

THE MORNING AFTER

*Highlights from the
Ross Town Council Meeting
of March 11, 2010*

Volume 4, No. 5

March 12, 2010



*Town Manager
Gary Broad*

Public Pensions on Steroids

Council member Scot Hunter gave an informative overview last night of the Town retirement liability picture.

And it was good news and bad news. First, the town has a CalPERS shortfall, aka a side fund in CalPERS parlance, of \$107,927 for town hall employees and \$1,525,324 for fire and police employees. The public safety liability jumped by \$500,000 when the Town agreed to enhanced retirement for its public safety staff. This \$1.6 million shortfall is the bad news.

Ross also pays 37.835% for each dollar of public safety salary in PERS retirement costs and 17.273% of each town hall employee salary to PERS. The good news is the Town has built up reserves to over \$4.8 million dollars, approximately three times this liability – which is why the Council was discussing whether to pay off this liability. But our side fund liability will divert money that could otherwise have been used in the community for downtown improvements, office facilities, emergencies, etc. Read our entire report at www.townofross.org to learn more about public pensions on steroids.

Council Approves Temporary Outdoor Dining Area

The Council unanimously voted to allow Café on the Common to install a temporary eating and bike parking area in front of the café from April through November 2010. A raised wood deck will be installed flush with the sidewalk, and planters and trees will provide a buffer to the street. The eating and bike area will measure 8' x 20' and occupy one parking space.

Council members and residents enthusiastically supported the proposal and the opportunity to bring more business to the downtown merchants. Mayor Pro Tempore Scot Hunter noted that many bicyclists stop in San Anselmo and Fairfax on the weekends, and Ross merchants “should get a piece of the action.” If successful, the Town may consider a more permanent feature when the downtown plan improvements are made.



A temporary deck and bike parking area will be installed across from Cafe on the Common this spring.

Mayor Rick Strauss' Report

I'd like to thank the Public Works Department for the great work they've done installing new trees along Lagunitas Road and Shady Lane to re-establish our tree canopy.

Grants Available to Property Owners to Repair Private Sewer Pipes

District Manager Brett Richards gave a presentation on the Ross Valley Sanitary District (RSVD) which cleans, repairs and replaces sewer pipes and pumps for Ross and six other Ross Valley communities.

According to Richards, there are approximately 200 miles of public sewer mainline pipes in the Ross Valley and 200 miles of private sewer lateral lines that connect residences and businesses to the mainline. On dry weather days, about 5 million gallons of sewer water flows through the pipes, but during heavy rains as much as 40 million additional gallons of water can enter the system through pipe leaks. Tree roots in particular cause much damage to sewer pipes.

RSVD is tackling this problem by repairing public mainlines and providing grants to property owners to repair their private lateral lines. If you've noticed water draining slowly in your home, or if you have large trees or ground settling near your lateral line, you may have a damaged sewer pipe. Property owners may qualify for financial assistance for half the total repair cost, up to \$4,000. Contact RSVD at 259-2949 or visit www.rsvd.org for further information.



Ross School to Use Common for Temporary Multi-Purpose Room

The Council voted to allow the Ross School to continue to use a portion of the Ross Common for its school construction project through September 2011. The current encroachment permit expires July 31. The School will use the Common for a temporary multi-purpose room, physical education offices and restrooms and for project staging. The School will remove the majority of the existing classroom portables this summer and restore disturbed portions of the Common.

Election Process for Mayor and Mayor Pro-Tempore

Council member Cahill reviewed the 20-year history of the Town Council's election process for mayor and mayor pro-tempore and noted the Town had used the same procedure since 1990. The mayor always opens the election process to the council members, requests nominations and then conducts a vote, first for the mayoral position and then for mayor pro tempore. All nine communities in Marin that responded to a survey on their election process followed the same procedure as Ross. The previous mayor pro tempore was elected mayor in all 20 years.



Stormwater Ordinance Under Consideration

The Town Council, sitting as a Planning Commission, discussed new regulations to reduce stormwater runoff from new development. The draft ordinance would add stormwater management design guidelines and building regulations and a stormwater management plan requirement for projects valued over \$250,000. Stormwater management plans would be designed, at a minimum, to produce no new net increase in peak runoff from the site as compared to pre-project conditions.

New design review guidelines are intended to reduce the use of impervious materials, minimize building footprints and lot coverage, protect and restore native site vegetation, and encourage runoff infiltration and the use of stormwater retention controls. Town staff also introduced a revised planning application form that requires information on impervious surface area and a preliminary drainage plan.

Council members expressed concern about adding additional development costs to projects and agreed to further consider the \$250,000 valuation threshold. The Council also wants the ordinance to distinguish between remodels and new construction projects and to provide the building official with discretion to waive requirements as appropriate. Staff will revise the draft ordinance and return to Council for further discussion.

