

# Closure of the Ross Fire Station and Rebuilding the Ross Civic Center

## Frequently Asked Questions

### PREAMBLE

On April 3, 2025, the Ross Town Council was asked to provide direction to the Town Manager regarding communication of the presentations and discussion of the March 13, 2025 Town Council agenda item concerning the provision of fire and emergency medical services in Ross. The Town Council directed two Councilmembers to work with the Town Manager to develop a Frequently Asked Questions and Answers document for publication to the community and for posting to the website.

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## I. CURRENT EMERGENCY SERVICES IN ROSS

### How are public safety services provided in Ross?

Throughout Marin County, emergency medical services and fire protection services are provided by firefighter/emergency medical technicians (EMTs) and firefighter/paramedics based on fire engines and ambulances. These resources are dispatched from a county-wide 911 Emergency Command Center. Ross’s fire engine-based services (emergency medical and fire protection) have been, and will continue to be, provided through the Ross Valley Fire Department (RVFD), even though there is no longer a fire engine based in Ross. The closest RVFD engine is located at Fire Station 19, in downtown San Anselmo; through mutual aid agreements, a closer engine is also available from the Kentfield Fire Protection District. Ambulance services are provided by the Ross Valley Paramedic Authority (RVPA). One of the two ambulances owned by the RVPA continues to be based in Ross. The Ross Police Department is also notified of emergencies.

### Who are the Emergency Service Providers for Ross?

**Ross Valley Fire Department (RVFD):** Since 2012, Ross has been a member of the Ross Valley Fire Department, along with Fairfax, San Anselmo, and Sleepy Hollow. The RVFD has been providing both emergency medical services as well as fire services to Ross residents (along with mutual aid services from fire departments in Kentfield, Central Marin, San Rafael, and others); these services will continue. All firefighters are either EMTs or paramedics. A fire engine is dispatched for all medical and all fire-related 911 calls.

**Ross Valley Paramedic Authority (RVPA):** Since 1983 Ross has been a member of the Ross Valley Paramedic Authority, along with Fairfax, San Anselmo, Sleepy Hollow Fire Protection District, Larkspur, Kentfield Fire Protection District, some unincorporated areas in the Ross Valley, and Corte Madera. One of RVPA’s two paramedic ambulances, Medic 18, staffed with two paramedics has been based in Ross since 1983. Medic 18, which serves the Ross Valley, will continue to be based at the Ross Civic Center and will continue to be dispatched, along with a fire engine, to medical emergencies. If the Ross-based ambulance is out on a call, the nearest available ambulance and fire engine with an EMT or paramedic will be dispatched to the incident.

**Ross Police Department:** The Ross Police Department provides emergency services to Ross residents; the Ross Police will remain in Ross and these services will continue. Mutual

aid services will also continue to be provided by Central Marin Police, Fairfax Police, Marin County Sheriff, San Rafael Police, College of Marin Police and other departments in the County.

## **II. KEY DATES**

### **When did the Ross Town Council decide to close the Ross Fire Station?**

In March 2021, the Ross Town Council voted unanimously to close the Ross Fire Station. This decision was made after several years of careful analysis, expert input, broad community engagement (three public meetings, a workshop, a questionnaire, FAQs, and a website), and robust deliberations, and included the exploration of private fundraising. The possibility of closing the fire station had been considered by the Ross Town Council in 2005 and again in 2013.

### **When did the Ross Fire Station close?**

The Ross Fire Station closed on July 1, 2025. This date was selected after the Ross Valley Fire Department (RVFD) developed eight options and held many meetings during 2021 to ensure fire services and emergency medical services remain excellent in the Town of Ross and throughout the Ross Valley. In January 2022, the RVFD Board, which includes two Ross Town Council members, and each of its members (the towns of Ross, San Anselmo, and Fairfax, along with the Sleepy Hollow Fire Protection District), unanimously approved closing the Ross Fire Station on July 1, 2025, as reflected in the Third Amendment to the RVFD Joint Powers Agreement (JPA). Also approved were plans to relocate the firefighters based in Ross to other RVFD stations in San Anselmo (Station 19) and Fairfax (Station 21).

