

**SPECIAL MEETING of the ROSS TOWN COUNCIL
ANNUAL STRATEGIC PLANNING WORKSHOP
THURSDAY, MARCH 15, 2022**

Held by Teleconference

1. 9:00 a.m. Commencement.

Mayor Elizabeth Robbins; Mayor Pro Tem Beach Kuhl; Council Member Elizabeth Brekhuis, Council Member Bill Kircher, Jr., and Council Member Julie McMillan

2. Posting of agenda.

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

3. Public Comment on the Workshop

Jeff Koblick, RPOA, stated RPOA sent a proposal to the Town to formalize their projects and proposed budget over the course of the next year and RPOA looks forward to working with the Town in the year ahead.

4. Strategic Workshop Overview.

Christa Johnson, Town Manager, introduced the item and said the annual strategic workshop input from the Council will help guide development of the Fiscal Year ending 2023 Budget. She described the day's schedule and format and introduced Town staff members in attendance, as well as Andrew Hill of Dyett & Bhatia. She will then celebrate the Town's recent accomplishments, elements of their organizational capacity, the 5-year financial forecast, CIP, a discussion of priority items that are non-capital related for the coming year, and then wrap up.

5. Orientation to Housing Element Update.

Andrew Hill, Dyett & Bhatia, provided a PowerPoint presentation regarding Housing Element legal requirements, definition of key terms and key steps in their approach to the project. He covered topics such as the definition of a Housing Element, its 8-year cycle, statutory requirements, certification by HCD, inventory of sites for housing, an assessment of local housing needs and constraints, implementing actions and goals supported by policies and implementing programs.

He then described the inventory already created for single family homes and ADUs, the Regional Housing Needs Allocation (RHNA), affordability levels, Ross's total allocation and income category mix of 111 units, requirement to zone for sufficient capacity to meet RHNA at all income levels, challenges given more stringent criteria, facilitation of the production of smaller scale housing and SB 9 lot splits. He then gave an overview of the work to undertake analysis to identify user groups, audit of the zoning code, interviews with real estate professionals to assess constraints, focus group discussions, analyze access to fair housing and production of reports that will inform the needs of the community.

There will be multiple opportunities for community review, feedback and refinement throughout the process, engagement public outreach methods, surveys, and scheduled open house events

for the Housing Element. Also required is update of the Safety Element, preparation of environmental review to satisfy CEQA, and the overall timeline for completion.

Mayor Robbins and Council Members posed questions, and received answers and commented on the following:

- The timing for counting units in the current RHNA cycle, which requires units receiving their Certificate of Occupancy during the planning period of 4-6 months before January 15th.
- Use of General Fund monies of jurisdictions to incentivize pre-fabricated ADUs through use of “permit-ready ADUs” and potential for waiving Town development fees.
- Request for the EIR schedule and the PowerPoint presentation to Council Members.
- Recommendation for Mr. Hill to work with Mark Brown from Marin Wildfire Prevention Authority (MWPA) on evacuation and emergency preparedness.
- Request to explore examples of utilization of credits from other jurisdictions.
- Importance of outreach communications to the public about the required Housing Element update, Safety Element update, and rezoning processes, consequences if the Town does not adhere to new State laws, coordination with MWPA and attention paid to the main evacuation route of Sir Francis Drake and Lagunitas.
- Suggestion for an amnesty program to grandfather in many of the existing ADUs without penalties to help the Town meet its RHNA.
- Next steps for a Town-wide mailer to kick off and explain the overall process in April, Town Council review of current inventory of sites and presentation of preliminary findings, and a June Open House to present existing conditions and trends.
- Request that the Mayor and/or Vice Mayor approve the mailer before sending it out.
- Suggestions that the postcard mailer be sent to every homeowner and to the Town’s email list inviting people to participate in the process and to visit the Town’s website.
- Mr. Hill to provide information to staff to post on the Town’s website encouraging people to sign up on the Town’s email list to receive information.
- Hold popup events where outreach can be provided at the Post Office or other locations around Town.

