

SPECIAL MEETING of the ROSS TOWN COUNCIL
ANNUAL BUDGET WORKSHOP
THURSDAY, APRIL 29, 2021
Held by Teleconference

1. 9:00 a.m. Call to Order and Roll Call.

Mayor Elizabeth Robbins; Mayor Pro Tempore Beach Kuhl; Council Member Elizabeth Brekhus, Council Member Bill Kircher, Jr., Council Member Julie McMillan

2. Posting of agenda.

Town Clerk Lopez reported that the agenda was posted according to government requirements.

3. Open Time for Public Expression - None

4. Budget presentation and discussion of the draft Town of Ross Budget for Fiscal Year 2022.

Town Manager Joe Chinn gave a PowerPoint presentation of the budget process for Fiscal Year ended June 30, 2021/22 (FYE22) and spoke about the budget schedule and Town goals.

He then described Town General operating, facilities and equipment, emergency funds, and special revenue funds (gas tax, roadway, drainage, public safety tax, COPS). He provided an overview of revenues in FYE22 return to FYE19 level after the COVID recession decreases and the Town's response to revenue and service recovery in various departments, as well as the General Fund expense changes between FYE21 and FYE22, noting the Town has steadily increased their fund balance every year and staff cut expenses more than revenues.

Council Members confirmed that the transfer of \$2 million to the Facilities Fund while also continuing with additional retirement UAL pension payments which keep overall pension costs lower. He spoke about CalPERS investment rate of return and how this impacts the Town's payments over time, recognized the savings from changing the loan schedule from 30 years to 20 years, and the need to continue funding the Facilities Fund to build up funding to replace obsolete facilities.

Mr. Chinn then presented a pie chart showing revenues, noting that property tax and the public safety parcel tax total 69% of Town revenues.

Council Member Brekhus referred to investments and rents of \$316,300 and she confirmed this is from a combination of the Post Office revenues, cell tower leases, and interest.

Mr. Chinn then presented expenditures by type in the General Fund, stating wages and benefits make up about 42% of the Town's total expenses. The second largest is the Ross Valley Fire JPA of 26% and third largest is outside contract services at 12% which has not changed since last year. Expenditures by department indicate that 50% is public safety and remaining departments combined are 40%, with some departments fully funded by department revenues, and General Fund capital expenses the other 10%.

Council Member Brekhus referred to the chart of expenditures and outside services, planning and building expenditures. She asked and confirmed planning and building includes the entire department's expenses and also includes outside contract services, with CSG currently serving as the Town's plan check contractor for larger jobs. Mr. Chinn commented that the building inspector handles a number of smaller building plan checks internally and these costs have decreased significantly which is represented in the budget over time.

Mr. Chinn then described staffing and stated the Town reduced staffing in recent years given COVID, they are at 21.2 positions and expect to go to 22.3, with the increases in Recreation part-time workers. The Town has a balanced budget; revenues are budgeted at \$15,196 over expenses; the Facilities Fund is \$2,000 positive; and cumulatively the General Fund has a positive of \$17,196. The first three special revenue funds shown in the chart are for capital which totals most all of the \$392,900 budgeted expenses being greater than budgeted revenues, thus budgeting the use of fund balances to assist in funding capital improvements.

Mr. Chinn then referred to the Town's Income Statement on Tab D, page 8, which represents the big picture. He noted that not included in this budget to date is the Federal Government's American Rescue Plan (ARP) signed by the President on March 11, 2021. The ARP preliminarily allocates \$461,000 to the Town of Ross. The Treasury has yet to issue guidelines on rules and requirements of the money. Staff expects to bring this to the Council with the June budget and have discussions about their use once have more information on their potential use.

Mr. Chinn then described new projects and programs and new capital projects as outlined in the PowerPoint. He referred to the EV charging station and spoke about its location, cost and consideration to relocate the conduit in between the Post Office building and 3 Ross Common which would be much closer to downtown and would cost \$4,000 versus \$10,000.

Council discussion ensued regarding other jurisdictions with EV charging stations, proposed use of ARP funds or grant monies to pay for future installation of the EV charging station(s), regular and handicapped parking at the Post Office and the need for parking given residents have their own private charging stations. Support was voiced by Mayor Robbins and Council Members Kuhl and Brekhus for conduit only for now and Council Member McMillan and Kircher both supported conduit and an EV charging station.

Council Member Kircher suggested the Town could set aside specific time periods for both regular parking of vehicles and EV charging vehicles. He also described a potential opportunity for the Town for a vendor to pay for installation of the EV charging station(s) and the Town providing a percentage of what they receive in electricity payment, which has been done at the Bon Air center.

Mr. Simonitch confirmed that TAM is in the current cycle of a \$3,000 reimbursement for a single level 2 charger so if the Town puts in a single stand with 2 charging heads it would receive \$6,000, and he would need to apply for the grant by June 30, 2021.

Mayor Robbins confirmed there was consensus by a majority of Council Members to only run the conduit now.

Council Member McMillan questioned the hesitation from Council Members to move forward on the complete installation and Mayor Robbins and Council Member Brekhus indicated their specific concerns for loss of parking.

