

REGULAR MEETING of the ROSS TOWN COUNCIL  
THURSDAY, DECEMBER 11, 2025  
*Held In-Person and Teleconference via Zoom*

**1. 6:08 p.m. Commencement.**

Mayor Julie McMillan; Mayor Pro Tem Elizabeth Robbins; Council Members Teri Dowling; Bill Kircher, Jr., Mathew Salter; Town Manager Christa Johnson; Town Attorney Ben Stock.

**2. Posting of agenda/changes to agenda.**

Town Manager Johnson confirmed the agenda was posted according to government requirements.

**3. Disclosure of Ex Parte Communications on Items on this Agenda**

None.

**4. Open Time for Public Expression.**

Diane Rudden, a RN, suggested the Town consider as a future agenda item the installation of a Narcan dispenser at the Post Office and suggested placing outdoor defibrillators at the tennis courts and the Post Office, and ensure the public is informed of their locations.

**5. Mayor's Report**

I want to provide another update on Town facilities issues:

- On December 4, 2025, the Ross Valley Paramedic Authority (RVPA) approved a long-term lease with the Town of Ross, keeping the paramedics in Ross where they have been for more than 40 years. The lease's 8-year term begins at the completion of the new Ross paramedic facility or January 1, 2029, whichever is sooner, and will run until approximately 2037. In addition, a year ago the RVPA Board voted unanimously that no further work would occur to separate the RVPA; over the past year, the RVPA has been strengthening the agency by revising its governance documents and financials, and in 2026 it will seek approval of these documents from members.
- Tonight, Ross Valley Fire Department Chief Mahoney will present Emergency Services Response data from July 1, 2025 – October 31, 2025, a small 4-month period. Unfortunately, false information about response times (and many other items) has recently been circulated to residents, including claims that it took 16 minutes to respond to a call at Branson, and 10+ minutes to respond to an injured resident at the Post Office. In fact, based on official data, the response time to Branson was 7.5 minutes (and was for a false alarm), and 6.5 minutes to the Post Office.
- The January 8, 2026 Council meeting begins at 6 pm at Town Hall and on Zoom to provide the Town's Elections Code Report and presentations from consultants for the Friends of the Ross Firehouse. Tonight, we will discuss how best to accommodate residents if there are more than Town Hall can hold.

As we close 2025, I want to recognize and express my gratitude to the Town staff. These dedicated employees ensure that the Town runs smoothly and is extremely safe. We are fortunate to have such loyal and capable staff constantly working to enhance the lives of Ross residents. Thank you to all Ross Department Heads, along with department members:

- Town Manager Christa Johnson,
- Town Clerk Cyndie Martel,
- Recreation Manager Maureen Borthwick,
- Planning & Building Director Roberta Feliciano,
- Public Works Director and Town Engineer Rich Simonitch,
- Police Chief Pata, and
- Ross Valley Fire Department Chief Mahoney.

In addition, volunteers continue to be the heart and soul of our Town, constantly working and collaborating to enhance residents' lives and foster our strong community. We saw this recently at the festive Winterfest event at the Marin Art & Garden Center (thanks also to the Ross Police Officers for delicious hot chocolate). My sincere thanks to the following organizations and their volunteers: the Ross Property Owners' Association, Ross Auxiliary, Age Friendly Ross, the Ross Historical Society, Advisory Design Review and the Town Treasurer. Our Town would not be the same without you!

Finally, I wish you and your families the best of holidays, and a happy new year full of optimism and hope.

## **6. Council Committee & Liaison Reports**

Council Member Kircher reported that at the November 20, 2025 MCE meeting, the Board discussed creating a permanent, independent Finance Committee and the need for an outside governance review. Concerns were raised about fiscal oversight and the large 34-member Board spanning four counties. There was consensus to explore alternative governance structures, with the Finance Committee helping manage MCE's growing financial responsibilities. The issue will be discussed by the Executive Committee and then brought back to the full Board with proposals.

Mayor Pro Tem Robbins reported that the RVPA approved a lease with the Town of Ross to keep the ambulance in town, expressing hope for a long-term partnership, though the lease includes provisions allowing RVPA to leave if certain conditions, such as failure of a regional parcel tax measure, occur.

## **7. Staff & Community Reports.**

### **a. Ross Property Owners Association**

Jeff Koblick of the RPOA thanked the Town Council and staff for their support in hosting a record number of events, expressed appreciation to donors for the holiday lights, and shared hopes for a great 2026.

### **b. Town Manager**

Town Manager Johnson gave the following report:

I'm happy to report that Alex Lopez has been promoted from Assistant Planner to Planner. Alex has worked for the Town for three years now and his promotion is well deserved. Congratulations Alex!

I'm also happy to report that the double portable behind the public safety building was removed earlier this week. After 20 years, we were pleased to say goodbye to it.

Town hall is closed to the public from Dec 24 through Jan 1<sup>st</sup>. Of course, police and fire services are provided 24/7. Building inspections will be conducted on Dec 22, 29 and 31.

The Flood Zone 9 Advisory Committee held a meeting on November 18<sup>th</sup>. I asked Rich Simonitch to provide a summary that I could share with you:

SAFRR (BB2) project:

County Flood Control District received a letter from FEMA's consultant on September 25 requesting more information and some corrections on the County's July 30<sup>th</sup> CLOMR submittal. The County will be submitting responses to the letter by December 24<sup>th</sup> and will share them with Ross and San Anselmo. The comments were mostly technical requests for data and clarification on the hydraulic modelling used for the CLOMR submittal. However, one comment was requiring that all communities (Ross and San Anselmo) sign the acknowledgement form. It is unclear how the County will respond to this request.

CMCRFM (Fish ladder & College of Marin) project:

Construction is nearly completed on the concrete channel removal and bank restoration project behind Kent Middle School near the College of Marin. This is an impressive achievement by the County, with work completed in just 5 weeks. The County completed the access ramp and the Granton Park pump station last year. Unfortunately, they did not have a schedule on the removal of the fish ladder and channel improvements in Ross. The County plans to have a detailed budget study ready for a FZ9 meeting in January and they should have more information on that schedule when they present the budget. The grant for this project expires this month but the State will accept, but not necessarily approve, another grant extension for December 2026.

