manager for the Burlingame Police Department. There, she developed and managed training programs, working closely with department administrators to support officer development and specialized training interests. She is excited to continue expanding her expertise to better serve the Atherton Police Department and its community.

Alexis holds a Bachelor of Arts in Liberal Studies with a minor in Criminal Justice from San Francisco State University. She is passionate about being part of a close-knit community and looks forward to engaging with residents through various committees and organizations that partner with the department.

Outside of work, Alexis enjoys spending time with her family, cooking and hosting gatherings and traveling with her son. She also recently discovered a love for running and has already completed three 10K races, with a goal of running a half marathon by the end of the year.

HIP HOUSING

The Town of Atherton is partnering with HIP Housing to support the ADU Match Program, connecting homeowners with potential tenants to maximize housing opportunities.

If you have an ADU or a room for rent, HIP Housing can help match you with qualified tenants.

Contact 650-348-6660 x303 or visit [HIPHousing.org](https://www.HIPHousing.org) to learn more!



HERITAGE ASSOCIATION SPOTLIGHT

Atherton's Inventor: Leon F. Douglass (1869–1940)

Leon F. Douglass moved to Atherton in 1921, purchasing a grand estate on Valparaiso Avenue, which he named Victoria Manor after his wife, Victoria. Today, this historic building serves as the main structure of Menlo School. Douglass quickly transformed the mezzanine and basement into his personal laboratories, where he worked on groundbreaking projects, including underwater filming technology and advancements in color filmmaking with sound.

One of his most unique experiments involved cutting a window into his pool's wall, allowing him to film his two daughters and a seal playing underwater. Life in the Douglass household was anything but ordinary.

A prolific inventor, Douglass patented a revolutionary music machine that housed both the speaker and mechanism in a single unit. He named it the Victrola in honor of his wife. The Victrola, along with Nipper, the famous English Terrier, became the iconic trademark of the Victor Talking Machine Company in the early 1900s. In 1927, RCA acquired the company, making the logo a lasting symbol in the music industry.

A Self-Made Innovator

Born into extreme poverty in Nebraska in 1869, Douglass grew up in a hardworking family and developed a relentless work ethic. A self-taught engineer, he dedicated his life to improving emerging technologies in photography, sound and filmmaking.

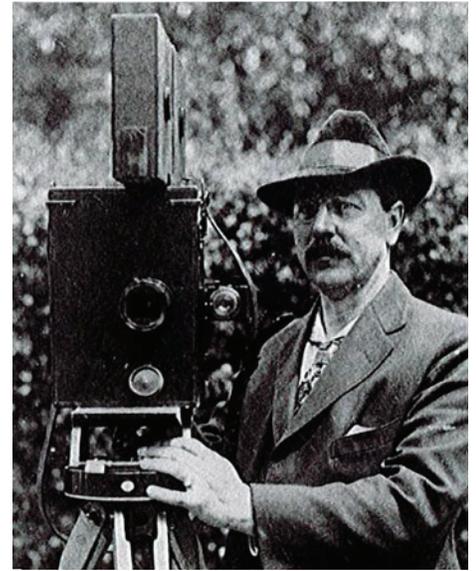
During the early 1900s, the phonograph industry was booming, and Douglass played a key role in its advancement. After moving to California in 1906, he invented a method for producing "natural color" motion pictures, laying the foundation for what would eventually become Technicolor. He also worked on early talking films, pushing the boundaries of the entertainment industry.

A Life of Innovation and Celebration

Douglass met Victoria in the early 1900s, and they shared 40 years of marriage, raising six children together. Their time in Atherton, spanning nearly two decades, was filled with vibrant social gatherings. From 1921 to 1934, they hosted extravagant Christmas

celebrations at Victoria Manor, welcoming all children from Menlo Park and Atherton. Each child received a carefully selected, wrapped gift based on their age, requests or needs.

The estate was adorned with twinkling lights, garlands and wreaths, creating a magical holiday scene. Santa Claus, portrayed by Atherton resident Charles Merrill, arrived in grand fashion — sometimes on a fire engine, other times on a donkey. Every year, 600 to 800 children left with gifts, as well as bags filled with fruit, candy and small treats.