Mayor Robbins concluded the matter and Council Members thanked Mr. Hill for his presentation.

6. Five Year Financial Forecast.

Town Manager Johnson gave a PowerPoint presentation, stating the Council had developed 6 Town goals which helped to guide staff with review and planning of new projects. Last year, the Council reviewed the goals and added a word “fairness” to the first goal, added a 7th goal to “Promote environmental stewardship” and reordered the goals. She then read the goals out loud and asked for Council additions, feedback or changes.

Mayor Robbins confirmed with Council Members they had no edits or revisions to the goals as presented.

Ms. Johnson then referred to the list of accomplishments which were inspired and supported by the Town Council. She read the extensive list out loud and asked if there were any additions.

Council Member McMillan thanked the Town Manager for providing the list of accomplishments and for shedding perspective on how hard everyone has been working. She suggested a Morning After article that incorporates bullet points of each accomplishment or an Annual Report of the Town.

Ms. Johnson then presented an overview of a slide on Organizational Capacity which included Council and staff capacities, percentage of staff work on day-to-day services with interruptions and emergencies, tools to foster efficient processes, external partnership resources, and Council expectations. She then spoke of new resources which are consumed by obligations, community capacity which is affected by rising divisiveness at various levels of government, a rising single or narrow single interest, rising expectations and need for instant communication, yet refreshing and challenging levels of civic engagement. She described external dynamics and challenges with state mandates, regional competition such as grants and retaining employees, on-going state legislation mandates, CEQA and NEPA considerations, extensive environmental review processes, and impacts from recession and inflation, pension and health care costs, and keeping abreast of technological advances.

Ms. Johnson then gave a PowerPoint presentation on the Town's 5-year Financial Forecast as outlined in the staff report. She introduced consultant Elizabeth Ford that has worked with the Town for many years and who was also able to answer questions.

Mayor Robbins spoke about the potential to pay increase the \$200,000 pension liability amount for discussion at the April budget meeting. Council Member McMillan cited concerns with the small surplus/gap when getting out to FY 2026/27, suggested instead increasing funds for the new facilities, and questioned if the voters would question why the Town did not save money for the facilities so as to pay less for bond debt. Ms. Johnson agreed this will be a decision for the Council.

Ms. Johnson then proceeded with the presentation and discussed operating revenues, forecasted revenues, ARPA funds and use of funds, expenses and proposed increases.

Council Member Kircher referred to the Police MOU and asked and confirmed the MOU incorporates items such as negotiating wages, working conditions, positions and titles, working schedules and holidays, etc.

Ms. Johnson summarized that the current level of services are fundable over the next 5 years, with expectations for small surpluses that may help fund capital or one-time expenses, additional payments to CalPERS which have generated significant cost reductions which enhance the Town's future sustainability, and the Public Safety Parcel Tax is up for renewal in November of 2024. If a new measure is not approved by voters before FY 2026 there will be a \$1 million shortfall in the Town's operating budget.

She cited challenges as a need for additional funding to address deferred capital needs and obsolete facilities, growth of pension and fire costs, and the public safety tax expiration. Opportunities include the closure of the fire station, development of a funding plan and site plan which will start in April where staff will bring forward an RFP document to obtain Council feedback. The Town will continue its strategy to reduce retirement costs, find ways to reduce JPA member costs, anticipates a savings with Ross Valley Fire Department, and will seek voter approval to extend the public safety tax.

Mayor Robbins referred to the Public Safety parcel tax which most recently passed with 79% voter support, and suggested the Town emphasize its successes and track record of fiscal policies in its outreach of the measure. Council Member McMillan also cited the importance and priority for timing and outreach of the parcel tax renewal.

BREAK

Mayor Robbins called for a break at 10:43 a.m., and thereafter resumed the workshop at 10:55 a.m.