Shady Lane Intersections to be Improved

The Council discussed recommendations from Parisi Associates, transportation consultants, to improve three Shady Lane intersections and agreed to implement some of the recommendations. At the Ames Avenue intersection, the Council agreed with the consultant's recommendation to add a new crosswalk on Shady Lane and relocate existing stop signs and pavement markings. Since the new Shady Lane crosswalk must have an Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)-compliant connection with the pathway, the Council agreed to pursue its preferred alternative to raise the pathway to street level.

After studying the Locust Avenue intersection, the traffic engineer determined multi-way stop control was not warranted according to the California Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices. Accident rates, traffic delays, and vehicular, bicycle and pedestrian volumes are not sufficiently high enough to justify the multi-way stop signs. Instead, the Council agreed to install signs on Shady Lane advising motorists to slow down and warning them about the narrow bridge and blind intersection.

Council Discusses Adding Town Engineer

The Council discussed hiring a full-time Town Engineer and agreed to interview candidates while further reviewing the timing involved in adding the new position. Town Manager Gary Broad and Public Works Director Mel Jarjoura recommended a full-time Town Engineer now to oversee a number of construction projects the Town will undertake in the next two years, including the Lagunitas Road Bridge replacement, Sir Francis Drake Boulevard roadway overlay, intersection and pathway improvements, Downtown Plan improvements, and new or remodeled town offices. The Town Engineer would be expected to replace Public Works Director Jarjoura once he retires in December 2011.



Council Discusses Unfunded Pension Liabilities

Mayor Pro Tempore Scot Hunter reported on the Town's employee pension plans and the current \$1.63 million unfunded pension liability.

The Town provides for a CalPERS pension plan for its employees. Police officers receive 3% of their highest single year salary for each year of service upon reaching retirement age of 55. Thus, a police officer who has worked for 30 years would receive 90% of his salary as a pension. Firefighters can receive nearly 100% of their highest single year salary after 30 years. Other Town employees receive 2% of their highest 3-year average salary for each year of service after attaining retirement age at 55. All retired employees receive a 2% annual increase in pension payments.

Currently, the Town has a pension plan fund deficit of nearly \$1.53 million for public safety personnel and \$108,000 for other Town employees. This fund deficit is the result of previously negotiated enhanced retirement benefits – for example, \$500,000 was added to the Town's pension liability when it agreed in 2004 to increase retirement benefits for police and fire safety personnel from the 2%@50 plan to 3%@55. Once the deficit is paid off, the debts will not reappear unless the Town chooses to add new retirement benefits in the future.

The Town is paying CalPERS 7.75% interest on this outstanding balance, although it is also making regular payments to pay off the entire debt by 2023. The Town's \$4.8 million reserves are currently earning a return of about 1.5%. Thus, paying off the \$1.63 million liability would net the Town about \$103,000 in FY2010-11.

The Council agreed to wait to see how much the Town will spend on new or remodeled Town facilities before determining the amount the Council felt the Town could afford to pay down. The Council will also determine at that time how much money needs to remain in the reserve accounts. In the meantime, the Council agreed to include the unfunded liability as a line item in its financial statements.

Council Opposes Ballot Initiative Aimed at Marin Energy Authority

The Council unanimously approved a resolution opposing the “New Two-Thirds Vote Requirement for Local Public Electricity Providers” initiative that will appear on the June 8, 2010 ballot. The constitutional amendment would require local governments to obtain two-thirds voter approval before expanding electricity service or establishing a community choice aggregation program, such as Marin Clean Energy, if any public funds or bonds are involved.

Retrofit Bay Area

The Council approved a resolution authorizing the County of Marin to accept a \$10.75 million grant award to start up a regional energy efficiency program known as “Retrofit Bay Area.” The program’s goal is to retrofit 15,000 homes in the Bay Area to achieve reductions in residential energy consumption. Approximately 600 homes in Marin County are expected to be retrofitted through the program. Grant funds will be used to develop outreach and marketing campaigns to educate residents about available financing and rebates for energy efficiency measures, and to provide contractors with training and incentives for program participation.



New technologies like this LED overhead light fixture can reduce energy use by as much as 80%.



Planning Application Scoreboard

The Town Council took the following action on planning applications considered at last night’s Council meeting. For more information on each planning application, you can view staff reports [here](#). The minutes of this meeting will be available on the website at www.townofross.org after approval at the April Council meeting.

Senior Planner Elise Semonian

Address	Applicant	Approved	Denied	Continued
29 Upper Road	Stuart and Sara Ryan			

Upcoming Town Meetings

The final Hillside Lot Ordinance Review public workshop will be on Tuesday, March 23, from 7:30-9 p.m. at Town Hall. Community members are strongly encouraged to attend!

The next regular Council meeting is scheduled for Thursday, April 8, at 6:30 p.m., however alternate dates may be considered. Agendas and staff reports are posted in advance of the meetings on the town’s website at www.townofross.org.

The Morning After is published following each regular Council meeting by The Town of Ross and is written by Project Planner Christine O’Rourke and edited by Town Manager Gary Broad with support from Linda Lopez. The newsletter is not an official record of the meeting’s proceedings and does not cover all agenda items. No portion of this newsletter may be copied, reproduced or reprinted without advance written permission from the Town of Ross.