## **III. REASONS TO CLOSE THE FIRE STATION**

### **Why did the Ross Town Council decide to close the Ross Fire Station?**

The decision to close the Ross Fire Station was based on several factors:

- A. The Ross fire station is no longer needed for fire protection services and emergency medical services since these services can be provided by nearby fire stations. The volume of working fire incidents in Ross is extremely low (three total over 2017 and 2018, based on the most recent deployment study for fire services). According to Marin County Fire Chief Jason Weber, who served as the RVFD Chief from 2019-2023, the Ross fire station is a remnant of Ross's volunteer fire department from the last century. There are two fire stations in close proximity to Ross:

- Kentfield Fire Protection District Station 17 is 0.3 miles from the Ross border and .6 miles from Ross Town Hall.
- RVFD's San Anselmo Station 19 is 0.6 miles from the Ross border and 1.1 miles from Ross Town Hall.

Additionally, all Marin fire departments operate under mutual aid agreements and respond to fire, emergency medical, and other incidents, regardless of jurisdiction.

- B. The paramedic ambulance will remain in Ross and will be available for most medical calls.** There are more medical emergency incidents than fire incidents in Ross. The Council's and residents' highest priority has been to keep Medic 18 in Ross, where it has been for 45 years. The 2024 Citygate study confirmed that Ross remains the ideal location for Medic 18 in the Ross Valley.

Paramedics receive a higher level of medical training (one – two years more) than EMTs. Paramedics at Ross Medic Station 18 are trained to perform advanced medical procedures, including taking the lead in emergency situations, engaging in more complex patient care and in-depth patient assessment, providing intensive patient care, and administering Advanced Life Support. The RVPA ambulance based in Ross will continue to be dispatched, along with a fire engine, for all medical emergencies. When the RVPA ambulance is not available (out on another call), then the nearest available ambulance will be dispatched along with the nearest available fire engine. Jason Weber, RVPA Executive Officer and Marin County Fire Chief, expects that the RVPA ambulance will be available in Ross for 79% of calls.

- C. The Ross fire station is functionally and structurally outdated.** Public safety personnel have considered the Ross police and fire stations, which also house Medic 18, to be in the worst physical and functional condition in Marin County. *See Appendix A for specific information regarding the condition of these essential facilities.*

- D. Ross realizes significant savings by closing its fire station:** Besides saving the cost of constructing a new station, approximately \$14,000,000-\$17,500,000, the Town will also have lower annual operational costs for fire services. Effective July 1, 2025, Ross will be credited annually in savings from lower personnel costs resulting from the closure of the Ross fire station. In July 2025, Ross was credited \$332,000. In addition, Ross will no longer need to pay for ongoing maintenance of its fire station. Instead, Ross will be contributing 27% of the capital repairs and building maintenance costs for Station 19 in San Anselmo. For 2025-26, this is budgeted at \$4,050.

E. Lack of financial support from Ross residents: Based on discussions in 2020 and 2021, it seems unlikely that Ross residents would support additional funding for rebuilding a fire station. After extensive outreach to Ross residents, the December 2020 questionnaire of Ross residents, with 336 responses, showed only 45% supported paying the additional cost to rebuild the Ross Fire Station. These results indicated a ballot measure to fund a fire station construction would fall far short of the required 2/3 majority. Private fundraising efforts were unsuccessful, securing only about \$350,000 in pledges.

F. Additional information about fire station locations:

If one were deciding where to build a fire station today, Ross would not be considered due to the close proximity of the Kentfield and San Anselmo stations. Modern fire stations are also not sited next to creeks with seasonal flooding such as the Ross site.

Since 1980, the City of Belvedere has not had a fire station or an ambulance. Belvedere closed its fire station and converted it into a community center. Belvedere receives fire and emergency medical services from Tiburon Station 11 (3,134 feet from the Belvedere Town Hall; the difference between the Kentfield Fire Station and Ross Town Hall is 3,650 feet) and ambulance services from Tiburon Station 12, which is 2.9 miles away.

#### **IV. RECENT ENHANCEMENTS TO FIRE AND EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES**

**Since 2021, how have fire and emergency medical services improved?**

Fire and emergency medical services have improved in the following ways:

A. Keeping Medic 18 in Ross: The Town of Ross is currently drafting an 8-year lease with the RVPA to ensure Medic 18 remains in Ross. The lease will include a provision that requires RVPA to provide the Town of Ross with response data, allowing the parties to make any necessary adjustments. The RVPA is also in the process of enhancing its legal documents to strengthen the agency and increasing capacity to ensure continued robust service.

B. Increasing staffing on RVFD engines: For many years, RVFD was the only fire department in Marin County with a two-person engine company; all other Marin fire departments have three-person staffing on fire engines, which is the current county standard. A three-person engine significantly improves the response to a fire or medical emergency, improves firefighter safety and operational effectiveness. On July 1, 2025, with the closure of the Ross Fire Station, the relocation of firefighters in

Ross to other RVFD Stations has allowed RVFD staffing to increase to three people to an engine. This provides more resources to every incident, enhancing structure firefighting and safety for firefighters. A three-person engine also provides faster patient access and patient removal start time, improving medical care by EMTs or paramedics on routine incidents.