7. Draft Five-Year Capital Improvement Plan.

Rich Simonitch, Public Works Director, gave a PowerPoint presentation of the 5-year Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) and described the status of existing projects, near-term and future projects, cost estimates, funds for the CIP (Roadway Fund, Drainage Fund, and Facilities and Equipment Fund), as included in the staff report.

Ms. Johnson stated in addition to including \$200,000 for paydown of the unfunded pension liability, the financial forecast also includes \$550,000 for the current year and \$500,000 for the future years to pay out of the Operating Fund and moving it into the Facilities Fund. This is a \$700,000 paydown towards facilities and paying down the pension liability. She asked for Council questions or comments, stating the next presentation will focus on the one-time draft capital priorities for the coming year.

Mayor Pro Tem Kuhl questioned the Fernhill sidewalk status and Mr. Simonitch described the project as an opportunity to fit a 4 foot pathway through the entire stretch and in most locations widen it out to 6 feet, which he confirmed is all within the Town's public right-of-way.

Council Member Kircher referred to extending the Bolinas drain down so it enters the creek at the bridge, undergrounding the utilities in front of the Town Hall, and safety improvements along Sir Francis Drake. He asked if these are separate or whether they all relate to each other wherein there could be a more extensive undergrounding of utilities. Mr. Simonitch explained that the Bolinas drain does not relate to public safety on the surface of Sir Francis Drake. They will need to rebuild the sidewalk in several places between Bolinas and Sir Francis Drake Bridge so there may be an opportunity to widen the sidewalk and put in additional signage regarding the narrow road where it crosses the Corte Madera Creek at the bridge. Regarding undergrounding utilities at Town Hall and the safety of Sir Francis Drake, the three projects are not related and not developed to be a nexus within each other; however, there are opportunities as they remove

poles to have wider sidewalks. He also explained the reasons that there must be two separate trenches and two separate funding sources.

Council Member McMillan voiced concerns with skyrocketing construction costs and wondered if the \$14.6 million amount is accurate. Mr. Simonitch said staff will definitely review this next year and agreed that especially roadway projects and facilities costs are increasing.

Council Member McMillan referred to pedestrian improvements on Sir Francis Drake where she turns left out onto Sir Francis Drake and takes her life into her own hands, given the speeds of vehicles. She hopes the Town can include the pedestrian issues but also the egress out of Winship. Mr. Simonitch agreed they are inter-related and said he has spoken with Chief Pata for police enforcement and signage to curb speeds. He said a stop light is an option, but they would have to do a regional traffic study with the rest of the corridor to see if that works. However, the Council can direct staff to do a cursory review with a traffic consultant.

Council Member McMillan said the Council discussed extensively during the Branson School CUP one of their proposed safety mitigation steps was having a pathway between Branson and Norwood. She is encouraged that staff is exploring that and is hopeful Branson will take an active role in developing that pathway.

Council Member Brekhus voiced opposition to a traffic light at Winship and cited the short distance. She recommended enforcement as the better avenue, and suggested looking at a roundabout as an option.

Mr. Simonitch said he is a huge proponent of roundabouts and said Parisi Transportation did a study of a roundabout at Shady and Lagunitas and he would be happy to pursue this further and turn it into a capital project, per Council direction. However, since the Roadway fund is a bit stressed, they would have to move some projects around to accommodate that.

Mayor Robbins asked if the list of project is prioritized or whether the Council is tasked to prioritize it and add to them. Mr. Simonitch said the current list has been budgeted and he has begun preliminary engineering on the projects. He recommended the Council indicate any they wish to pull and said he has preliminary estimates for the Fernhill pathway but they are not moving forward on design work until they know where they want to go with that and start discussions with Branson. The long-range projects such as the extension of the pathway on Laurel Grove would require moving some of the pavement restoration projects around to get done.

Mayor Robbins questioned why the Town would redo the Town Hall parking lot now if the Town proposes to redo facilities at Town Hall. Mr. Simonitch said they are looking at 4-5 years down the road to getting the facilities redone so even with a 5-year lifespan it is something needed, and he confirmed it is the area between the police station and Town Hall that would be redone. Ms. Johnson then confirmed the CIP projects have been vetted with the Council in last year's budget process.

