

February 8, 2025

Dear Ross Town Council,

Thank you for opening up the firehouse issue for review. I appreciate the renewed opportunity to hopefully keep this most valuable asset in our community.

I have lived in Ross for 42 years. I moved here from a house that we owned at the top of Kent Woodlands. We moved in 1983 to Ross because we thought the one way out road exiting Kent Woodlands was a real danger in case of a fire. In 1991 the Oakland fire was a real wake-up call. I have a good friend whose house burned to the ground. I saw first hand the profound sadness of losing a family home not to even mention the danger of maybe losing your life. In other words, I have always taken the risk of fire very seriously.

In 2018, my next door neighbor Stephanie DiMarco and I started looking into undergrounding our utilities here in town. Some of you know this because we worked with you to get a town policy on how to move forward. During that process we learned a lot about fires. I also read the Marin County Grand Jury Reports, talked to numerous fire captains, and paid attention to what is happening in the world pertaining to the increased risk of fire because of climate change. I also read up on small town governments.

In the 2018-2019 Marin County Grand Jury Report it states "Marin County has been warned repeatedly that it stands one spark away from a major conflagration but the county's governments continue to conduct business as usual." I know the town is moving forward with the undergrounding project which helps with fire mitigation but I do see the loss of our firehouse and firetruck as a huge step backward. It seems to me in this time of extreme fire danger and actual fires such as the recent horrific fires in Los Angeles, keeping our firehouse and firetruck seems more important than ever.

Talking to some fire captains I know, I learned that closing our firehouse could impact our ability to keep our fire insurance. We already lost our fire insurance a couple of years ago and had to scramble to replace it. Are we going to see our property values go down as a result of the difficulty of being adequately insured? A fire captain also pointed out the very real problem of the timing of a response in the case of a medical emergency. If San Anselmo's EMT's are already on a call then the response will go to Fairfax. Is the extra 10 to 15 minutes a life or death problem for a heart attack victim? With our aging population here in Ross and Marin, that might become an increasingly serious reality.

I have learned that the first and I think the most important function of a town government is to keep its citizens safe. I can't think of anything more important to keep us safe than keeping our fire department open to protect Ross residents. When the decision to close our firehouse was done, I think the metric the town used didn't reflect the reality of our situation here. We have been very fortunate to have avoided a fire storm but every time the rains stop that becomes a terrible and very real possibility.

Local fire protection and emergency services are critical for the safety of our town and its residents. I hope we can all come up with a solution to move forward and keep our firehouse and firetruck. I am willing to help.

Sincerely,

Kristine Kelley