Council Member Brekhus suggested reducing the two handicapped spaces to one space, given they are not used often. She believes every parking space counts, given they are coming out of COVID and the Town has eliminated spaces throughout Town which is sometimes a problem. She voiced support of the charger's installation but wants to create flexibility for people trying to park in that area. Mayor Pro Tempore Kuhl then described the efficiency of charging vehicles and again restated his support for only conduit as technology may also change and grants will be available in the next cycle.

Mayor Robbins summarized that the direction to staff was to see where things are with cars, parking, projects, grants, and for this matter to return to the Council in the future. Mr. Chinn confirmed staff will move forward with the \$4,000 for the conduit relocation which is in the budget.

Council Member Kircher referred to a budget item of about \$110,000 for vegetation management and asked if this was sufficient given the approaching dry fire season. Mr. Chinn stated the \$110,000 is for defensible space inspections and vegetation removal which are local funds provided through MWPA. Fire Chief Weber is scheduled to attend the May 13th Council meeting to talk about the MWPA and vegetation management projects.

Council Member McMillan suggested also inviting Mark Brown, Executive Officer of the MWPA to explain their priorities. Mr. Chinn confirmed.

Council Member Brekhus questioned the Redwood Drive/Ross Common Rehabilitation project, and Mr. Simonitch said this is the section between Ross Common between Lagunitas and Redwood along the park, and he described proposed work. The parking lot behind the Post Office is similar, but there are concrete walkways that are falling apart on the perimeter. These are proposed to be removed and replaced with patterned concrete, expansion of the asphalt area and moving some of the walkways closer to the fence along the creek.

Council Member Brekhus asked if there was any opportunity from a funding standpoint to tie work on the pathway leading to Frederick Allen into a Flood District project. Mr. Simonitch replied that the limits of the Flood Control's project are right at the demarcation between the parking lot and the park, and the funding is for Flood Control projects but he agreed to run this by the District.

Council Member Brekhus referred to the re-striping of Ross Common and asked for the possibility to increase parking. She also recalled discussion of whether a roundabout on Shady, Allen and Lagunitas and Ross Common was viable, and Mr. Simonitch said he was unsure there was Council

consensus to do a traffic study and expend funds. If Council would like staff to go in that direction, they can pursue it. Regarding parking along Ross Common, he will get plans back for review and will look at any opportunities to add parking or reconfigure the angle of the parking to add one or two spaces.

Mayor Robbins suggested spaces be striped at a 45 degree angle to increase parking on the side of the Post Office. Mr. Simonitch said if they have the lane width they can align the lanes and see if it works to maximize either side of the street.

Mr. Chinn then presented General Government Department Summary and described differences between previous years and FYE22 and the percentages of change in the budget.

Town Clerk Linda Lopez briefly spoke about future in-person meeting options once COVID restrictions are removed, AB 339 if approved by the State would require agencies to continue to provide their meetings through Internet or telephonic service, PEG grant availability, and the option to hire a video operator to operate the cameras.

Council discussion ensued and Council Members voiced unanimous support for a video operator, high quality camera positioning, and a table or space for the operator. Ms. Lopez agreed to check into instances of off-site Council members teleconferencing, and Mr. Chinn agreed to update the Council regarding the start of in-person meetings.

BREAK/RECONVENE MEETING

Mayor Robbins called for a break at 10:55 a.m. and thereafter reconvened the meeting at 11:03 a.m.

Mr. Chinn presented Fire Department expenditures, and there were no questions of Council Members.

Police Chief Raffaello Pata then presented Police Department expenditures. Council Member McMillan referred to the 37% increase in workers' compensation and confirmed this is due to claim cases which inevitably results in rate increases.

Planning and Building Director Patrick Streeter then presented Planning and Building Department expenditures, and there were no questions of Council Members.

Public Works Director Rich Simonitch then presented the Public Works Department expenditures.

Mayor Robbins pointed out a typographical naming error relating to "Ross Common County of Marin Measure A Parks", and Mr. Chinn said this is a remnant of the past and is mislabeled from what was the Measure A parks component and he agreed to change this to indicate it as "Park Maintenance-Ross Common".

In response to Council Member Brekhus, Mr. Chinn confirmed that the \$20,000 and \$22,000 Measure A parks revenue listed on page 9 is used for Park Maintenance – Ross Common expenses shown in Recreation budget on page 19 and Public Works budget on page 17. Beginning with 2020/21 all costs for the Common maintenance have been moved to the Public Works budget.

Recreation Director Gretchen Castets then presented the Recreation Department expenditures.

Council Member Brekhus asked if there was any policy around requiring vaccinations for staff and those programs where people congregate. Ms. Castets said most instructors have been vaccinated, but the Town cannot require staff to get vaccinated but strongly encourage it.

Council Member McMillan questioned where the debt service for the long-term facility lease with Ross School appears on the expenditure page, and Mr. Chinn pointed out its listing in the Recreation budget on page 20 as the debt service, interest and principal.