Council Member Kircher voiced additional support for roundabouts and cited the importance of roundabouts for bike safety.

Council Member Brekhus questioned the ADA change for the back parking lot and the different costs. Mr. Simonitch explained the parking lot improvement is the Town Hall improvement for \$25,000 under Figure 1 of page 6, and it is not under the ADA transition plan funding.

Council Member Brekhus questioned the tree roots on the project, and Mr. Simonitch said he met with the Town's Arborist, Ed Gurka who has recommended cutting, trimming and using herbicide material to deter root growth before asphaltting. The next phase of design is to work this protection of tree roots into the bid documents to keep it from happening again.

Council Member Brekhus asked if the EV parking was also inclusive of the accessible parking. Mr. Simonitch displayed his screen and noted the cost for this project is \$45,000 and it spans two fiscal years. The EV station already exists and there would be nominal striping. They are adding two compact spots to park at the EV station, eliminating the parking stall which was the DPW Secretary stall and turning it into a lunch/picnic area since they are gaining two spaces at the EV station.

Council Member Brekhus asked if the expense for creating the two spots for the EV station makes sense. Mr. Simonitch noted the spaces for the EV station are a small part of the cost. The Town has an EV vehicle in their fleet used by some employees and noted that a condition of the TAM grant is that the employees would be able to use these stations.

Ms. Johnson cited the level of deferred maintenance, the largest rise in what is a public parking lot and also confirmed that part of the project is to slightly adjust the driveway due to challenging visibility issues. Rich Simonitch then shared his screen and displayed and described the entire project area and components.

Mayor Robbins asked and confirmed staff could limit the project to fixing the pavement for accessibility and remove the curb, which would reduce the cost by \$25,000.

Council Member McMillan said she would favor addressing things that will not be touched during the facilities remodel, such as those things close to Town Hall. She favored extending the Laurel Grove pathway beyond Canyon for safety, suggested Chief Pata look at further traffic calming measures at Winship and explore a light if that is an option that would help reduce speeding and enhance safety.

Council Member Brekhus referred to scoping for facilities and the potential for housing on the Town facility site. Ms. Johnson explained that the RFP for consultants to do the master planning process will be brought to the Council in April. She added that there are many jurisdictions proposing workforce housing or small units to meet their RHNA. She then described the Council's interest to electrify more of the Town-owned vehicles, proposed EV purchases, and the need not to defer improvements.

Mayor Robbins cited Council consensus for the Fernhill sidewalk, Laurel Grove extension, enforcement of Sir Francis Drake or a stop light, portions of the Town Hall improvements, and looking into a roundabout at Shady Lane and Lagunitas. She asked and confirmed these items will come back to the Council, except for the current Town Hall parking, which the Council agreed the Town Manager would make the decision on. Council Member McMillan voiced opposition to a roundabout and asked for confirmation from staff that one would cost between \$300,000 and \$500,000.

Mayor Robbins re-confirmed Council consensus for the Fernhill sidewalk, Laurel Grove extension, enforcement of Sir Francis Drake or a stop light, and portions of the Town Hall improvements (tbd by Town Manager).

8. Discussion of Town Goals and items related to the Fiscal Year 2022-23 Budget.

Town Manager Johnson gave a PowerPoint presentation and said staff has developed a list of potential new or one-time projects to be included in next year's budget which she recited and asked for Council input, as well as two projects included in the Council's packet relating to Age-Friendly budget and RPOA funding.

Council Members McMillan and Brekhus voiced support for a Facility Financing Subcommittee. Council Member McMillan said there are alternatives to be explored like a transfer tax or increasing the transfer tax, but long-term it might be beneficial to fund facilities and provide additional revenues to the Town.

Mayor Pro Tem Kuhl questioned and confirmed the Council's involvement with employee retention and recruitment.