And lastly, I'm proud to report that my sister Jil and I received an award for Best Costume in Ross's Turkey Trot race held on Nov 15<sup>th</sup>. Our second in a row. Big thanks to Ross Rec for organizing the event and to community partners for their assistance. It was a fabulous event and not just because I received an award!

Council Member Salter asked Chris Martin to provide a report on the CLOMR, and Town Manager Johnson said he attended the October meeting and suggested having him come back after the January Flood Zone 9 meeting.

## **8. Consent Agenda**

The following items will be considered in a single motion, unless removed from the Consent Agenda. There were no requests to remove an item or public comments. Council Member Dowling thanked the students and supporters for their work with the smoking regulation ordinance.

**Mayor Pro Tem Robbins moved, and Council Member Dowling seconded, to approve Consent Agenda Items a, b, c, and d. Motion carried unanimously (5-0).**

**a. Minutes:**

**Special Meeting Closed Session, November 6, 2025**

**Regular Meeting, November 13, 2025**

**Special Meeting, November 21, 2025**

- b. Demands: November 2025**
- c. Town Council consideration of the second reading and adoption of Ordinance 735 amending Chapter 6.18 Smoking Regulations, Sections 6.18.020, 6.18.030, 6.18.065 and 6.18.070 of the Ross Municipal Code to ban the sale of all tobacco products in the Town of Ross. This item was introduced at the November 13, 2025 meeting.**
- d. Town Council consideration to adopt Resolution No. 2549 to amend the Town's salary schedule effective December 11, 2025, to add Building Inspector I/II.**

**End of Consent Agenda.**

**There are no Public Hearings on Planning Projects – Part 1.**

**Administrative Agenda.**

- 9. Town Council to conduct a public hearing and adopt Resolution No. 2546 authorizing maximum rates imposed and collected by Marin Sanitary Service for Refuse and Recyclable Material Collection and Disposal Services to be effective January 1, 2026, and determining that the Town's franchise fees are justified by the Town's costs of providing solid waste services and reasonable charges for the use of Town property for solid waste services.**

Town Manager Johnson gave the staff report and overview of the item to conduct a public hearing regarding a 3.84% increased rate to be imposed and collected by Marin Sanitary Service for 2026.

Council Member Salter asked for an overview of how the franchise fee is calculated and what it represents.

Garth Schultz via Zoom, R3 Consulting Group, said the franchise fee covers the Town's costs for management and administration of the agreement with MSS service, ancillary solid waste services the Town provides, and use of public right-of-way for the set out of containers which is a benefit for customers. He said the study compares the revenues the Town receives through the franchise fee against the costs incurred and value in use of the public right-of-way. The study found revenues received from the franchise fee are slightly lower, but not more than necessary to cover the Town's cost in the use of this right-of-way and therefore appropriate for the Town to continue to receive.

Mayor McMillan opened the public comment period.

Justin Wilcox of MSS, thanked the Council and reflected on a strong year of transition following Joe Garbarino's passing. He noted a successful customer appreciation event that promoted composting and recycling, invited customers to their facility to take tours and learn about composting and recycling, and said this year was highlighted by the Landfill Harmonic Orchestra from Paraguay who performed with recycled instruments. He also expressed pride in being recognized by the North Bay Labor Council as the first business honored for being labor-friendly and for valuing its union workers.

**Council Member Dowling moved, and Mayor Pro Tem Robbins seconded, to adopt Resolution No. 2546 authorizing maximum rates imposed and collected by Marin Sanitary Service for Refuse and Recyclable Material Collection and Disposal Services to be effective January 1, 2026, and determining that the Town's franchise fees are justified by the Town's costs of providing solid waste services and reasonable charges for the use of Town property for solid waste services. Motion carried unanimously (5-0).**

**10. Town Council to receive a presentation related to Ross Valley Fire Department and the Ross Valley Paramedic Authority response times for the Town of Ross from July 1, 2025 to October 31, 2025.**

Fire Chief Dan Mahoney gave a PowerPoint presentation regarding RVFD and RVPA response times from July 1<sup>st</sup> to October 31<sup>st</sup>. It is recommended the Town Council receive the presentation, and said he was available to answer any questions.

Mayor McMillan referred to the presentation and stated it appears the ambulance arrived first 14 times which is close to 40% of the time.

Council Member Dowling questioned the long response times at the Water District. Chief Mahoney explained that delays are due to logistical challenges, including transferring equipment to a four-wheel-drive vehicle, accessing locked gates, traveling on fire roads, and sometimes carrying gear by foot to incidents off-road, noting that many of the longest response times involve Water District calls.

Mayor McMillan asked if the Ross Police arrived first at any incidents. Police Chief Pata said on about half of the calls, police have arrived first; however, this is the difference between 1 minute, 20 seconds from their arrival to the time the ambulance arrives.

Mayor McMillan asked if there was any response from Kentfield Fire, and Chief Mahoney replied there were no incidents Kentfield Fire responded to on medical aids and he also called out that there were no fire incidents during this period.

Council Member Kircher noted discrepancies in reported response times from different years and emphasized the importance of using larger data sets for accuracy. Chief Mahoney agreed, explaining that recent response time figures are based on a small number of incidents, which can cause variability, and that even multi-year data in Ross yields limited samples when evaluating 90th percentile response times.

Council Member Salter asked to explain what NFPA-1710 benchmarks are. Chief Mahoney said this is a standard for Fire Department responses and there are many different benchmarks they recognize, and one is response times. They emulate the Citygate response times and their response times are taken from the NFPA-1710 response times. He believes after talking with Citygate today that some of these response times are in the process of being changed. But, for this presentation, they will stick with 2019 Citygate recommendations.

Council Member Salter said the NFPA-1710 benchmark for all fire departments is either 8 minutes or 7 minutes, 30 seconds, and he confirmed with Chief Mahoney that this is the recommendation. Whether agencies want to adopt that or not is a policy decision, but Citygate recommends 7 minutes and 30 seconds, and 8 minutes would be for a total emergency response team to get on scene.