- C. Opening the Emergency Command Center: In 2024, a new centralized Emergency Command Center opened in San Rafael. The Emergency Command Center, operating 24 hours 7 days every week, centralizes dispatch for all fire and emergency medical services across Marin, sending the most appropriate resources.
- D. Assisting with emergency medical calls by Ross Police: The Ross Police Department is notified about emergencies so they may assist with cardiac arrests, choking and bleeding incidents. Ross police officers are trained in cardiopulmonary resuscitation, automated external defibrillators, and basic first aid.
- E. Continuing mutual aid agreements: All Marin fire agencies have mutual aid agreements enabling a full response of the 35 engines and 13 ambulances from all agencies available to support any incident in the County. For example, on March 16, 2025, five fire agencies (RVFD, Kentfield, Central Marin, San Rafael, and Marin County Fire) responded quickly to a garage fire in Ross and worked collaboratively to extinguish the fire and limit damage.
- F. Preparing for wildfires, led by Marin Wildfire: Starting in 2020, Marin Wildfire has worked to make Marin County safer and more prepared for wildfires, investing more than \$20,000,000 annually countywide, including a total of \$564,000 in the Town of Ross. Marin is the best prepared county for wildfires in California.
- G. Enhancing evacuations: Emergency officials use AlertMarin to provide critical information and potentially life-saving instruction. AlertMarin is managed by the Marin County Office of Emergency Management (OEM). The Ross Police Department oversees evacuations and, along with the OEM, has the authority to issue evacuation orders via AlertMarin. In 2023, Marin Wildfire completed an Evacuation Ingress/Egress Study to understand and reduce the risks associated with evacuation routes in Marin County. Marin Wildfire and partner agencies, including the Ross Police Department, are using the study's data to produce near-term community benefits.

## **V. RESPONSE TIMES FOR FIRE AND PARAMEDICS**

### **With the closure of the Ross Fire Station, will there be a difference in fire or paramedic response time?**

Per the 2019 Citygate report, closing the Ross Fire Station will increase fire engine travel time by a minimum of 2 minutes, to 9 minutes, 55 seconds; this is similar to the response time in an edge suburban area. The increase in travel time might be somewhat less than two minutes if the fire engine is dispatched from the Kentfield Fire Station; travel time from the Kentfield Fire Station wasn't considered in the Citygate report.

For medical calls, since Medic 18 will remain in Ross, the response time for the majority of calls will be unchanged at 7 minutes, 55 seconds, provided that the Medic 18 ambulance is not out on another call. A longer response time may occur when Medic 18 is out on another call, in which case the Emergency Command Center would send the closest and most appropriate first responders, including a fire engine from San Anselmo Station 19 staffed with a trained EMT and/or paramedic. When available, Ross Police (trained in cardiopulmonary resuscitation, automated external defibrillators, and basic first aid) would also provide a response.

### **What is the effect of a two-minute longer response time for a fire or medical emergency?**

For a fire, there is the potential for structure fires to have further interior loss, but the fire would likely remain within the building of origin. For wildland fires, a minimal effect on the outcome would be expected, as additional regional staffing would be provided on days of higher risk, such as during red flag warnings.

For most medical calls, the slightly longer response time would not be expected to affect the outcome.

## **VI. FIRE INSURANCE AND WILDFIRES**

### **Will the closure of the Ross Fire Station adversely affect property insurance coverage in Ross?**

No. Insurance companies use analytics providers such as the Insurance Services Office (ISO) to help determine risks with insuring residential properties. One factor ISO considers is a residence's distance from a fire station, with 5 miles or more viewed as a negative. With the Ross Fire Station closure, no change is expected to the RVFD's ISO rating because no residence will be more than 5 miles from a fire station.



**If there is a major wildfire in Marin and Ross, what is the effect of not having a fire station in Ross?**

One fire station will not make a difference during a wildfire. Typically, wildfires generate a broad regional response, and the quality of response is more contingent on the size of the responding force (personnel and equipment) than the locations of individual fire stations. In recent years, the regional response has been proactively organized and coordinated during red flag warnings, which the National Weather Service issues about three days in advance, and other high-risk fire events with additional staff and fire engines placed strategically throughout the County to respond to potential incidents. Resources in Marin County during red flag warnings involve increasing additional fire resources and personnel, and the level of staffing depends on the severity of the red flag warning. These additional resources include up to 10 engines countywide; hand crews; bulldozers; an incident management team; Emergency Command Center staffing; a 24-hour OEM alert and warning Duty Officer in the Emergency Command Center; and signs in designated areas posted by Ross police officers.

