

SPECIAL MEETING of the ROSS TOWN COUNCIL  
MONDAY, OCTOBER 6, 2025  
*Held In-Person and Teleconference via Zoom*

**1. 3:00 p.m. Commencement.**

Mayor Julie McMillan (participating via Zoom from NYU Langone, Kimmel Pavillion, 424 E. 34<sup>th</sup> Street, 13<sup>th</sup> Floor Lobby, New York, NY 10016); 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. Councilmember Reports on Meetings and Conversations.**

None.

**4. Town Council consideration to adopt Resolution No. 2542 to:**

- a. Order preparation of an Elections Code Section 9212 Report evaluating the “Friends of Ross Firehouse” initiative measure;**
- b. Authorize the Town Manager to negotiate and execute agreements with appropriate consultants, including RSG, Inc., Citygate Associates, and Mary McGrath Architects, and other necessary consultants to assist with the preparation of the 9212 report;**
- c. Authorize an additional budget appropriation in an amount not to exceed \$85,000 to cover anticipated costs for consultant services.**

Town Manager Johnson presented a proposal for the Town Council to order a California Election Code Section 9212 Report evaluating the “Friends of Ross Firehouse” (FORF) citizen initiative. The measure seeks to prioritize rehabilitating or rebuilding the closed firehouse and staffing it at 2024 service levels. If passed, the initiative would amend the Ross Municipal Code and could only be changed by future voter approval.

The 9212 Report would analyze fiscal, land use, and service impacts and is due 30 days after the November 13th meeting—likely by December 11th. Consultants RSG, Inc., Citygate Associates, and Mary McGrath Architects would be hired to assist, with a proposed budget of \$85,000 from the Town’s undesignated funds. The Council may also expand the scope of the report or opt not to commission it, though doing so could leave voters and officials underinformed. Therefore, staff recommends adopting a resolution to proceed with the report, consultant agreements, and budget approval.

Council Member Salter questioned the need for a special meeting instead of addressing the issue at the regular Council meeting.

Town Manager Johnson explained the urgency stemmed from ensuring all five Council members are present, as one will be absent on Thursday, and due to procedural timing with signature verification for the initiative. The County Election Officer has 30 days to verify signatures, which are expected to be presented at the November 13th Council meeting.

Town Attorney Ben Stock added that the Election Code allows the Council to request the 9212 Report at any time, and starting early ensures consultants have adequate time. If signatures are not validated, the Town still pays for any consultant work completed.

Town Manager Johnson then clarified that the \$85,000 budget request is an allocation from the undesignated fund balance, not a guaranteed expenditure. Any unspent funds will return to the balance at the fiscal year's end.

In response to Council Member Salter's concern about the necessity of the report, given an existing 30-page FAQ document, Town Manager Johnson emphasized that the 9212 Report specifically analyzes the impacts of the initiative itself. The FAQ includes broader information and uses outdated consultant studies, such as the Mary McGrath report from 2019–2020, which now requires updating for accurate fiscal analysis.

Council Member Salter voiced concerns with noticing the public, transparency, and the inconvenience of a 3:00 p.m. meeting time. The Town Manager cited the Council's procedures and indicated she polled the Council as to their availability and all five members were available this date and time.

Mayor Pro Tem Robbins referred to the \$85,000 cost and confirmed the Town Manager is authorized to spend up to \$50,000. The amount of \$85,000 is what she would have available unless she returns to the Council for an additional appropriation. The Council could ask that something else be studied in this report that could be an impact of the citizens' initiative she may not have identified so it could affect costs.

Mayor Pro Tem Robbins asked if the Council will see the contracts or will the Town Manager enter into all contracts depending upon the Council's action to authorize her. Town Manager Johnson said if authorized, she will negotiate the contracts and scope of work, and provide copies to the Council.

Mayor McMillan asked how consultants could evaluate the design and cost elements of the FORF initiative when such details haven't been provided. Town Manager Johnson clarified that the 9212 Report will focus on the impacts of the ballot measure itself, not on any unofficial or undeclared plans from FORF. If FORF later submits design or cost information—such as a feasibility study reportedly being prepared by a consultant from Colorado—the Council could then direct staff to review it. In that case, additional expert input, such as from an architect, would be needed to provide a proper evaluation.

Mayor McMillan asked about the potential downsides of not commissioning the 9212 Report to save money. Town Manager Johnson responded that the main drawback would be the lack of independent, third-party analysis to inform the Council's decision-making once the initiative signatures are verified. Without the report, the Council would miss out on expert, objective evaluations that staff alone cannot provide. If the Council wants reliable, professional input on the initiative's impacts, she recommended authorizing contracts with the necessary consultants.