Council Member Salter asked why the NFPA wants 8 minutes or 7 minutes and 30 seconds and make sure it is at the 90% level or below. Chief Mahoney said this is for a suburban area, and rural areas have different response times. In 2005, the RVFD adopted a standards of cover and it is called out in the Citygate study on page 19 that their standard to respond to an incident is 7 minutes or 8 minutes. It was called out in the Citygate report that those are legacy times that need to be updated. They have not updated those standards yet.

Town Manager Johnson suggested Council Member Salter check with the National Fire Standards Association about their standards. The Fire Chief and Fire Board are not involved in their determinations. Again, she reminded the Council this item is agendaized to give a presentation about response times for the 4-month period of time.

Council Member Dowling said she noticed in the engine response time it is a response time when you exclude the incidents outside of the Ross Town limits; that the 90% level is 9 minutes and 34 seconds, and all of times listed for response are that number or less. Regarding the data provided, the response times for the 30 responses are anywhere from 3 minutes 20 seconds all the way up to 8 minutes and 38 seconds, so most of those incidents in those 4 months were at the 90th percentile level or less. Chief Mahoney confirmed this is correct, and one of the other factors here that he was unable to pull out were non-emergency calls. So, if they were able to pull out the non-emergency calls, that 90<sup>th</sup> percentile would go lower. He worked hard to get the Council that number. He redacted it from his report at the last minute because he was 95% confident with his numbers, but that other 5% he was not, and he only wanted to bring numbers to the Council where he had 100% confidence.

Mayor Pro Tem Robbins said the Council is focused on the numbers and she asked that with the Ross Station closed, the engines have to come from San Anselmo or Kentfield and, whatever the response time is, they are a minimum of 2 minutes more of whatever that number comes out to be. Chief Mahoney said yes, the travel distance will depend on where the incident is and the closer the incident is to San Anselmo or Station 19, the faster the fire engine will get there.

Mayor Pro Tem Robbins noted that for most Ross sites, there is a longer travel time now as compared to in the past, and Citygate noted there would be a 2-minute minimum added time. Chief Mahoney said this is true, and ironically, when they exclude the Water District calls, the 9 minutes and 43 seconds is really below what Citygate noted for the 2 minutes on the 7 minutes 55 seconds. But again, these numbers could change and he is not saying they can only go down. They can go up also, but he would recommend getting a larger data set to look at the actual response time.

Mayor McMillan asked if it makes sense to look at these numbers and calculate an average response time instead of the 90<sup>th</sup> percentile figure. She thinks the common person understands that more easily. Chief Mahoney agreed and said more people can understand the average number, but when looking at the average number, they are not including more than the 10% of response times above that 90<sup>th</sup> percentile. So really, the fire service looks at how to get to a call 90% of the time and consider the other 10% are one off's or incidents that may have taken longer because of certain circumstances.

Council Member Salter asked what is the simultaneous demand that has gone to at Station 19 and asked how that has changed now that Station 18 is gone. Chief Mahoney said he has not tracked the numbers because it is very early. They are trying to be vigilant and are reporting out to the Battalion Chiefs every month to make sure they adjust and settle down to the new norm, and they could track those numbers if they did a study.

Mayor McMillan asked if there was a simultaneous incident and the engine at Station 19 was not available, the engine from Kentfield would respond instead. Chief Mahoney said yes. There could have been simultaneous demands for Engine 20 and 21, leaving Engine 19 available to come to Ross. But, in that 4-month period, the data shows Engine 17 was not called to come over to assist. If Engine 19 was not available, Engine 17 would come over to assist if they are available.

Council Member Salter asked about the unit hour utilization and asked if this figure is reviewed for the department. Chief Mahoney said he believes the Citygate report stated that the engines were not reaching their maximum capacity for unit hour utilization. This was mentioned in the RVPA study for the ambulances as they have a higher unit hour utilization because there is less of them than there are fire engines.

Council Member Salter asked if the Chief looked at the response times department-wide, and Chief Mahoney said no, just Ross. He noted there were 38 incidents and to get numbers for tonight it took him about 30 hours, so it is not easy pulling data and extracting variables.

Council Member Salter asked why the 90<sup>th</sup> percentile is used. Chief Mahoney said the 90<sup>th</sup> percentile provides a benchmark to take that higher number and try to meet all responses below that. If they take an average number, they will probably not meet that number half the time. When looking at deployment models, funding, and all of these different things that can drive fire departments, the 90<sup>th</sup> percentile is used to look at data similar to this. This is not to say there is an instance a department may use an average for another reason, but Citygate recommends the 90<sup>th</sup> percentile, as well as the NFPA.

Council Member Salter said the Council received a comment from a retired Ross Fire Captain, Bruce Selfridge who said there were some modeling and studies done involving the watershed and the scenarios from him identified it was a very dangerous threat to the Town of Ross from a fire starting up there. He asked if the Chief has seen any of those models or studies done, and Chief Mahoney said "no."

Council Member Salter said given times observed in this study where the engine took 9 minutes to 18 minutes to get up there, he asked if this is concerning at all to the Chief.

Chief Mahoney said they are partners with the Water District and obviously their response zone does not fit within the District's area. They provide mutual aid as good neighbors to them, and they do have Water District Rangers up there that patrol the area and have medical skills and a vehicle with water and fire hose. So, they are not the sole responders to the Water District, but as far as response times, as of now, even when they would have a fire engine in Ross, many areas they would not drive the engine up the fire roads and they would count on Marin County Fire Department engines or RVFD Type 3 engine to access the incident. These are larger fire engines designed to stay on pavement and not necessarily go up dirt roads. Sometimes the fires also do not start right off the fire road there but rather deep in the watershed where they must hike in, but he has not seen those reports.

Mayor McMillan asked if the Chief had a feeling about calls in the watershed based on weather and call volumes being lower in the winter and higher in the summer. Chief Mahoney said back in 2019, he thinks the watershed had far more visitors now than they did especially during COVID where recreation was outdoors when they had a number of calls up there. People want to return there, but just like any recreational area outdoors in the summertime, they tend to run far more incidents. In the winter it tends to die out a bit, but now with the invention of e-bikes, they have many people up in the watershed which results in more opportunities for someone to get injured.

