

The Future Use of Our Land

Goal 8

A Beautiful, Safe and Close-Knit Community

When we talk about what we like about our Town, there are many common themes. Among them are preservation of the small-town character, maintenance of architectural diversity and protection of the green, tree-dominated hills. The purpose of the general plan is to translate concepts like these into usable guidelines, goals and codes. The challenge lies in preserving the Town character and traditions that Ross residents hold dear, while allowing room for necessary change. The Ross General Plan does not intend to turn Ross into a live-in museum; rather, it seeks to guide change to preserve the architectural mix and take into account not just the individual property, but the community-at-large.

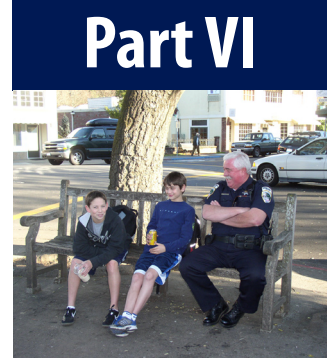
OUR VISION OF ROSS IN YEAR 2025

As citizens of Ross we are dedicated to leaving our community a better and more beautiful place than we found it. Our neighborly connections, historic heritage, sense of community, natural ecological environments, attractive neighborhoods, local businesses and Town services all work well together.

The Ross Common is where Town residents participate in community celebrations throughout the year, including the annual Ross Town dinner, and the Fourth of July parade and picnic. Next to The Common is the Ross School. We recognize the importance of Ross School to our community. Maintaining the school's academic excellence is a goal of everyone in Town. The Ross Post Office is an informal gathering place for the community and a place where residents can maintain their connection to the community as a whole.

The commercial downtown area has two-and three-story buildings that are home to an eclectic variety of retail stores, restaurants and professional offices. The Town encourages the community to support these businesses in order to maintain their viability and to sustain a timeless "country village" appeal to the Downtown area.

Part VI



Major New Ideas

- Prepare a Precise Plan for the Downtown Area
- Modify Downtown Commercial Zoning
- Develop New Sign Ordinance for the Downtown
- Investigate Enforcement Mechanisms

Ross General Plan Policies

8.1 Land Use Plan. Establish land use categories, densities and intensities of land use, as depicted on the Land Use Plan (see Figure 12 in Appendix A), that support the vision and goals of the Ross General Plan.



The Ross Common and downtown provide a gathering place

8.2 Densities and Intensities of Land Uses. Define limits on densities of development as shown on the Land Use Plan. Development on any site shall conform to existing zoning and the following factors: site resources and constraints; potentially hazardous conditions; traffic and access; adequacy of infrastructure (water, sewer, etc.); design policies; development patterns of adjacent areas; and prevailing densities or intensities of adjacent areas.

8.3 Special Planning Area. Prepare area-specific development guidelines for locations designated on the Land Use Plan as “special planning area.”

8.4 Downtown and Ross Common. Maintain the Town-owned Ross Common areas linked to uses and activities at Ross School, and linked to the Town’s downtown area as the central recreation, gathering and local shopping area of Ross. Maintain the downtown area as an attractive, pedestrian-friendly, small retail/business area. Encourage smaller-scale housing units mixed with commercial uses.

8.5 Downtown Commercial Uses. Create a warm, friendly, attractive and economically viable shopping environment in the downtown by encouraging local-serving commercial uses that create a pedestrian feel in the Downtown, especially in ground-floor storefront locations. Create an attractiveness to the Downtown commercial area through regulation of signage, awnings, and other façade treatments, and through public improvements.

8.6 Gathering Places. Encourage and enhance community gathering places such as downtown, the Ross Common and the post office. Support the activities of Ross Recreation, Ross School, and the Marin Art & Garden Center.

8.7 Enforcement of Regulations. Ensure the safety, proper construction and maintenance of buildings, property and neighborhoods through enforcement of codes, public education and cooperation with other public agencies.