Council Member Dowling confirmed that the Council would have a third-party recommendation as well as more up-to-date information.

Council Member Kircher noted that the 9212 Report should focus on the cost of renovating the existing fire station, as the initiative prioritizes renovation over rebuilding. He asked what the renovation cost would be in addition to other costs.

Town Manager Johnson explained that determining the cost to renovate is essential since the initiative favors keeping the station in its current location. However, past studies indicate that renovation would be more expensive than rebuilding, and those cost estimates are now outdated (about five years old). If the station can't remain at its current site, the Town would face added costs such as acquiring new land and addressing land use, housing, and other impacts—further justifying the need for updated, expert analysis through the 9212 Report.

Mayor McMillan opened the public comment period.

Michael Rosenbaum clarified that the FAQ document was authored by Mayor McMillan and Mayor Pro Tem Robbins—not the Town Manager. He criticized the \$85,000 in unplanned consultant costs tied to the FORF initiative, arguing it is fair to ask the FORF organization to reimburse the Town for these expenses. He urged the Council to direct the Town Manager to formally demand that FORF pay any and all related costs within 30 days of notification, requested Council oversight of the BRW Architects fee proposal, asking how often and by what percentage the firm typically charges for additional services, recommended having Ross resident Dan Winey review any architectural contract, said he is currently opposed to the FORF initiative until they present concrete plans backed by binding agreements which he believes could take another 60–90 days, raised privacy concerns, questioned how FORF obtained access to the Town's email list, and for the Town Attorney to review the matter.

Moni Hussein said as a 5-year resident of Ross, he has seen his homeowners insurance increase, fire danger increase, and more will be needed in the future to fight fires. It seems prudent to him to carefully consider the impact of closing a fire station or to remain unable to fight their own fires and rely on their neighbors. He voiced interest in seeing what it could take to preserve firefighting and EMT capacities in Ross. If costs are concerned, spending \$85,000 before they know a measure will make the ballot does not seem the right move to him. Lastly, there is no parking when school gets out at 3:00 p.m.

Barbara Call, 8 Redwood Drive, said she was the only Ross resident present to look at what the Council presented in its master plan. She also toured the facilities and saw a lot of potential to refurbish rather than to destroy the fire station. FORF was formed because some members of the Council will not listen to them or to the public. No workshops were held and now the Council wants \$85,000 of taxpayers money to fight the taxpayers which does not make sense.

Mayor McMillan clarified that she and Council Member Kircher met twice with representatives of FORF.

Brian Saulman said he is a retired physician and strongly supports the proposal to obtain an outside independent objective expert analysis of the issues involving the Ross Fire Station. He believes this will provide valuable information, clarify facts, dispel misunderstanding, and specify areas that have not been specified at all up to today by the FORF.

Molly Gamble of 14 Norwood Avenue emphasized the Council's fiscal responsibility to clearly communicate firehouse project costs using a trusted, objective consultant like Citygate. She urged collaboration on improving public safety, noted longstanding community concern about fire response, and expressed interest in joining a task force. While acknowledging differing opinions, stressed shared goals, and pointed out the issue has been discussed for decades, with a unanimous 2021 vote marking slow but deliberate progress.

Katie Hoertkorn of 181 Lagunitas Road, drawing on her experience in governance and business, emphasized the urgent need for accurate cost data on the fire station, noting structural issues require a full rebuild. She warned that staffing limitations could impact operations and Ross could face triple the current fire service costs—around \$12 million in the first year—if operating independently. She strongly supported the need for the Citygate report to clarify the true financial impact.

A speaker referred to the Citygate study and asked how they would quantify the cost of someone losing their life without a fire station. She spoke about her cousin's fall into a pool who was rescued by paramedics and, thanks to the short amount of response time, her cousin is fine.

Mayor McMillan closed the public comment period and returned the item to the Council for deliberation.

Councilmember Dowling said the Town needs an objective and up-to-date report to share with all Ross residents and she supported adoption of the resolution. She thinks \$85,000 for clarity and objectivity is worth it so the Town can move on.

Mayor Pro Tem Robbins opposed the FAQ document due to its length, content, and omissions, and criticized the last-minute special meeting as lacking transparency. She emphasized the need for a fire engine in Ross to ensure timely emergency response and called the closure decision from five years ago misleading. While she supports funding a study focused solely on the cost of maintaining an independent fire station, she opposes additional spending and urged collaboration with the Friends of the Ross Firehouse to avoid duplicating efforts.