Mayor McMillan opened the public comment period.

Bob Herbst, President, Friends of Ross Firehouse, said they are working on a construction plan to reopen their firehouse and return the 7 minute and 55 second response time that RVFD delivered to them when the firehouse was open. Regarding the 7 minute and 30 second NFPA recommended best response time for suburban areas, on page 22 of the Citygate report, section 2; Standards of Coverage Assessment states, "The brain can only survive 4 to 6 minutes without oxygen. Cardiac arrest and other events can cause oxygen deprivation to the brain." Thus, from the time of 911 receiving the call, an effective deployment system is beginning to manage the problem within a 7- to 8-minute total response time, and this is the 7 minutes and 30 second NFPA recommended best response time. This is right at the point where brain death is becoming irreversible and the fire has gone to the point of leaving the room of origin and becoming very serious.



This is why response times matter and he is sure the Chief does not want poor response times. He thinks they have a chance to redo the decision to close the fire station and on January 8<sup>th</sup>, they will present their plan and hopefully they can find a new path forward.

Stephanie DeMarco thanked Chief Mahoney and the RVFD for their dedication and protecting the community. Despite best efforts, they are seeing emergency response times lengthening and, in many cases, they will be unsafe levels. They understand this is a direct result of the Town's decision to close the firehouse and that the Fire Department has worked tirelessly to maintain safety standards despite this challenge. Unfortunately, a fire response system functions like a network. Each station is a node that supports all the others. If one is removed, the entire system is weakened, which she described. The decision to close the station was predicated on an analysis that rebuilding the aging structure would be too expensive. Over the past 8 months, a volunteer citizens group; Friends of the Ross Firehouse, has been working with architects, builders, and public safety experts to demonstrate this narrative is incorrect. On January 8<sup>th</sup>, they look forward to presenting to the Council an alternative plan that rehabilitates the public safety building, restores fast emergency response times and preserves the unique character of the Town Civic Center and this plan will cost millions of dollars less than the Town's master plan.

The Council has heard from over 400 residents who have signed in support of reopening the fire station. The public sentiment is overwhelming—people want a fire station back in Ross. They look forward to the opportunity to share an alternative plan on January 8<sup>th</sup> and they are hopeful that the Council will see the value and benefits of the plan and that they are all able to move forward together to their mutual benefit.

Mark Lewandowski said he supports the 90<sup>th</sup> percentile over the average. When he hears conversations like this, it triggers him to work with established models like the 90<sup>th</sup> percentile. In layman's terms, it means that 9 out of 10 responses are below the limit. By definition, average means half are above and half are below. So, if they try to change those models, they end up skewing things and ignoring the important response times. Therefore, he thinks the 90<sup>th</sup> percentile is important and asked the Council to pay attention to that.

Barbara Call said she has spoken before and this time she relayed a proverb for the Council which dates back to biblical times but was updated in the 1500's by the English: "There are none so blind as those who will not see." It is not those who cannot see but those who will not see because they have a stubborn refusal to acknowledge or understand the truth. She hears arguments about the response time, but the point is, the Town is not better without a fire department and without an emergency response system in-house. If these things are "farmed out" to Fairfax or Kentfield, she asked what controls will the Town have over what these agencies do. She said towns have fire departments, emergency response systems, and she asked the Council to do what is best for the town which is not to demolish the fire department or historic building.

She also shared the saying of the "sunk cost fallacy." This means throwing good money after bad and the Town has spent money already on the plan, but this is all bad money that has been spent. There is no point throwing good money after bad money. Interesting is that she thinks the Council

is selling the town on the fact they are only asking for \$11 million because they have saved \$10 million. In her mind, this still equals \$21 million so she thinks the Friends of the Firehouse plan is going to be free because the money has already been saved. They will get a fire station, the town having a better response time, and everybody will quit arguing about this issue.

Mike Rosenbaum said he thinks the Town should agree on one source and have verifiable information, both for the Town of Ross and the Friends of Ross Firehouse. He referenced Chief Mahoney's presentation on page 114. Everyone should stick to agreed upon data. He thinks the Council needs to trust Marin County agencies and should not question, impugn or criticize reports from County agencies as it undermines public trust. He thinks they need to remove non-emergency calls like the time Engine 19 was called to remove a neighbor's cat from Dewitt Avenue on October 19<sup>th</sup> at 4PM. He has photos to prove this and it is not AI generated.

He also learned tonight about Marin Water District is that data also needs to be excluded. He is an ex-ski patroller, first responder, and he can guarantee that if you fall down on the hill, no one will touch you for at least 8 minutes. No one is going to know at the top of the hill that you have a heart attack, so MMWD is a non-urban emergency. They do not have ski patrollers or first-responders at the top to know when someone hurts themselves. He thinks the Council has done a wonderful job.

Nancy McCarthy said what concerns her is what the future will hold. We see significant increases in building, not to speak of the School Street Plaza with six or seven stories, and she thinks Fairfax will need a new fire truck to be able to reach those stories, not to speak of the increased building in San Anselmo. She does not see how they are going to meet that need with what they have now. She thinks having a fire truck in the Town of Ross will assure residents they will be the first priority; that it will not be somebody else or waiting around for Ross's fire truck to come and this is one of the reasons people live here. They live here and expect this kind of service and now it is lost. Once the decision is made and the town loses its firehouse forever, it is over and it will not come back.

Regarding the previous speaker who gave the Council proverbs to consider and sunk costs, she would say there is another one—"Your first loss is your best loss." This may be applicable here.

#### **BREAK**

Mayor McMillan called for a break at 7:27 p.m. and thereafter, resumed the regular meeting at 7:35 p.m.

An attempted Zoom bomber was cut off.

Mayor McMillan confirmed with the Town Attorney that the item is not an action item and discussion can take place.

Council discussion ensued with the following summarized comments by individual Council Members:

Council Member Kircher stated the report is a good start but it needs more detail to distinguish true emergencies from lower-priority calls. Preliminary data suggests few life-threatening emergencies, average response times improve when excluding low-priority or distant calls, and ambulance availability may be lower than assumed. More precise, long-term data is needed before drawing conclusions.