Overview of Our Past Accomplishments

The general plan and zoning have guided decision-making to enable new development to gracefully fit-in with the community. As special issues have arisen over the past 15 years, new regulations have been developed to respond to those needs. The Town is now essentially built-out, with almost all of the remaining vacant land in Town located on steeply sloping hillside areas with limited residential development potential. A significant amount of vacant land zoned for residential use is contained in three major parcels adjacent to or part of Bald Hill. There are very few vacant lots located in the flatter portions of the Town. The figure below shows existing land use in Ross as of 2006.

Figure 13

Existing (2006) Land Use in Ross

Land Use Designation	Acreage in Town Limits (2006)	Percentage
Very Low Density Residential	300.47	38.1%
Low Density Residential	156.46	19.8%
Medium Low Density Residential	73.75	9.4%
Medium Density Residential	13.02	1.7%
Local Service Commercial	1.25	0.2%
Public Park and Open Space	50.47	6.4%
Limited Specialized Recreational/Cultural	28.15	3.6%
Public Service	6.24	0.8%
Limited Quasi-Public/Private Service	18.52	2.3%
Roadways and Other Right-of-Way	140.32	17.8%
Total	788.65	100.0%

Source: Town of Ross (2006)

Action List of New Ideas

8.A Prepare a Downtown Area Plan. Develop a plan for the Downtown area as a “Special Planning Area” (see Land Use Plan) to include the Downtown commercial area, parking area through the post office to Lagunitas Avenue, and Ross Common. The plan would include: (1) street design improvements; (2) parking; (3) potential uses, including opportunities for limited housing; (4) design guidelines; (5) pedestrian and bicycle access — including access to Frederick Allen Park and Kentfield Rehabilitation Hospital; and, (6) outdoor gathering areas.



Ross Post Office

8.B Modify Downtown Commercial Zoning. Revise commercial zoning in the Downtown to prohibit offices in storefront locations, to encourage mixed use housing, and to encourage uses that are local-serving and would contribute to the vitality of downtown.

8.C Develop New Sign Ordinance for the Downtown. In coordination with Advisory Design Review, develop a new sign ordinance for the downtown to provide greater flexibility in sign design and Town approval.

8.D Investigate Enforcement Methods. Review enforcement needs as part of the development of design guidelines and other programs intended to refine Town practices for application review and approval.

Goal 9

Excellence of Community Stewardship

We define stewardship as the careful and responsible management of something entrusted to one's care. This community shares a unique environment in which we foster, nurture and protect our families. The founding principles of this place are joy in the physical environment, the families who stand together and the education of the children who will learn and project these values into the future. We have come to this valley in search of a better way to live. Every aspect of this shared view of the projected future is grounded in the stewardship of these irreplaceable assets.

OUR VISION OF ROSS IN YEAR 2025

We visualize Ross in 2025 as a friendly and welcoming Town that encourages interaction and community involvement. The population is diverse and welcomes people of all races, ages, creeds and ethnic backgrounds. All members of the community treat others with friendly respect. Our amicable and considerate demeanor significantly influences the behavior of our children. There is a feeling of inclusion in the community that translates into the opportunity for everyone to participate in the civic and community life of the Town.

Ross General Plan Policies

9.1 Coordination with Other Jurisdictions and Agencies. Ensure that regional, state and federal agencies, nearby cities, Towns, and special districts, College of Marin, County of Marin and LAFCO are aware of and responsive to the goals, policies and programs of the Ross General Plan.

9.2 Adequate Town Services. Maintain facilities and staffing to support general government, public works, fire protection and police services that are responsive to local needs. Use the design and development review process to minimize increases in service needs resulting from new development.

9.3 Water and Sewer Service. Coordinate with Marin Municipal Water District (MMWD) and Ross Valley Sanitary District (Sanitary District No. 1) in the provision of adequate water and sewer facilities to meet the current and future needs of the Town.

Major New Ideas

- Consider Fire Service Consolidation
- Establish a List of Town Specialists
- Monitor General Plan Implementation
- Provide Information to All Residents
- Establish Town Development Review Protocol

9.4 Coordination with Schools. Maintain a close, collaborative relationship with the Ross School and other educational programs in Ross to maintain the excellence of the education programs offered and to plan for future needs. Use all direct and indirect means available to the Town of Ross to ensure that the modification, operation and maintenance of Ross School is consistent with the goals and aspirations of the Ross General Plan.