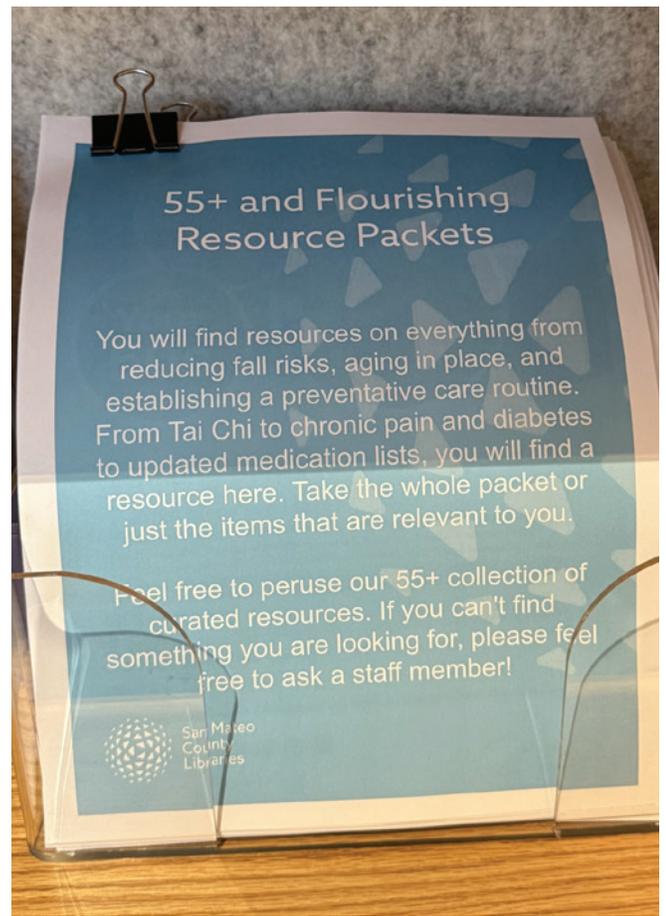


Preserving a Legacy

Leon Douglass passed away in 1940, followed by Victoria in 1943. Five years later, Menlo School purchased Victoria Manor, repurposing it for classrooms, dormitories and administrative offices. Over time, the building began to deteriorate, and concerns about its structural integrity led to discussions of demolition.

Fortunately, historically minded citizens rallied to save the landmark. In 1994, efforts to preserve and renovate the estate were approved, ensuring that the past and present could coexist harmoniously. Thanks to major retrofitting and restoration efforts, Victoria Manor remains a beautiful and significant part of the community, a lasting tribute to the legacy of Leon F. Douglass — an inventor, visionary and beloved figure in Atherton's history.

To find out more, come visit the Atherton Heritage Association on Tuesdays, 10 a.m. to 1 p.m., or call us (650) 752-0536. They are located in the Historic Town Hall in the Civic Center, right next to the Atherton Library and Mme. Colette.



55+ CORNER AT THE ATHERTON LIBRARY

Welcome to the fabulous and flourishing “55+ Corner” at the Atherton Library!

In January 2025, the Atherton Library introduced the 55+ Corner, a dedicated space designed to support and inspire older adults. This cozy area offers a range of materials on healthy aging, personal finance, travel and more. Whether you’re seeking practical advice or a captivating story, there is something for everyone.

What’s Available

The 55+ Corner features a carefully curated collection, including:

- **Nonfiction:** Books on longevity, exercise, nutrition, retirement, mental agility, and social experiences.
- **Fiction:** Stories with older adult main characters.
- **Large Print:** A selection of books in easy-to-read formats.
- **Community Resources:** Calendars, newsletters and informational pamphlets from local older adult services and health organizations.
- **Wellness Tools:** A blood pressure cuff kit for at-home monitoring.

The library regularly refreshes the collection as materials are checked out. Additional books are sourced through the San Mateo County Libraries system. A comprehensive list of books and community resources are maintained and updated as new titles and information become available. Improved signage and expanded materials will be added over time.

The 55+ Corner is located on the shelves next to the New Fiction and New Nonfiction sections. Two comfortable chairs are available, providing a relaxing spot to browse.

Questions? For more information, contact:
 Ginny Mies, Atherton Library Manager: mies@smcl.org
 Nick Hernandez, Librarian: hernandezn@smcl.org



REACH CODE UPDATE

Atherton continues to advance sustainable building practices by expanding electric-readiness requirements for new construction and major renovations. The Town remains committed to reducing fossil fuel reliance and supporting a healthier, more resilient community through ongoing updates to its building codes.