Council Member Dowling said she appreciates the data but notes it is limited. She requested a full 12 months of data, clearer separation of emergency vs. non-emergency calls, and a follow-up presentation in July.

Mayor Pro Tem Robbins acknowledged response times will inevitably be longer from Kentfield and San Anselmo, and thinks the key question is whether the community accepts that. She warned against selectively excluding data unless the same methodology is applied to prior studies.

Council Member Salter argued the data clearly shows longer response times ( $\approx 11$  minutes engine,  $\approx 14$  minutes ambulance) and criticizes cherry-picking and nit picking to minimize this. He emphasized that removing a fire station weakens the regional response network, increases strain on remaining engines, and reduces safety—especially given future growth and fire risk, and supports adding capacity, not reducing it.

Mayor McMillan reminded that Council knowingly accepted longer response times when voting in 2021. She emphasized realistic expectations, the reliability of ambulance response, proximity of neighboring stations, and that paramedics remain in Ross. She supported reviewing a full year of data and hiring a consultant for comprehensive analysis and suggested moving onto the next item.

**11. Town Council to conduct a discussion regarding the Ross Common playfield and provide direction to staff on the potential next steps.**

Public Works Director Rich Simonitch presented a staff report and PowerPoint on the Ross Common playfield restoration. The Council had previously discussed restoration options and CIP projects in late 2024 but decided not to pursue any capital projects for Ross Common this fiscal year, continuing only general maintenance. He then provided a historical overview of the field, noting that while some areas remain distressed, they are not worsening, and recommended focusing restoration efforts on the most severely damaged sections.

Options to consider as they move closer towards budget discussions include:

1. Maintain status quo which is under the current 5-year CIP;
2. Move forward with a nominal project featuring fertilization and additional signage prohibiting dogs and bicyclists on the Common at a cost of \$10,000 annually, with a standard December through March closure;

3. Move forward with a modest interim rehabilitation program costing about \$60,000 to \$70,000 plus a \$10,000 annual fertilization program with 3 to 4 month estimated closures; or
4. Move forward with a complete restoration project which would require reallocation of approximately \$600,000 to \$1 million, with an 8 to 10 month estimated closure.

Public Works staff recommended continuing drainage improvements in the southeast part of the field and maintaining the enhanced fertilization program. They strongly advised fully closing the field from December to March to prevent further damage from wet conditions. For long-term restoration, staff suggested a major CIP project that would restrict dogs to the Post Office lawn, add split-rail fencing, provide more waste bags, and increase seating to create a dedicated dog area. Photos were shown of unleashed dogs, which staff believes occurs daily, though the exact frequency is uncertain.

Mayor McMillan said if the Council were to move forward with Option 3, she asked when results of this would start showing. Director Simonitch said it would be one month to install it and for 2 to 3 months the field would need to be closed, but the aesthetic benefits would be seen instantly.

Council Member Kircher asked about bike and e-bike use on the field. Director Simonitch confirmed bike tire marks exist and noted that bicycles on the playfield, especially in concentrated areas, damage the turf.

Council Member Kircher then asked if spending \$50,000–\$60,000 on Option 3 could be applied to a larger future project (Option 4). Director Simonitch clarified that Option 3 is a one-time expense, with annual fertilization costing \$10,000, and any sod installed under Option 3 would need to be removed if a full restoration is later pursued.

Council Member Kircher questioned the benefit of Option 3 beyond delaying a full restoration. Director Simonitch explained it addresses complaints about the lawn's appearance but does not prevent long-term issues; major investment would require restricting use and seasonal closure like other Marin County fields.

Council Member Dowling asked about staff time required for Option 3. Director Simonitch said it would not require much additional effort. Two bids were received: one over \$60,000, which would require public bidding, and one under \$60,000, which would need Council approval. Either way, the staff work is comparable to a small capital project of that size.

Mayor Pro Tem Robbins noted strong community support for a full field renovation and confirmed CIP funds are available, suggesting discussion during the February 12 Council CIP meeting. She emphasized prioritizing funding for a paramedic facility by 2029 and questioned whether renovation could proceed without addressing the dog policy, citing potential controversy.

Town Manager Johnson stated that dogs are prohibited on the playing fields but enforcement has been difficult, and ongoing damage would waste a \$1 million renovation requiring over a year of closure. She suggested creating an off-leash dog area near the Post Office with a physical barrier to prevent dogs and people from reaching Ross Common, helping protect the playfield.

Council Member Salter asked about the last substantial renovation of the field. Director Simonitch said the field dates to the 1970s or 1980s, with the school built in 2011, and noted that other local fields, like Bacich School, close for months for upgrades. Council Member Salter asked if major field closures are common and Director Simonitch explained that school fields are regulated differently than civic fields and cited a controversial field project at Memorial Park in San Anselmo.

Council Member Salter inquired whether the field is a playfield or athletic field. Director Simonitch clarified it is a playfield for younger kids, with restrictions on cleats for children over 12, whereas athletic fields are more structured for programs for older youth. Council Member Salter noted school and recreation programs use the field for sports, and Town Manager Johnson confirmed these are after-school programs, not high school sports. Director Simonitch then emphasized that a well-maintained, restricted field would be ideal but decisions on funding are up to the Council.

Council Member Salter also mentioned complaints from Little League about field conditions and confirmed the field is rated as severely distressed. Town Manager Johnson noted that the Recreation Manager, who handles Little League concerns, was not present and that Public Works does not address these complaints.

Mayor McMillan suggested that much of the field damage occurred during the temporary portable village set up for the Ross School remodel and asked whether the Town had sought financial help from the school for improvements. Town Manager Johnson said the Town has an informal partnership with the school, which has contributed to past projects, and the Superintendent supports the renovation as a stakeholder but did not offer funding.

Mayor McMillan also questioned whether funds had been set aside to restore the Common after construction and whether certain field elements were meant to be temporary. Town Manager Johnson said she would ask the Recreation Manager but expressed doubt that records still exist or that the school could be pursued for funding due to time passed and staff turnover.