Mayor Robbins and Council Members discussed the request from Age-Friendly for \$8,000 to be included in the budget and questioned the potential for use of existing funds, sponsorships and fundraising, suggested exploring establishment of an endowment, use of the Recreation fund to support activities, the desire to do more activities, reasonably pricing events as an optional \$10/person donation, and determining interest.

Gretchen Castets, Recreation Manager, described events where the Age-Friendly Task Force charges per person for events, described contributions by members, donations, and said she can make adjustments based upon Council direction.

After discussion, Council Members voiced support to fund \$8,000 for the Age-Friendly FY 22/23 budget for the first year and to revisit it next year.

Mayor Robbins turned to the second additional proposal from RPOA to split their events with Town funding. In the past, RPOA has funded amenities and decorations as ways to beautify the Town. More recently, they had some infrastructure projects with Town contributions and added to existing Town-wide events on the Common, which is calendared close to the Town Dinner. She asked if the Council should clarify that RPOA pays for enhancements and the Town pays for

infrastructure, or perhaps the Town helps with some events which strength community involvement.

Council Members described the events as important and significant for the Town, questioned the breakdown of the budget and whether the Ross Auxiliary's funds are included, pointed out that the Town's payment for the Fourth of July and the Town Dinner are not listed in the budget, recognition of the growth of the Live on the Commons events, Recreation funds that go towards some events, the various RPOA and Auxiliary funds raised from activities over the years, and concerns about the Town participating in funding social events.

After Council discussion, there was Council consensus to support the proposed RPOA budget for this year and to revisit it next year, to consider including the Fourth of July, Town Dinner events, and Auxiliary contributions, to prepare a listing of all events for next year's review, and to confirm the level of funding for each event by the Town, RPOA and the Ross Auxiliary.

Mayor Robbins suggested allowing public comment in order to provide clarification.

Adrienne Liggett, Co-President of Ross Auxiliary and Boardmember on RPOA, clarified that the Ross Auxiliary receives \$4,000 to \$5,000 from their Mobile Directory every year, the Winter Dinner brings in \$12,000, and they are hoping to bring an auction format back. Funds they plan to raise will go towards Ross Common beautification and repaving. They will look to partner with the Town on a bocce court or improve plantings around the Common, but said they are trying to partner with RPOA to beautify the Town.

Elena Batalla (by phone), Co-President of Ross Auxiliary and Boardmember on RPOA, clarified that their main goal is to bring the community together and also use the infrastructure already in place. The Live on the Common events provide a venue for multi-generations and feels it should not be seen as an event just for families or Auxiliary members but also could fall under Age-Friendly to improve older adults' lifestyles and activities. They received feedback that the Town Dinner is too formal, and this motivated them to hold the Live on the Common so they would be more than happy to be a partner in making Ross a more friendly and integrated community.

Ms. Johnson said based on Ms. Batalla's comment and the Mayor's comment that the dinner and event are so close together in October, she asked if the Council wanted to consider not holding the dinner this year.

Mayor Robbins and Council Members voiced support to hold the dinner and also the Live on the Common event for this year, and then see how it goes and reconsider next year. They cited the many projects and activities coming up in terms of renewing the parcel tax, a potential bond for facilities, but acknowledge people are excited to get back to live events and see each other. So, they should be capitalizing on the opportunity to build good will among Town residents and build community.

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Mayor Robbins summarized that the Council is supportive of the Age-Friendly request as well as the RPOA request.

9. Next steps and wrap up.

Town Manager Johnson thanked the Council for their time and said staff will take input. The Council will have a special budget workshop on April 28th starting at 9:00 a.m. and will be receiving the draft budget document. She will also incorporate more from the staff management team discussions.

Mayor Robbins and Council Members thanked staff for their presentations and information on important topics.

10. Adjournment.

Mayor Robbins adjourned the meeting at 12:59 p.m.


Elizabeth Robbins, Mayor

ATTEST:


Linda Lopez, Town Clerk