At its Jan. 15, meeting, the City Council unanimously approved an ordinance amending Chapter 15.19 of the Atherton Municipal Code to align with the 2022 California Green Building Standards Code (CALGreen). This ordinance strengthens electric-readiness requirements by ensuring that new residential buildings and major alterations include infrastructure for future electrification, such as dedicated electrical panels and conduit for electric appliances like heat pumps, water heaters, and cooking equipment.

The Town has previously launched sustainability outreach initiatives to educate residents and builders on building electrification and its connection to the Climate Action Plan. Informational flyers have highlighted the benefits of replacing gas-powered appliances with all-electric alternatives and detailed rebate opportunities from Peninsula Clean Energy (PCE) and other state agencies. The Community Development Department will continue these outreach efforts to ensure residents understand the new requirements and oversee compliance through the building permit review process.

By integrating electric-readiness measures at key construction stages, the Reach Code reduces retrofit costs for homeowners and supports the Town's long-term sustainability and public health objectives. Keeping the Municipal Code up-to-date with state and regional electrification mandates reinforces Atherton's commitment to proactive climate action and a more energy-efficient future.



The ordinance took effect on Feb. 14. Learn more about the ordinance in the Jan. 15 meeting agenda packet. Scan the QR Code or visit ci.atherton.ca.us/641/agendas-minutes

TREE AWARD COMPETITION 2025

The Atherton Tree Committee invites you to nominate an Atherton tree for a prestigious Tree Award by May 30! Nomination forms are available at the Town Center Public Works Department and online at atherton.news/tree-nomination



E-LEAF BLOWER REBATE PROGRAM

The Town of Atherton will be scaling back its transitional e-leaf blower rebate program as demand slows. While the rebate amount remains up to \$250, the total number of rebates available will be reduced by 50 percent.

As of July 1, 2024, the Town implemented an amendment to Municipal Code Chapter 8.16 prohibiting the use of gas-powered leaf blowers. This amendment was established as a result of state legislation banning the sale of all gas-powered small off-road and lawn equipment, effective January 1, 2024.

To support residents in transitioning to electric alternatives, the Town launched the rebate program for fiscal years 2023/24 and 2024/25, initially offering at least 1,000 rebates of up to \$250 for the purchase of an electric leaf blower, including associated batteries and chargers. Due to high participation and a gradual decline in demand, the rebate program will be reduced by half, offering up to 500 rebates in the amount of \$250.

The program was designed to ease the transition to electric leaf blowers and encourage compliance with the new regulations. While the number of available rebates is decreasing, the Town remains committed to supporting residents in making the switch.

E-leaf blowers serve as a more convenient, quiet and sustainable landscaping tool. Electric leaf blowers emit zero emissions and only require a battery to function. Their use in place of gas-powered leaf blowers helps to reduce pollution in Atherton and across the state.

As the amendment has now been in effect close to a year, many residents have taken the opportunity to transition, aided by the resources offered through the rebate program. Continuing support for the transition will remain available, though at a reduced program size.

Several rebate recipients shared feedback about their experience with the program:

“Noise pollution from leaf blowers and lawn mowers is a real scourge for an entire neighborhood... The Atherton Electric Leaf Blower program is one of the Town’s most useful direct benefits for residents. It enabled us to help our gardener make the switch. The noise reduction is extraordinary.”



Another resident shared that, “The process to apply for and get the rebate was so easy! The rebate was generous enough to buy a powerful leaf blower that gets the job done in minutes. I am a big advocate of electric leaf blowers now. Thank you!”

While many appreciated the rebate, some residents pointed out that landscapers face challenges in transitioning due to the high costs of new equipment and batteries. Others noted that gas-powered leaf blowers are still in use and emphasized the need for stronger enforcement. The Town remains committed to supporting compliance while addressing these concerns.

Residents are expected to comply with the Town of Atherton’s Municipal Code Chapter 8.16. Using a gas-powered leaf blower may be subject to fines starting at \$100. For questions related to fines, please contact the Town’s Code Enforcement Division at 650-752-0553.