Mr. Chinn presented the General Fund Capital Projects, and Council Member Brekhus asked and confirmed Gates and Associates has been hired and met with staff, and community workshops will start in the next month to garner feedback from the community.

Council discussion ensued regarding reducing the level of consultant services needed given that the Council could hold workshops and obtain feedback and a thought that the Ross Common does not need much improvement. Discussion included thoughts on the type of improvements needed to the Common, thought of reducing the number of planned community meetings from three, and the framing and approach to be to ask residents are there improvements that they would like to see on the Common not that we are redoing the Common. Mr. Streeter relayed that funds included in the budget as well as grant funds cover the consultant's work and part of the overall project costs.

Mr. Simonitch then presented Gas Tax Fund Projects and Roadway Fund Projects.

Council Member McMillan said she believes residents who live along Laurel Grove past Canyon to Winding Way have contacted staff and they are interested in providing private donations to get the pathway extended. Mr. Simonitch said he has responded and said once staff knows the alignment and which side of the road the pathway is going to go on, they will have a better idea of scoping out any future segments. He would have to work out on how they could conduct a capital project with private contributions.

Mr. Simonitch then presented Drainage Fund Projects, and asked for questions and comments.

Mayor Pro Tempore Kuhl voiced concern with the delay in the Winship Bridge project, stating the Town does not have full control over it but are making efforts to get it done some other way. He believes the Town is holding up San Anselmo's flood project because they recognize that they should not move forward until the Winship Bridge is done. He asked if there were other ways to put pressure on HBP to recognize this is a project that should be given priority.

Mr. Simonitch explained staff met with County staff who led a discussion with Representative Huffman's office because there is County interest to get their projects done which also have grant deadlines. Staff is doing all it can and he is talking with Flood Control on a weekly basis on ways to move forward.

Council Member Brekhus echoed Mayor Pro Tempore Kuhl's point, and believes the EIR done was woefully insufficient given there were two projects that needed to be done together. Mayor Robbins concurred.

Mr. Simonitch added that as obligated by the agreement, the County is going to the Board of Supervisors next month to augment their current reimbursement contract with the Town due to going over budget by \$36,000, to cover all CEQA costs.

Council Member Brekhus asked if the Town is spending \$350,000 on the bridge plan which is needed to move the process forward. Mr. Simonitch explained these funds are not yet programmed through the HBP and the Town's consultant would need to return to the Council with a contract amendment to even move forward and finish final design. He then spoke about potential options in working with the County on a loan and repayment or other avenues to be able to move forward with construction that would need Council buy-in.

Mr. Chinn then presented and spoke about the Public Safety tax which generates \$906,000 a year. The CPI index for this year is 1.5% so the tax will be \$1,085 per parcel. Revenue is transferred out to the Operating Fund to pay for police and fire. He then described the COPS fund which pays for the cost of one officer. The General Plan Update fund is expected to add \$62,000 of revenue and transferring \$30,000 for applicable programs in the Operating Fund and \$25,000 to the Facilities Fund, with the goal to build up money for the future General Plan and Housing Element update.

Council Member McMillan asked when the Public Safety parcel tax expires. Mr. Chinn said he believes it expires at the end of FYE25 and the election to renew should be held at least one year before expiration.

Mr. Chinn then asked if there were Council questions or comments on the Capital Improvement Program for the coming year or current year.

Mayor Pro Tempore Kuhl returned to the numbers budgeted for improvement of the Ross Common. There were Council Members who voiced concerns about this budget. The hedge and path need work and he believes it would be adequate to hold discussion and obtain feedback at a Council meeting for any other work.

Mr. Chinn said staff has heard from three regular constituents and others that they definitely want to visit this subject and talk about things they want to see at the Common and downtown. These include wanting a restroom facility, more seating areas, discussion of dog issues, youth sports, family and age friendly use, realignment of the Town's gateway between the Post Office and the Common, and making the downtown better and more connected.

He also believes canceling the consultant's contract would be short-sighted. They want to get this right and he preferred staff not running the meeting with so many elements and recommended a professional consultant handle it.

Council Member discussion ensued regarding whether a consultant contract's scope for three workshops was a reasonable approach, given the work involves replacement of the hedging and work on the pathways, questioned the number of complaints about dog bites, the grant application process, confirmed that grant funds could be used just for improvements, whether timing was right due to the upcoming Facilities tax measure, limitations of staff time on the overall work scope, and altering the scope of work in the contract which currently includes at least three public engagement meetings and preparation of a master plan with a circulation plan and programming based on the feedback from the community.

Mayor Robbins confirmed there was a majority of Council Members to support scaling down the scope of the contract and Mr. Simonitch described how the origin of the master plan came to be.

Mr. Chinn and Mr. Streeter confirmed the direction to staff from the Council was to work with the consultant on a reduced contract, for less Council meetings to be held to obtain feedback, and for the scope of work not to include a major renovation of the Ross Common.

Mr. Chinn thanked the Council for their feedback and thanked staff for their work in putting together the budget.

5. Adjournment.

Mayor Robbins adjourned the meeting at 12:49 p.m.

Elizabeth Robbins, Mayor

ATTEST:

Linda Lopez, Town Clerk