**Given the January 2025 Palisades and Altadena fires, is it still a good idea for Ross to not have its own fire station?**

Yes. When there is a wildfire in Marin, there will be a broad regional response, and one fire station will not make a difference. See the response above. RVFD carefully planned for the closure of the Ross Fire Station to ensure that fire services remain excellent.

In addition, the Town Council made the decision to close the Ross Fire Station in 2021 after several years of similar megafires starting in 2017.

Like other regions around the globe, California is experiencing more wildfires due to many factors: climate change; increasing temperatures; higher concentrations of rain leading to increased fuel load; hotter, drier weather; longer periods of drought; more than 100 years of fire suppression; and more people living in the wildland-urban interface.

To help prevent and reduce urban conflagrations, residents need to follow Marin Wildfire's recommendations, including increasing preparations, signing up for AlertMarin, evacuating early before an order, hardening homes and structures, and creating defensible space, especially in Zone 0. For further information, please visit [Marinwildfire.org](https://marinwildfire.org); [Firesafemarin.org](https://firesafemarin.org); [emergency.marincounty.gov/pages/alertmarin](https://emergency.marincounty.gov/pages/alertmarin)

## **VII. REOPENING A FIRE STATION IN ROSS**

### **Could the Town of Ross reopen the Fire Station with staffing provided by RVFD?**

It's possible but unlikely that the RVFD would agree to re-staff a fire station in Ross. The RVFD and its other three members (San Anselmo, Fairfax and Sleepy Hollow) do not have the financial resources to fund new firefighter positions for Ross. Any agreement to provide staffing for a new Ross fire station would likely require Ross to pay for those services, resulting in an increase in Ross's costs by millions each year.

### **Could the Town of Ross have its own independent fire department?**

It's possible, but a separate fire department would be extremely expensive to operate. The cost of an independent fire department could be as high as \$8,300,000, which is the annual budget for the Kentfield Fire Protection District, a one-station fire district. The Town of Ross currently pays approximately \$2,600,000 annually to receive fire services from the RVFD. The Town does not have excess revenue to cover the additional expense of operating an independent fire department. The additional approximately \$5,000,000 cost would have to be borne by Ross residents through an additional annual assessment that could be as high as \$6,000 per household and would need to increase in most subsequent years.

An independent fire department does not provide additional resources such as specialized training and equipment, or enhanced services to allow the handling of a broader range of emergencies and incidents. A single-station department may not attract candidates seeking advancement in a larger department, and retaining qualified personnel would be challenging. Setting up a single station fire department goes against the county-wide trend of consolidating fire services; for example, Mill Valley Fire Department joined Southern Marin Fire Protection District in 2023, and the City of Larkspur and Town of Corte Madera merged their fire departments in 2018 to form the Central Marin Fire Department.

## **VIII. THE TOWN OF ROSS'S PAYMENT TO RVFD FOR FIRE SERVICES**

### **What does Ross pay RVFD for fire services??**

After a year of negotiations, the Ross Town Council unanimously agreed to join the RVFD in 2012 and contribute 23.7% of the costs. This was based on Ross having 25% of the facilities and 25% of the firefighters, and included a slight reduction for an administrative fee, in recognition that Ross only had 10% of the population and structures, and 13.7% of the incidents, so Ross would be responsible for only 15% of the administrative costs.

This amount was “budget neutral” for Ross, meaning it was the same amount Ross had been paying to fund its separate fire station and department.

In addition, the merger was projected to generate cost savings of \$110,000 annually for the Town of Ross because it would no longer need its own fire chief or a contract for services for a Battalion Chief. It was also projected to save Ross money through reduced overhead costs, overtime, and the elimination of Social Security contributions. Further, the merged department would reduce duplication of effort in program administration, provide advancement opportunities for Ross fire personnel, and improve services for residents.

Ross pays 23.37% of the costs of the RVFD. San Anselmo pays 40.53%; Fairfax pays 23.3%; and Sleepy Hollow pays 12.8%. To modify the cost allocation arrangement, RVFD requires unanimous consent from the four members. The RVFD JPA requires the cost allocation to be reviewed every three years to consider the member agencies’ relative population sizes, number of structures, assessed values, service calls, or other relevant factors. In 2026, the cost allocation will be reviewed again.