California also offers a separate program to assist landscapers and small businesses in adopting greener landscaping equipment. The CORE program website provides additional information on state and local requirements for landscapers and other professionals. You can also learn more about training on electric landscaping tools via a recording of a workshop held in the Town in partnership with the American Green Zone Alliance.



These resources are available on the Town’s Electric Leaf Blower Program website. Scan the QR Code or visit ci.atherton.ca.us/668/Electric-Leaf-Blower-Program

REMINDER



Reminder! For any home alarm system, there is a \$100 initial set-up fee followed by a \$50 annual permit renewal fee, payable at City Hall. This is irrespective of monitoring services used. Accepted payment methods include credit card, cash and checks. For more information about the free alarm monitoring service provided by the Police Department and how to connect your system directly to the Police Department, scan the QR code or visit: atherton.news/alarm-monitoring



POLICE DEPARTMENT ANNUAL REPORT

The Atherton Police Department (APD) is dedicated to building trust with the community and fostering a safe, secure environment for all. By providing transparency about department policies, materials, activities and practices, APD remains committed to accountability and integrity. In alignment with these values, APD produces an annual report highlighting its achievements and productivity over the past 12 months.

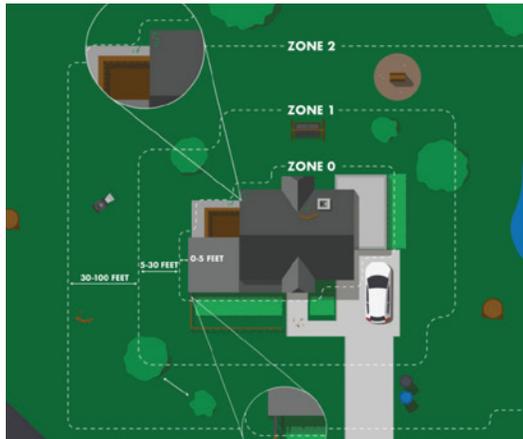
Providing crime stats, division information, technology updates, program details and event recaps, this report offers an in-depth look at APD's work. It serves as a valuable resource for residents to understand the department's operations and its direct impact on public safety. Chief of Police Steven D. McCulley opens the report with a letter to Atherton's residents, reflecting on the past year and outlines APD's goals as it moved into 2025.

By reviewing the report, residents can gain a clearer picture of APD's efforts and resources available to them. Whether looking for the latest trends, department initiatives, public safety tips or community engagement efforts, this report offers comprehensive insights into the work of APD.



Stay informed and continue 2025 with a greater understanding of the Atherton Police Department's role in the community. To view the 2024 Annual Report, scan the QR code or visit atherton.news/2024-PD-annual-report

NEW RESOURCES ON DEFENSIBLE SPACE & HOME HARDENING FROM MENLO PARK FIRE PROTECTION DISTRICT



The Menlo Park Fire Protection District has released valuable new resources to help residents prepare their homes for wildfire season. These resources provide practical tips on creating defensible space around your property and hardening your home to withstand fire risks. Learn how to protect your property and loved ones by visiting the District's website for detailed guides and actionable steps. Stay safe and be proactive — wildfire preparedness starts at home!

DEFENSIBLE SPACE

Defensible space is a buffer between your home and surrounding vegetation that slows or stops the spread of wildfire.

Zone 0: Immediate Zone

Extends 5 feet from buildings, structures, decks, etc.

- Keep branches trimmed 10 feet away from chimneys and stovepipes.
- Use gravel, pavers, or concrete instead of combustible mulch.
- Clear dead weeds, grass, and debris; Check roofs, gutters, and outdoor areas.

Zone 1: Intermediate Zone

Extends 30 feet out from buildings, structures, decks, etc.

- Remove all dead plants, grass, and weeds (Vegetation from your yard, roof and rain gutters)
- Trim trees regularly to keep branches a minimum of 10 feet from other trees.

Zone 2: Extended Zone

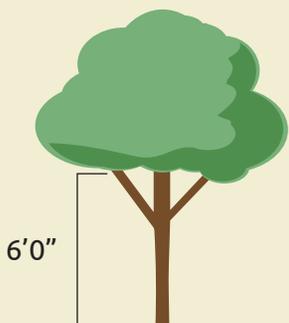
Extends from 30 feet to 100 feet from buildings, structures, decks, etc...or to the property line, whichever is closer.