Council Member Kircher clarified that the Council's site plan involved extensive public input and that claims of avoiding engagement with Friends of the Ross Firehouse (FORF) are false—he personally met with their members and expressed interest in their ideas. He emphasized the need for accurate, updated cost data to assess the feasibility of an operational firehouse, especially since the initiative mandates one without identifying funding. He supports the \$85,000

study as a responsible step to inform voters, not oppose them, and believes it will enable constructive discussion and potentially save money. He reaffirmed his openness to collaboration and noted the urgency imposed by initiative deadlines.

Mayor McMillan expressed full support for commissioning the report, emphasizing the need for updated, objective information beyond what FORF has provided. She rejected the notion that the meeting was clandestine, noting the scheduling challenges and the importance of full Council participation. She confirmed prior meetings with FORF representatives and stressed the need for a shared understanding of facts, which the report could help establish.

She also clarified that the Town is committed to preserving the firehouse's architectural style and raised concerns about meeting affordable housing obligations if the fire station remains on site. She welcomed collaboration with FORF and suggested forming a task force to explore design and cost solutions together.

Mayor Pro Tem Robbins agreed on the importance of collaboration but emphasized that meetings should occur at the Town Council level, not in private. She stressed the need for public input and transparency, believing open discussions are essential for finding common ground and moving forward as a community.

Mayor McMillan suggested a citizens advisory task force that could advise on design separate from the Town Council.

Council Member Salter proposed agendaizing the citizens advisory task force meeting to better understand the division within the Town and the history behind it. As a new Council Member, he was surprised to learn that the Town spends \$2.7 million on fire services—over a quarter of its budget—despite representing only about 10% of the population, effectively subsidizing the RVFD by over \$1 million annually and criticized past leadership for neglecting building maintenance and signing poor contracts, resulting in deteriorated facilities and inflated costs.

He noted that in 2021, despite public pushback and questionable estimates, no vote occurred, and citizens felt unheard. His outreach to the Citizens to Support the Fire Station was rebuffed due to his Council role, reinforcing the public's sense of exclusion. He supports placing a measure on the ballot to let 2,500 residents' voices be heard, opposes spending \$85,000 on what he sees as a stall tactic, and advocates for fresh consultants and ideas. Ultimately, he believes the current \$21 million plan—which excludes a fire station and lacks the required 2/3 voter support—is flawed and unsustainable.

Mayor McMillan clarified that the Town has not been subsidizing RVFD for the past 13 years. Instead, a 2012 agreement set RVFD costs equal to what the Town was already paying to operate its own fire station. Since the station's closure, costs have dropped by over \$300,000, and the Town now pays less than Fairfax. She emphasized that JPA cost-sharing is complex and not based solely on population, and to claim otherwise ignores the realities faced by Ross and similar agencies.

As Mayor in 2020 and 2021, she emphasized that the Council held multiple public meetings, received input from over 300 residents, and even delayed decisions to accommodate community concerns. While efforts to raise private funds for a new fire station yielded only \$350,000 in pledges, experts advised that a station wasn't essential due to nearby coverage.

She added that there is a viable Plan B. Over \$12 million has been saved, allowing a phased project starting with the paramedics and police station. She rejected Council Member Salter's claim of failed leadership, stating the issue is complex and requires collaborative, not divisive, solutions. She concluded by calling for a motion to proceed with the Elections Report.

**Council Member Dowling moved Council Member Kircher seconded, to adopt Resolution No. 2542 to order preparation of an Elections Code Section 9212 Report evaluating the "Friends of Ross Firehouse" initiative measure; Authorize the Town Manager to negotiate and execute agreements with appropriate consultants, including RSG, Inc., Citygate Associates, and Mary McGrath Architects, and other necessary consultants to assist with the preparation of the 9212 report; and Authorize an additional budget appropriation in an amount not to exceed \$85,000 to cover anticipated costs for consultant services. Motion carried (3-2; Robbins and Salter opposed).**

**BREAK**

Mayor McMillan opened the public comment for Closed Session, and there were no speakers. She then called for a brief break at 4:25 p.m. and, thereafter, reconvened the meeting at 4:35 p.m.

**5. Adjourn to Closed Session**

The Council adjourned to Closed Session at 4:35 p.m. to discuss the following matter:

**CONFERENCE WITH LEGAL COUNSEL—ANTICIPATED LITIGATION**

**Significant exposure to litigation pursuant to Government Code Section 54956.9(d)(2):  
(1 potential case)**

**6. Town Council will return to open session and announce actions taken, if any.**

Mayor McMillan reconvened the special meeting and announced that no reportable action had been taken in Closed Session.

**7. Adjournment.**

The meeting adjourned at 6:30 p.m.

  
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Julie McMillan, Mayor

**ATTEST:**

  
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Cyndie Martel, Town Clerk