Importantly, under the JPA agreement, each member is responsible for costs to maintain (and rebuild) their fire station. By not rebuilding the Ross Fire Station, Ross is saving approximately \$14,000,000 - \$17,500,000.

## **IX. ENGINES FROM THE ROSS FIRE STATION**

### **What happened to the old Ross Fire Engine 18?**

In July 2025 a majority of the Town Council voted to allow RVFD to sell Engine 18 at auction with proceeds of the sale returning to the Town of Ross. The Town of Ross purchased Engine 18 in 2006, before Ross joined RVFD in 2012. Engine 18 is twenty years old, the oldest engine in RVFD’s fleet and well past its useful life, with significant maintenance and repair issues. The RVFD Fire Chief determined that Engine 18 was no longer reliable to serve as an operating emergency vehicle.

### **What happened to the other fire engine housed at Station 18?**

The newer engine is owned by RVFD and was moved to San Anselmo Station 19 to be used as a reserve when first run engines are in the repair shop.

## **X. THE NEED TO ADDRESS OTHER TOWN FACILITIES**

### **Does the Town also need to rebuild and reconfigure other Civic Center facilities?**

Yes. In addition to the police station and a paramedic station to house Medic 18, the Town needs better facilities to house the administrative, planning and public works functions. Currently, departments are physically separated across the Civic Center, negatively impacting functional relationships and workflow. Housing the departments together will improve the public's access to Town facilities, staff's synergies, collaboration and working environment, and enhance recruiting, retention and service to the community.

The Portable: Since 2016, the Planning and Building Department, along with the Public Works Director, have been housed in a portable located behind Town Hall at the southwest corner of the Ross Civic Center site. The portable was intended to be temporary and an "interim solution to the Town's office space challenges." It has now been at the Civic Center for nearly ten years. The public has difficulty finding the portable because it is behind other buildings and not visible from Sir Francis Drake Boulevard or Lagunitas Road. Parking is limited and difficult to navigate. The portable has limited counter area for customers and no private meeting rooms to discuss development issues with staff.

Public Works Building: Currently the Public Works Building is isolated on the west of the Civic Center site. The Town needs to update the Public Works facility and move it closer to the other departments. The facility is obsolete, not ADA compliant and only of residential-grade construction. The facility, providing storage of all Town records and documents unrelated to Public Works operations, is inefficient and results in inadequate preservation of Town records. The entrance drive for deliveries located adjacent to the public works building is not usable by delivery trucks due to the steep slope and lack of vehicular turnaround clearance.

Space for Ross's Housing Element: The Town of Ross's Housing Element was certified in June 2024 by California's Housing and Community Development Department (HCD) after two years of careful work by staff and consultants, public participation, environmental review and multiple consultations with HCD. It cannot be changed, and noncompliance will result in steep fines and the loss of local control over development. The Housing Element depends on space at the Civic Center for nine affordable housing units with resident and guest parking and separate access from Sir Francis Drake Boulevard. This space only became available with the closure of the Fire Station, relocation of the Public Works facility and reconfiguration of the buildings at the Civic Center. The Town is obligated to facilitate the development of these nine units on this site and intends on partnering with a nonprofit housing organization to construct and operate the units.

## **XI. COSTS TO REBUILD FACILITIES**

**What is the cost to rebuild the fire and police stations, along with building new administrative space? What is the cost of the project if the fire station is not rebuilt (fire engines would be based in neighboring towns)?**

In 2020, including rebuilding the Fire Station, the project cost was estimated at \$28,400,000 in 2020 dollars by Mary McGrath Architects. If the project does not include a Fire Station, the cost was estimated at \$14,600,000 in 2020 dollars, a difference of \$13,800,000.

In June 2023, the Ross Town Council unanimously approved a Facilities Master Plan after more than a year of extensive outreach and consideration. The development of the Facilities Master Plan included a comprehensive analysis of the costs to design and construct the elements of the Facilities Master Plan. The costs to construct the project are approximately \$21,000,000 based on 2023 construction dollars. Construction costs industry wide have increased significantly since 2023 and the project's costs will be updated as the Town enters the design phase in 2026.

