TOWN OF ROSS

Agenda Item No. 15.

Staff Report

Date: December 9, 2021

To: Mayor Robbins and Council Members

From: Raffaello Pata, Police Chief
Richard Simonitch, Public Works Director

Subject: October 24, 2021 Storm Event

Recommendation
It is recommended that the Town Council receive a report regarding the Town's response to the October 24th storm event.

Background and Discussion
On Sunday, October 24, 2021, the Town experienced its first major storm of the season. Described as a "bomb cyclone", this storm dropped over 12 inches of rain in Kentfield over a 24-hour period. During the days and weeks before the storm, the Town Public Works staff began annual preparation for winter weather by clearing out Town-maintained storm drain inlets, culverts, and drainage ways. On October 19, staff sent out an extensive "winter preparedness" email notification which included a warning of the upcoming series of storm systems, and on October 22, an "atmospheric river" storm notification email was prepared. Both notifications were distributed to residents on the day they were prepared utilizing the Town-wide email system. Additionally, on October 22 the Public Works Director and the Police Chief discussed the possibility that the flood siren would need to be activated on Sunday, October 24 if the Corte Madera Creek reached flood stage near Town Hall.

During the October 24 storm event, a power outage caused by a downed power line on Lagunitas Road triggered the Town Hall buildings to lose power. The Fire, Police, and Town Hall began operating on emergency backup power supplied by a common generator. A battery backup system was installed several years ago for the flood warning siren in case of power outage since the building where the siren is located is not on the Town's generator backup grid.

Beginning early in the morning of October 24, the on-duty police officer visually checked the Corte Madera Creek and streets in town and reported his findings every two hours to the Police

Chief. The Police Chief was also serving as the Acting Town Manager and arrived in town on Sunday morning to monitor and discuss the activity in Town with the Public Works Director. The Chief called in additional staff to assist with handling several calls for service. He was informed by the Public Works Director that a Public Works crew was also mobilized to help with the localized flooding. Beginning at 12:00 pm, the Police Chief participated in video conference calls with the Marin County Office of Emergency Services. The Chief was also in contact with the Ross Valley Incident Commander, Chief Weber. The group monitored conditions in Town and in San Anselmo and Fairfax. As the Corte Madera Creek approached flood stage on the afternoon of October 24, a joint decision by regional agencies was made to alert the Ross Valley community by activating the warning sirens located in Fairfax, San Anselmo, and Ross. Unfortunately, the backup battery system on the Ross siren failed and without power at the Ross siren, only the Fairfax and San Anselmo sirens sounded. The Police and Public Works department immediately began going door to door to notify residents along the creek of the possibility of flooding until the heavy rain had passed and the creek began receding. The Public Works team began to troubleshoot and repair the siren and within 48 hours the backup system was repaired and successfully tested for both normal power and back-up power.

The cause of the failure of the flood siren on October 24 was determined to be some aged backup batteries that were not holding an adequate charge from the continuous charging system. The siren in Ross has historically been tested and operated exclusively by the local Fire Department personnel and the transfer of responsibility from the fire personnel to Town staff, if it was ever done, was never documented. According to former Police Chief Masterson, the siren was tested approximately one year ago by he and former Town Manager Joe Chinn.

In response to the challenges presented by the emerging Public Safety Power Shutoff (PSPS) environment, the Town performed an extensive upgrade of the backup power supply redundancies in 2020 for the buildings not on the fixed diesel generator, namely the Development Services Portable and the SFD traffic signals at Laurel Grove and at Lagunitas Road intersections. Two new 4000-watt inverter-type portable generators were purchased to power these systems during a power outage.

The building where the flood siren is currently housed near the DPW Corporation yard was built in 2000 by Sprint PCS specifically for their cellular infrastructure. When the Town's electrical consultants scoped out the upgrade work in 2020 they determined that the Sprint PCS building's electrical system would require a complete overhaul to accommodate a standard generator backup system which could coexist with Sprint's own high-voltage system. The infeasibility of routing the Town's backup generator system to the flood siren is the reason why the flood siren in this Sprint building was installed with its own independent battery backup system.

As part of the effort to reach the community and test the emergency response systems for the future, the Police or Public Works Department will test the siren on the second and fourth Friday of the month, starting November 12, 2021, at 12:00PM. The siren will sound for approximately five seconds and will then reset. The system will be tested with and without battery back-up to make sure the flood siren systems are functioning properly. Maintaining the battery backup

system and activating the siren will now be the responsibility of the Town Police and Public Works staff.

Alternative actions

As part of the scheduled February 17, 2022 Annual Strategic Workshop, the Town Council could discuss making improvements to the backup system. During a future meeting the Town Council could direct the Town Manager to conduct a feasibility study on installing a generator backup system in the Sprint building that does not conflict with Sprint's cellular infrastructure. The cost for this study is estimated to be between $10,000 and $15,000. The cost to complete the installation would be determined by the study and could be in the range of $50,000-$100,000 or higher.

Attachments

None