Mayor McMillan said when she walked around the Common recently, it seemed the worst areas were the areas around the backstop and where bases are for baseball. She wondered if making it temporary would help the restoration during the off season or not and suggested this might be considered.

Council Member Dowling asked and confirmed the Town did not have anything set aside in its budget for doing the renovation either on a \$60,000 or a \$600,000 scale. However, RPOA has offered in the past to provide some funding, and Town Manager Johnson said she would

approach them and ask them to pay for half of Option 3, noting it would be a matter of coming up with the other half. She confirmed this project would last about 5 years and, by that time, the paramedic facility would be completed and the Council might look to the \$1 million renovation, given it does need to be improved.

Mayor McMillan opened the public comment period.

Bruce Goldberg, a longtime dog owner, said most dogs stay in the Grove and owners generally clean up after them. While dogs occasionally spill onto the field, he believes the field's poor condition is mainly due to lack of maintenance since 2011, not dogs. He noted other issues such as gopher and mole damage, irrigation sinkholes, and swampy areas near the playground. He also observed that bike and e-bike use on the field is minor, affecting only about 10% of the time.

Mike Rosenbaum, who was fostering a senior dog, argued that dogs should not be solely blamed for Ross Common's condition and noted they lack representation in meetings. He raised concerns about enforcement of leash rules, the safety of a proposed dog area near the Post Office, and the greater damage caused by bikes compared to dogs. He supported closing Ross Common from November to March and recommended a sturdy border fence to prevent winter access. He also noted that Little League equipment, such as backstops and dugouts, contributes more to turf damage than dogs. He suggested revisiting the lease for Ross Common now that Ross Rec is part of the Town, considering historic portable use as a funding source, and to explore naming rights or sponsorships for a renovated field.

Patrick Quigney, a parent, coach, and Little League board member, said Ross Common is run down and unsafe for kids, with weeds, cones, and a poorly maintained field. He observed minor e-bike use but emphasized that sports activities contribute more to wear. He organized a petition, now signed by 235 parents, urging a full renovation rather than a temporary fix. He cited Memorial Park's recent \$600,000 restoration as a comparable example and stressed the community needs a lasting, well-maintained field for future generations.

Mark Lewandowski, a resident since 2019, emphasized that Ross Common is a central community space for all recreational use, including dogs and bikes. He opposed closing the field during the school year, arguing that kids need a safe place to play and ride bikes, and dogs need space to run. He encouraged finding creative solutions to maintain multi-use access from December through March and highlighted the importance of keeping the field open for community enjoyment.

Elena Battalya, Ross PTO co-president, emphasized the field's importance to the community and the Council's responsibility to maintain infrastructure that supports residents. She highlighted youth mental health benefits from outdoor activity and safe recreation, urging the Council to prioritize children's needs. She recommended a two-stage renovation to avoid closing the entire field at once, allowing continued access during construction, even if it increases costs, and called for creative solutions that reflect community values.

Adrian Liggett, co-president of the Ross School PTO, advocated for a comprehensive, long-overdue field rehabilitation. She urged creative solutions to avoid a lengthy 10-month closure and shared personal concerns about her 9-year-old daughter's safety while playing on the poorly maintained field which has caused injuries, and emphasized that the community deserves a safer, well-maintained field.

Russ Haswell, a newer Ross resident and Little League coach/board member, emphasized that Ross Common is the town's central gathering space and should have received regular reinvestment. He noted that while the field may not be officially a sports field, young athletes use it and face frequent injuries due to its poor condition. He supported previous speakers' comments and urged the Council to consider phasing renovations to keep parts of the field open during construction.

Mayor Pro Tem Robbins said the 2018 report concludes a total redesign and reconstruction is needed, said community members would like this to look good and be safe, and she questioned the bid process, given people have said they want to use it for some of the time.

Council Member Salter said he thinks this is a "no brainer." It is long overdue and has not been redone since the 1980's. It was destroyed by the school construction, was never redone, and thinks the Town can afford to do this project.

Council Member Kircher provided an historical background, noting this is not the first time it came before the Council but repeatedly as well as discussed with RPOA. Doing this project would be a great investment and more feasible if there was private participation or donations. He recognized on-going maintenance efforts after it is redone because it is an open park. He would support it and phase it so it can be partially open.

Council Member Dowling said she loves Ross Common and would like to see this as a share of costs so there is a commitment to keep it usable. She would ask if RPOA, PTO, Little League, and others can contribute and not just depend upon the Town to pay for it. She noted it will also take staff time and resources to make it happen.

Mayor McMillan asked for more information and recommended continuing the discussion at the February CIP meeting in terms of phasing and how much it would cost to redo as well as the maintenance and how the Town can ensure the field is not damaged over time. The field will require enhanced maintenance annually to ensure a return on the investment. Additionally, the dog and bike problems are impacts and she suggested considering a fence on the Grove area so dogs stay in that area, and she would also like to see exploration of costs for phasing and the timing. She suggested staff review Memorial Park to determine how long that took and what is realistic.

She believes the school project did a lot of damage in 2011. The Town has not done any upgrade to the Common in decades, and it is the heart and soul of their town, so she supported making and preserving the investment.

Town Manager Johnson said staff supports the idea of renovating the playfields, but cautioned that advancing additional projects beyond what is currently included in the Council-adopted Capital Improvement Program (CIP) requires substantial staff time. Current staff capacity is limited, particularly in Public Works, where key projects are already underway and the department head is retiring in August. She is heavily committed to implementing the Facilities Master Plan and addressing issues from the ballot initiative, leaving no capacity to conduct further outreach or develop funding plans without added staff.

She emphasized that the Council must prioritize among many competing demands through the budget and CIP process beginning in February. She offered to provide more detailed cost, timing, and obligation information—including funding needs for the Facilities Master Plan and the required paramedic facility by 2029—and said she can explore options for additional staffing to help move the project forward.

Council Member Salter suggested a Public Works Subcommittee, noting that there is a Finance Subcommittee and this is a project to take to such a committee who can work with the groups which will not divert from staff's time.