The Branson School (Soccer)

9.5 Coordination with Non-Profit Groups, Organizations and Businesses in Ross. Provide for effective outreach and coordination with churches, the post office, clubs, organizations, service providers and local businesses in planning matters of mutual interest, as well as community events and cultural activities.

9.6 Community Involvement. Encourage community participation in the formulation and review of planning policies, Ross General Plan implementing programs and development proposals.

9.7 Annexation Criteria. Areas that can reasonably be served through extension of the existing service area of the Town will be considered for annexation. Annexations will be considered based on the following criteria:

- (a) Resident interest.
- (b) The effect of the annexation on the Town's "small town" character
- (c) The cost/revenue implications of the provision of Town services.
- (d) The availability of Town services and infrastructure.
- (e) Access.
- (f) Location within the Ross watershed.
- (g) Potential liability concerns related to drainage, geotechnical conditions and roadway adequacy.

Where existing properties are situated within the Town of Ross Planning Area (some properties may be in two jurisdictions), the Town will consider property owner requests for annexation on a case-by-case basis, depending upon the reasonableness of the request and conformity with the Town's annexation criteria.

Overview of Our Past Accomplishments

Our community cannot operate without the strong interaction and involvement of its residents. Community involvement pumps fresh ideas into our Town. Each person is different, and collectively we all benefit in recognizing that the participation of a

full cross-section of the community gives a validity and creative boost to our planning and decision-making. Resident participation leads to better government and a better community.

Town government plays a critical role in bringing the community together. We encourage community participation in the formulation and review of planning policies, implementing programs and development proposals. The Town provides information to the community about planning policy issues to (a) enable effective participation from all segments of the community, (b) enhance community dialogue, (c) foster consensus building, (d) bring in expert analysis, and (e) achieve the best decisions based upon achieving the greatest good. For example, the Town uses its “information by email” list with over 500 contacts to keep people aware of what is going on in the community, emailing them Council agendas each month and special email releases from Town staff and other notices of public interest.

The Town must also coordinate with surrounding jurisdictions, special districts and the Marin County Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO). LAFCO coordinates the logical and timely changes in local governmental boundaries (annexation and detachment of territory, formation of special districts, and consolidation, merger, and dissolution of districts) and ways to reorganize, simplify and streamline governmental structure.



Ross Fire Department

Action List of New Ideas

9.A Study and Implement Town Hall Remodel. Evaluate options for remodeling Town Hall for police, fire, administrative staff and meeting space.

9.B Consider Fire Service Consolidation. Study opportunities to consolidate fire protection service with other Ross Valley jurisdictions and agencies.

9.C Review Fees. Conduct a periodic review of fees to assure cost recovery for services provided by the Town.

9.D Post General Plan Information on the Town Website. Provide an interactive general plan format by posting the Ross General Plan on the Town’s website and providing links to make it easy to navigate for users.

9.E Establish a List of Town Specialists. Identify specialists in fields such as hydrology, archaeology, historic preservation, cultural places, etc. (similar to the Town Arborist position) who can provide technical review and recommendations, as needed by Town staff, for development proposals.

9.F Monitor General Plan Implementation. Conduct a biennial, publicly noticed meeting to review and update the section of the Ross General Plan entitled “Priorities for Implementing the Ross General Plan.” Program priorities will be reflected in the Town’s budgeting and capital improvement programming decisions.


9.G Provide Information to All Residents. Maintain, publicize and distribute information on a variety of topics related to community health, safety and environmental protection. This information includes, but is not limited to, disaster planning material, an inventory of hazardous materials and substances used by the Town and ways for residents to dispose of hazardous materials, drought tolerant landscaping, contact information, schedules of fees, etc. Strive to create electronic access to the community by using “Information by Email” as appropriate, and other means.

9.H Establish Town Development Review Protocol. Establish Town protocol (procedures and responsibilities) for Town Council, committees, technical specialists and consultants, applicants, neighbors, and Town staff in the development review process and formulation of town policies, procedures and enforcement. Ensure compliance with state and local laws and regulations.