**Why are the projected public facility building costs so much higher than home or commercial construction costs?**

A publicly funded building requires many more significant costs for planning, design, and construction than a home or commercial building, including:

- The 1986 Essential Services Act (ESA) obligates the Town to adhere to more stringent seismic design requirements including larger footings, more rebar, seismic strapping, and more geotechnical work
- Labor compliance laws requiring construction workers to be paid “prevailing wage”; Marin County’s rates are among the highest in California
- Significant specialty systems, equipment, and furniture
- Sustainable design and increased energy conservation measures
- Reconstruction of the frontage along Sir Francis Drake and the driveway entries, including realignment of the driveway with Laurel Grove Avenue, to improve circulation, layout, and safety, including revised traffic signalization and undergrounding overhead utilities
- Demolition and hazardous material removal
- Temporary facilities for staff and emergency equipment during construction
- CEQA review
- Retaining the Spanish Colonial Revival style architecture, as preferred by residents to match Town Hall

- Cost escalation on cost estimates, since construction will not occur for a few more years
- Financing and legal fees to fund the facilities

**San Anselmo and Fairfax are currently remodeling their fire stations. Why are those projects so much cheaper than the cost of a new Ross Fire Station?**

As currently planned by their respective Town governments, San Anselmo Station 20 and Fairfax Station 21 are remodeling to address deferred maintenance and the residential portions of their facilities to accommodate RVFD firefighters who relocated from the Ross Fire Station and increased staffing of three firefighters to an engine.

Unlike what would be needed for a new Ross Fire Station, the changes to Station 20 and 21 are primarily addressing residential space. The Station 21 project does not reconfigure the layout, upgrade the circulation, or rebuild the core of the stations. The Station 21 project does not rebuild engine bays nor raises them out of the flood plain. The Station 20 project raises the living quarters out of the flood plain but not the engine room. Neither project undergirds utilities. Only Station 20 requires temporary facilities for staff or equipment during construction. Neither project needed expensive CEQA environmental impact reports.

## **XII. REMODELING THE FACILITIES INSTEAD OF REBUILDING THEM**

**Can we renovate the facilities instead of rebuilding them?**

No, renovation is not feasible. The Town needs modern, fully functioning facilities for police, Medic 18, and administrative staff that will last for the next 75-100 years. The Town needs to improve the Civic Center's layout and circulation to enhance safety and for faster response. It needs to provide facilities to improve staff's working environment, collaboration and service to the community. In addition, the Town of Ross's certified housing element relies on the newly available space at the civic center for nine units of affordable housing that will be constructed by a nonprofit organization.

Renovating the existing police and fire station buildings to ESA and Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) flood requirements would cost more than demolishing the buildings and constructing new buildings. Renovating would not remedy the issues with the existing floor plans, parcel constraints, or circulation issues. *See Appendix B for specific information regarding professional assessments published regarding the facilities since the early 2000's.*

There are also many significant physical site constraints and building footprint issues that make remodeling imprudent.

- The fire station layout, assembled over time, is poor
- Fire and paramedic bays are at the back of the site, away from quicker access to Sir Francis Drake Boulevard
- The fire station is inefficiently sited on a parcel which lacks depth due to the creek behind the buildings
- Site traffic circulation for vehicles and people is not safe
  - Fire stations require a clear and unimpeded path of travel for apparatus and support vehicles to and from the site
  - Administrative staff and public vehicles that enter and exit the civic center campus create circulation and parking conflicts as well as safety concerns
  - The site is constrained
  - Safety vehicle access should be separated from other vehicles
  - The driveway should be realigned with Laurel Grove Avenue
- There is no secure parking for police vehicles
- There is a known flood risk. The fire station's apparatus bays in the back of the site were flooded during the 2005 flood, compromising the use of the entire fire station as a public safety building which under FEMA must operate under emergency conditions for 72 hours following an emergency event. The fire station would need to be raised above the 500-year flood level, and the paved areas around the site would require significant reconstruction to meet the new elevated grades of the apparatus bays and fire station.

### **XIII. COST SAVINGS AND FUNDING OF FACILITIES**

#### **How much will Ross save by closing its fire station?**

In addition to saving approximately \$14,000,000 to \$17,500,000 in construction costs related to building a new fire station, the Town will also have lower annual operational costs for fire services. Effective July 1, 2025, Ross will be credited annually in savings from lower personnel costs resulting from the closure of the Ross Fire Station. In July 2025, Ross received a \$332,000 credit.

In addition, Ross will not need to pay for ongoing maintenance of its fire station. It will only need to contribute 27% of the capital repairs and building maintenance costs for Station 19 in San Anselmo. For 2025-26, this is budgeted at \$4,050.