Town Manager Johnson said staff works with RPOA very well and they provided quotes, spent a lot of time, and asked for a lot of time from contractors in the Spring of 2024 which is identified in the staff report. The quotes came forward with no mention of paying prevailing wage, and the Town cannot build a project without paying prevailing wage. If the Council wishes to have staff work done by people who are not public sector experts or employees, the project will likely be built not in compliance with State law and therefore will generate a great deal of liability for the Town.

Mayor McMillan suggested trying to do as much as staff can for the February CIP meeting and the Council can see where they are. She also is uncomfortable having volunteers shepherd this project, as this is one of their biggest assets so it is important to have it done carefully and done to last several years into the future. The Council will have more information to discuss and reassess and determine a path forward which is reasonable for everybody.

Council Members agreed that more discussion is needed before agreeing on the full renovation of the Common, said they were leaning towards it, and staff will come back at the February CIP meeting to discuss it further.

**12. Town Council consideration to adopt Resolution No. 2548 to conduct the 2025 (4<sup>th</sup>) review of the use permit for the Lagunitas Country Club (LCC).**

Planning and Building Director Roberta Feliciano gave the staff report and overview of the biannual review of the Lagunitas Country Club (LCC) use permit review, noting the LCC has been in substantial compliance with conditions of approval. There were two complaints involving amplified music and use of the parking lot for valet parking; however, LCC acknowledged the complaints and responded to them, and staff recommends adoption of Resolution No. 2548.



Mayor McMillan opened the public comment period.

Baird Conner, President of the Board of Directors at LCC, introduced Brittany Anderson, Club Manager, said they want to say they are not unwilling to adhere to stipulations in the use permit and if they erred, they acknowledge that and will change their operations. They granted their neighbor valet access when he had a huge Halloween party, where he invited the entire town. They did not realize valet parking was against the use permit, but now know and they will make sure there is continuity and adherence to their use permit.

**Mayor Pro Tem Robbins moved, and Council Member Dowling seconded, to adopt Resolution No. 2548. Motion carried unanimously (5-0).**

**13. Town Council to receive a presentation from staff regarding the status of the implementation of the Town of Ross Facilities Master Plan.**

David Kelley, Project Manager, provided a PowerPoint presentation and overview of the second update of the Facilities Master Plan implementation progress with focus on update of costs, compliance with CEQA, and recent progress made with respect to addressing affordable housing planned as part of the Master Plan. He described cost options and concepts, architectural style, and said the Council chose Concept B as the preferred alternative, which he described and displayed. The implementation roadmap is phasing the project to prioritize the paramedic facility as well as the police building. Staff has worked with KPA on updating costs which they completed for the paramedic facility and the remaining cost estimates are in process. Staff asked that they provide cost estimates through 2030 so the Council can see the impact of cost escalation on the figures that were originally provided in 2023 numbers.

In terms of next steps, a Request for Proposals (RFP) for an environmental consulting firm will be brought to the Town Council for review. Once Council approves an agreement with a firm to conduct the environmental review, other key studies such as an updated traffic study, and consultation with local tribal and indigenous communities will need to be completed.

Regarding housing, Mr. Kelley then discussed a potential partnership with Cedars of Marin for permanent supportive housing for a long-term lease for use for housing. Staff has identified how the lease agreement can be structured to ensure units would be counted towards RHNA numbers and will obtain HCD approval on the model Cedars is proposing which will come to the Council for consideration, along with preparation of an exclusive negotiating agreement.

Regarding capital and operational costs associated with the fire station, their plan is to bring that forward on January 8<sup>th</sup>. In conclusion, the Facility Master Plan was based on strategic modernization of all facilities, with community input provided during the process, with the ultimate goal to prioritize public safety.

Council Member Salter referred to Concept B and the budget for it, he said there is a lot of money spent on site work and parking of almost \$6 million. If the Town is creating the space for the affordable housing developer, given there is a big piece of the budget relating to the Lagunitas intersection and paving, he asked if the developer could pay for site work costs.

Mr. Kelley agreed this is in line with staff's thinking. They need to do additional work on refining what their concept is so the Town has perspective on what improvements will be necessary to support the affordable housing project. An effort was made with respect to the cost estimates for the paramedic facility to take a portion of the total improvement costs for the facility. In response to whether staff would do this for each facility, Mr. Kelley said they will have to look specifically at how they do this because certain costs may not be attributable to one use or the other. Next steps include hiring an architect to help them with the design work and to help apportion site improvement costs to each of those uses.

Town Manager Johnson noted this project is 9 units and what is exciting is that Cedars of Marin is well-respected and local, and they do not think they will need to go out for tax credit financing. Also, in Concept B, housing has its own separate entrance, so people will not be going in and out of the new Laurel Grove intersection so it will be faster for paramedics and police to get in and out.

Council Member Salter said utilities, paving, sidewalks will be put towards creating the space for the developer and he believes it might be helpful to know some apportioned costs that might potentially go to a developer as a separate number.

Mr. Kelley said sidewalk improvements could be cut or the Town might build a sidewalk and entrance and then calculate the cost as a reimbursable cost by the developer. He referred to the tie-in for undergrounding work, he met with PG&E and Director Simonitch and their goal would be to have those timelines co-coordinated so undergrounding work is done and the Town can tie into that when buildings are being designed and ultimately constructed.

Council Member Salter referred to CEQA and asked for the timeline envisioned for the focused EIR. Town Attorney Stock said this is premature until the Town secures its environmental consultant and they move forward with scoping. He noted a one-year timeline is not unreasonable, and Mr. Kelley said the cost may be between \$100,000 to \$200,000 depending on the scope of work.

Council Member Salter lastly asked about financing for the project. Mr. Kelley said based on direction received from the Council, to the extent feasible it will be to phase this project with existing funding. That said, there is also acknowledgement that debt financing or some other method will be necessary. This will be part of the conversation as the project gets refined.

Town Manager Johnson noted the project was \$21 million two years ago, so at the January 8<sup>th</sup> meeting, the Council will receive updated information about costs which have increased. When the Council adopted the plan in June 2023, they directed her to move forward with phased implementation of Concept B. Therefore, the Town will work with an architect as to whether they can phase the project. This has become even more important because of the January 2029 deadline for the paramedic facility.