- Trees 30–60 feet from the home should have at least 12 feet between canopy tops.
- Trees 60–100 feet from the home should have at least 6 feet between canopy tops.
- Trim annual grass down to a maximum height of 4 inches.

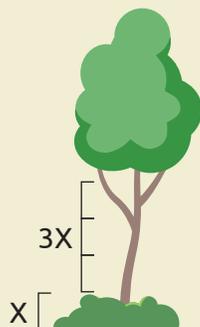
HORIZONTAL SPACING

VERTICAL SPACING Flat to mild slope (less than 20%)

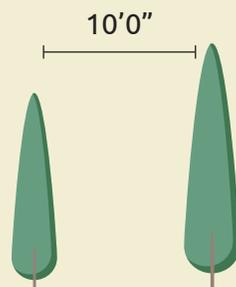
6 FOOT
MINIMUM
CLEARANCE



3X HEIGHT OF SHRUB
= MINIMUM VERTICAL
CLEARANCE



MINIMUM 10 FOOT
SPACE BETWEEN TREES



2X HEIGHT OF SHRUB =
MINIMUM HORIZONTAL
CLEARANCE





PLANT SELECTION

Choose plants that reduce the risk of wildfires. Following is a short list of fire-safe plants. These plants have high moisture content, low resin or sap and tend to be less flammable than others.

Shrubs

- California Lilac (Ceantothus spp.)
- Toyon (Heteromeles arbutifolia)
- Manzanita (Arctostaphylos spp.)

Perennials & Flowers

- Yarrow (Achillea millefolium)
- Daylily (Hemerocallis spp.)
- Red Hot Poker (Kniphofia uvaria)

Grasses & Succulents

- Blue Fescue (Festuca glauca)
- Agave (Agave spp.)
- Aloe (Aloe spp.)

HOME HARDENING

Home Hardening is the process of making a home more resistant to wildfires. It can be done by using fire-resistant materials and creating a defensible space around the home.

Roofs

- Build using fire-resistant materials for roofs, gutters, decks, etc. Roof assemblies must be a Class A or tested in accordance with ASTM E108 or UL790.

Gutters

- Metal rain gutters are safer than vinyl in fire prone areas. Enclose rain gutters to prevent the accumulation of plant debris.

Decks

- Fire-resistant materials: Construct decks from ignition-resistant building materials* like composite.
- Under-deck clearing: Maintain an ember-resistant zone beneath decks by removing all flammable materials.
- Slope consideration: For decks extending over slopes, establish a defensible space below to deter flame ascent.

Windows

- Dual-pane installation: Fit dual-paned windows with at least one tempered glass layer to withstand fire-induced breakage.
- Size consideration: Limit the size and number of windows facing large vegetation areas to reduce radiant heat exposure.
- Screen addition: Add screens to all operable windows to catch embers and reduce heat.

ARE YOU PREPARED FOR A WILDFIRE?

BE READY



LEVEL 1: PREPARE TO EVACUATE

- Create a family emergency plan with evacuation routes and meeting points.
- Prepare an emergency supply kit with food, water, medications and important documents.
- Sign up for local emergency alerts like SMC Alert and Genasys.

BE SET



LEVEL 2: BE ALERT

- Monitor fire conditions through trusted sources like CAL FIRE or the Watch Duty app.
- Keep your vehicle fueled and ready for evacuation.
- Gather essential belongings and prepare pets for evacuation.

GO NOW!



LEVEL 3: EVACUATE

- Leave as soon as an evacuation order is issued.
- Follow designated evacuation routes and do not block emergency vehicles.
- If trapped, call 911 and seek shelter away from vegetation and possible hazards.



TOWN OF ATHERTON
80 Fair Oaks Lane
Atherton, CA 94027



UPCOMING EVENTS



SOUNDS OF SUMMER CONCERT SERIES

June 19, July 17, Aug. 21

6 – 8 p.m.

Holbrook Palmer Park



ATHERTON SUMMER MOVIES

June 27 and July 25

After Sunset

Holbrook Palmer Park

STAY IN TOUCH



Facebook.com/TownOfAtherton



@TownOfAtherton



@TownOfAtherton



Nextdoor.com/City/Atherton--CA/