### **How will the Civic Center project be funded?**

The Town's current budget shows that by June 2026 the Town Council will have saved \$12,000,000 towards the civic center project. Large capital improvements often need funding from new taxes. Any taxes or assessments would require a 2/3 voter approval. The Town Council has not determined which method of tax or assessment would be used to finance the facilities. The Town Council will consider financing options when the facilities have been designed with an associated cost estimate.

### **Could the current Ross Public Safety Parcel Tax help fund the construction project?**

No. Ross residents currently pay a Public Safety Parcel Tax that generates 18% of the funds needed to pay the annual operational costs of providing police and fire services. This tax was renewed by Ross voters in 2024 and is in effect through 2035. A separate facilities tax measure would be necessary to fund capital improvements and would need 2/3 voter approval.

### **Is there a “no tax” option?**

It is unlikely that the complete civic center construction project can proceed without additional financial support from Ross residents. The buildings housing public safety personnel and equipment are in such a state of obsolescence and disrepair that further delay in addressing this issue could jeopardize the Town's ability to provide these services.

## **XIV. WHY HAS IT TAKEN SO LONG TO ADDRESS THE TOWN'S FACILITIES?**

### **Why has it taken so long for the Town to address the civic center facilities?**

For decades, the Town has repeatedly attempted to address the poor conditions of the fire and police stations, along with facilities for administrative staff. These efforts have been interrupted many times by other events, such as the December 2005 flood, exploring fire services consolidation, turnover of Town Managers, changes in members serving on the Council, and the need to address other pressing Town matters. Below are some of the major milestones:

- In 1981, 44 years ago, the Ross Town Council began discussing the poor building conditions for the volunteer firefighters
- In 1983, the Town completed a minor remodel on the Fire Station's sleeping rooms, kitchen and bathrooms (at a cost of approximately \$18,000)



- In 1984, the Ross Town Council rejected consolidating Ross fire services with Ross Valley or Kentfield, because “any long-term plan with either fire department would cost Ross taxpayers more money”
- In 2005, after the firefighters had moved out of the Fire Station to sleep in a portable, the Town Council considered a facilities needs assessment led by Dan Winey, a Ross resident and prominent, experienced Gensler architect; this assessment was based on the Town closing the Fire Station and converting it to office space for staff
- Shortly after the December 31, 2005 flood, the Town Council discussed whether to remodel or rebuild the facilities
- The Town’s General Plan, adopted in 2007, had as a high priority addressing the Town’s facilities for police, fire, and staff by 2010
- In 2008, the Town Council included as a goal the Civic Center development plan
- In April 2010, Mack5, who had just completed the Kentfield Fire Station, presented a conceptual cost estimate for the facilities, estimating that remodeling would cost approximately \$200,000 more than building a new facility; the estimate was based on the 2005 facilities needs assessment
- In June 2010, the Council discussed the public facilities, based on Councilmember Cahill’s goal to study the Town’s public facilities
  - Fire Chief Tom Vallee described the Fire Station as “held up by termites”
  - Mack5 estimated a new, 13,000 square foot building for fire, police and staff would cost approximately \$10,200,000
  - Mack5 proposed realigning the fire station’s driveway with Laurel Grove
  - Council discussed the need to raise the facilities out of the 100-year floodplain
  - They also contemplated consolidating fire services with other neighboring jurisdictions, and potentially eliminating the need for the Fire Station
  - Kathy Strauss, Ross resident and highly respected architect, developed a conceptual schematic for new public safety facilities, retaining the historical character of the existing building
  - Council agreed to form a Citizens’ Committee to advance the facilities project, with the goal of completing construction by 2013
- In October 2013 at its annual strategic workshop, and after Ross had joined RVFD in 2012, the Council discussed the public safety facilities
  - The Citizens’ Committee was never formed, and no progress had been made to address the facilities
  - The current building, physically and functionally obsolete, needs major repair and renovation to meet current public safety facility requirements to provide modern public safety services

- The first floor of the building is below the 100-year floodplain
- There is a significant amount of facility deferred maintenance, and the design is not up to current public safety standards
- There has been no real annual investment in the building to keep it up to minimal standards

In 2019, the RVFD commissioned a standards of coverage assessment from Citygate to provide a foundation for future fire service planning. In 2020, the Town Council began discussing which facilities the Town should update to serve the community efficiently and professionally. A high-level conceptual site plan and cost estimates for various options were developed and presented by Mary McGrath Architects, who specializes in public safety and civic buildings.