Mayor Pro Tem Robbins asked and confirmed with the Town Manager that the PowerPoint presentation can be added to the Town's website.

Mayor Pro Tem Robbins said the way the facility is designed now, she asked if it could be designed large enough to accommodate a fire engine to fit into it at some point in the future. Mr. Kelley said they can ask this question to the architect, factoring in how much more room would be needed to accommodate a fire truck, its requirements, and what type of truck. He noted the site is very constrained and likely something would need to move off the site if an apparatus bay were added which would result in more cost.

Mayor Pro Tem Robbins said she was unsure as to how this would get phased, and Mr. Kelley said it would be prioritizing in Phase 1 the public safety elements currently identified in the master plan, being the paramedic facility and police station. They would have to engage with the design team on how to implement a phased project against supporting an entrance, parking area to support the paramedic facility, and demolition of buildings while still operating during the phase.

Mayor Pro Tem Robbins referred to work with Cedars of Marin and asked if there were other options, such that the housing could be built for employees or teacher housing. Town Manager Johnson noted she has provided information to the Council via email and to the Mayor Pro Tem and the Mayor in person regarding staff discussions with Cedars representatives.

Mr. Kelley added that Cedars has reached out to the Town to discuss a potential partnership and the question is how this comports to RHNA and housing numbers, and everything he has found to date is consistent with the policies in the Housing Element. Ultimately, it is a Council decision as to whether to enter into an exclusive negotiating agreement or staff to pursue another avenue such as an RFP for interest. Because it is a relatively small project, they have heard it is difficult for developers to get full financing unless they are a non-profit entity like Cedars.

Town Manager Johnson added they met with David Hansen with Branson School before meeting with Cedars representatives and walked the site. He was enthusiastic about it being off campus housing for their staff and faculty. The Housing Element also identifies housing on Branson campus, so it was great to hear his interest. He did say, however, their focus is on building their athletic facilities and she met with Branson this past week with the Planning Director where they are raising funding to make improvements to their gym. Mr. Kelley has already started working on a draft RFQ for interested housing developers, and the Town could still receive Cedars with that and others. Tonight is to let the Council know that staff is trying to move forward with the many different layers of this project, and progress made regarding the housing aspect of it.

Council Members Dowling and Kircher thanked Mr. Kelley and the Town Manager for the progress made and for the report.

Mayor McMillan asked when an architect might be hired, and Mr. Kelley said he is preparing a RFQ/RFP for a design team to assist with the next phase. They put a pause on it because they are working on the Section 9212 Report and they wanted to have the meeting with County staff because part of the contract with the architect concerns what the procurement process will be, and there is a difference between traditional design/bid/build and progressive design, as well as a construction manager at risk, which he described. He stated the goal is to bring that forward in early 2026.

Council Member Kircher cited the structural engineering portion as very important as well as phasing development and not undermining other structures.

Mayor McMillan opened the public comment period, and there were no speakers.

Council Member Salter commented that he has trouble with the Civic Center project moving forward as a feasible project because of the acrimony in the town and potential for a vote to build the fire station. He thinks the Council should think about staff resources for a project that might be doomed, given they need a 2/3 vote.

Mayor McMillan said she is hopeful that after January 8<sup>th</sup> the Town will come together. She thinks there will be much more objective information presented and is hoping people come to that meeting with open ears and minds and listen instead of reading a lot of rhetoric that has been going on in town. Also, she is hoping the Council can explore alternative financing where if they are saving \$1 million a year, they can have a financing vehicle where they pay off \$1 million a year from excess tax revenue or something that does not entail a 2/3 vote.

**14. Town Council to discuss logistics related to the January 8, 2026 Town Council meeting.**

Town Manager Johnson outlined logistics for the January 8th Council meeting, noting the need to accommodate possible high attendance and potential remote participation. Ross School was unavailable and the Marin Art and Garden Center (Livermore Room) cannot support a Zoom hybrid meeting. She explained that limiting remote access could exclude participants with childcare, eldercare, or disability constraints.

Options include holding the meeting in Council Chambers with overflow space at the Livermore Room, using staff and an AV manager, or using the fire station bays (challenging due to noise and lack of heat). She noted outsourced providers could record or stream the meeting, but hybrid Zoom integration is costly and complex, with estimates of \$2,600–\$3,000 locally or potentially higher with outsourcing.

Council Members debated venue, remote participation, and cost. Mayor Pro Tem Robbins and Council Member Kircher preferred Marin Art and Garden Center with Zoom if feasible; Council Member Salter suggested and agreed to explore alternative providers and limiting costs to \$10,000. Council Member Dowling questioned timing and deadlines.

Mayor McMillan noted prior investment and value in accessibility, and Town Manager Johnson confirmed any extra costs would require a future appropriation in February.

Overall, the consensus was to aim for the January 8th meeting at MAGC as long as Zoom or hybrid participation can be arranged.

Mayor McMillan opened the public comment period.

Bob Herbst, President, Friends of Ross Firehouse, said he thinks Marin Art and Garden Center would be great to hold the meeting and said they are looking forward to presenting to the Council.

**End of Administrative Agenda.**

**There are no Public Hearings on Planning Projects – Part 2.**

**15. No Action Items: (Mayor)**

- a. **Council correspondence** – None.
- b. **Future Council items** – Mayor McMillan moved to agendize discussion of the locations for Narcan and AED defibrillators, and Council Member Kircher seconded the motion.
- c. **Council Member participation at the communication table at the Ross Post Office on the next Council meeting day** – Mayor Pro Tem Robbins and Council Member Dowling volunteered for January, pending weather conditions.

**16. Meeting Evaluation.**

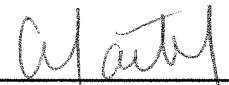
Town Attorney Stock reminded the Council to follow established rules and procedures, noting Council Members are not supposed to interrupt unless the Mayor stops the person who has the floor.

**17. Adjournment.**

The meeting adjourned at 11:05 p.m.

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Julie McMillan, Mayor

**ATTEST:**

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Cyndie Martel, Town Clerk