### **WHERE CAN I FIND MORE INFORMATION?**

Detailed presentations by Jason Weber (RVPA Executive Officer, Marin County Fire Chief and former RVFD Chief), Dan Mahoney (RVFD Chief), and Mark Brown (Marin Wildfire Executive Officer) were made during the March 13, 2025, Ross Town Council meeting. Please click on the following link which opens the Town of Ross website. Links included on the website are to the meeting recording, slide deck and staff report (with more than 20 supporting documents) and meeting minutes:

<https://www.townofrossca.gov/towncouncil/page/march-13-2025-town-council-discussion-and-presentations-regarding-provision-fire>

## **APPENDIX A – CONDITION OF ROSS FACILITIES**

Information regarding why Ross public facilities are in the worst condition of any in Marin County and must be replaced:

- They were built in 1927, nearly a century ago
- They are physically and functionally obsolete, with significant structural deficiencies
- They do not comply with the 1986 Essential Services Act (ESA), which establishes stringent requirements for public safety building construction
- In 2020, the north wing of the Fire Station was closed off at the recommendation of the Ross Building Department due to its deteriorated conditions, including exposed electrical outlets and wiring, wall studs, and floor joists, excessive water damage, and visible mold
- The bays at the front of the Fire Station are too small for today's modern fire engines, and since 2017 have housed exercise equipment for emergency services personnel
- The three apparatus bays at the back of the site were built 30 years ago. They are located next to the creek and have experienced flooding. The bays are also not located close to Sir Francis Drake, which hinders public safety personnel from quickly exiting the site. Several times a year the engine and public safety vehicles must be relocated to higher ground due to the flooding risks at the civic center site
- The critical facilities are close to the creek, prone to flooding and need to be elevated above the 500-year flood plain per Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) rules. More specifically, the fire bays would need to be raised 8-1/2 inches
- New construction/renovation will require most of the facility to be compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)
- Modern fire and paramedic facilities are designed to create travel paths for personnel from living spaces to apparatus bays, ensuring faster response times
  - For 20 years, starting in 2005, firefighters in Ross slept in a portable not connected to the Fire Station due to their concerns regarding the conditions of the station's living quarters
- The police station was originally built as a house and was converted to the police station. The floor plan and construction are far below the standards for a modern police facility, and its conditions have been deteriorating for decades
- There are no facilities for paramedics to clean blood and other body fluids, increasing contamination risks of sinks and counters in living spaces (kitchen, bathrooms, etc.)
- The dilapidated buildings located close to the creek are a magnet for vermin. In November 2024, the Town spent over \$10,000 to address a rat infestation in the Fire Station

## **APPENDIX B – PROFESSIONAL ASSESSMENTS OF FACILITIES**

Information regarding professional assessments published regarding the facilities since the early 2000's:

The facilities were reviewed in the early 2000s by Dan Winey, Ross resident and now Chairman Emeritus of Gensler Architects, along with a structural engineer. Their work included opening walls to observe the condition of the substructure, and accessing below the structure into the crawl space to observe the existing structural condition of the foundation and framing. Mr. Winey concluded:

- The building does not meet any of the current codes and regulations, including those required of an essential facility as well as ADA regulations
- The structural framing is completely inadequate and extensive structural modifications are necessary, and foundation work is required
- The mechanical, electric, plumbing and the technology infrastructure require complete replacement

In 2010, Mack5 determined that the cost of remodeling the buildings would be more than constructing a new facility.

In 2016 and again in 2020, Construction and Development Solutions Inc. (CDS) conducted a Property Condition Assessment of the Town's facilities. CDS found that the cost of construction within the existing building footprint could easily equal that of a new ground up facility. Many building systems and components had a diminished level of integrity and capacity because they had exceeded their life expectancy and were also noncompliant with the ESA requirements for public safety constructions. CDS found:

- There is a lack of seismic upgrades at the foundation, in-fill construction, lack of floor girder connections and seismic concerns due to the irregular shapes of the buildings
- Most of the building's electrical and HVAC components are at the end of their useful life expectancy and need to be upgraded, requiring almost complete removal and replacement of these components
- The water system shows signs of corrosion and should be replaced
- Pests and organisms, termites, rodents, fungus, wood-eating beetles and other organisms have affected various areas of the site and structure
- In 2020, the north wing of the Fire Station was closed off due to its deteriorated conditions, including exposed electrical outlets and wiring, wall studs, and floor joists, excessive water damage, and visible mold

After inspecting the building again in June 2025, Dan Winey determined that the building had continued to deteriorate and was in much worse shape than it was 20 years ago. He strongly cautioned the Town to "avoid the risk and costs associated with complete renovation."