THE SNEAK PEEK

*A Preview of Selected Items on the November 8, 2007
Ross Town Council Meeting Agenda*


Design Review...in Ross?
The newly adopted Town of Ross General Plan 2007-2025 calls for the Town to establish an advisory design review process to provide applicants with helpful early advice. The Council will talk about its progress in implementing its five Council goals for 2007-2008, including an informal design review in which owners, design professionals and neighbors can discuss issues and brainstorm design solutions.



Council to Consider Outdoor Smoking Restrictions on November 8th
The Town Council will continue its lively discussion of a proposed ordinance to expand existing smoking laws in town to restrict smoking in additional outdoor public places and to declare secondhand smoke a public nuisance. The Council would like your reaction to this ordinance: learn more about this issue at www.townofross.org under “What’s New?”



Flood Control Report
With the rainy season soon upon us, let’s talk flood control. Learn about the wrap up of the Town’s successful downtown floodgate project, raising (and sometimes razing) Ross residences above the 100-year flood, what the Army Corps is saying about getting the Flood Zone Unit 4 project out of the starting blocks and (if that isn’t enough) the status of flood litigation against Ross (and San Anselmo, and Fairfax, and the County of Marin, and the State of California, and the Flood Control District, etc., etc.) and what that means to you.



Planning Applications for Consideration on November 8th

- ▶ 83 Laurel Grove, Eric and Trisha Ashworth: Construction Time Extension
- ▶ 7 Woodside Way, Lee and Stephanie Notowich: Construction Time Extension
- ▶ 2 Hillgirt Drive, Timothy and Katrina Harmon: Construction Time Extension
- ▶ 23 Baywood, Richard and Cynthia Hannum: Design Review Amendment
- ▶ 14 Walnut Avenue, Loretta Gargan and Catherine Wagner: Design Review
- ▶ 37 Upper Road, Thomas and Susan Reinhart: Variance/Design Review
- ▶ 30 El Camino Bueno, Colin Lind and Anne Dickerson-Lind: Variance/Design Review
- ▶ Upper Toyon, Harvey Glasser: Lot Line Adjustment, Merger, Resubdivision

Detailed notices on these planning applications are available at www.townofross.org. The complete agenda and staff reports for the November 8, 2007, 6:30 p.m. meeting will be available on the web Friday. The Town of Ross welcomes, and encourages, your participation and input in Town issues.


“The Sneak Peek” provides a preview for residents of selected items on each upcoming Ross Town Council meeting agenda

“The Morning After” is published the day after each Ross Town Council meeting to provide the meeting highlights for residents.

THE MORNING AFTER

*Highlights from the
Ross Town Council Meeting
of October 11, 2007*

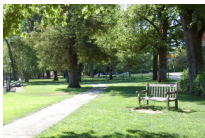
Volume 1, No. 4 October 12, 2007



Welcome from Mayor Scot Hunter
This month’s edition of “The Morning After” could well be called “Later that Morning.” It was after midnight this morning when we adjourned our October meeting. The evening featured a lively agenda with interesting, and sometimes heartfelt, debate on topics as varied as an enhanced smoking ordinance, the use of the Ross Common for temporary classrooms, and the hillside lot ordinance. All of these discussions are more meaningful if we know how you, as our constituents, feel about the issues – please email or call and let your Council know what you think. In the meantime, read on...

Council Considers Outdoor Smoking Restrictions
The Town Council continued discussion of a proposed Town ordinance further regulating secondhand smoke until more residents could become aware of the ordinance’s provisions. The ordinance would expand the Town’s existing smoking regulations to include smoking in some outdoor public places and to declare smoking to be a public nuisance.

Council members Diane Durst, Michael Skall and Rick Strauss expressed reservation with provisions declaring secondhand smoke to be a nuisance, allowing a resident impacted by a neighbor’s smoke drifting onto their property to pursue legal remedies. They expressed concern that the proposed ordinance would encourage litigation.



The ordinance proposed expanding the Town’s 1989 smoking prohibitions in enclosed public places to include smoking in bars, common areas of multi-family housing, and 50% of hotel guest rooms. The ordinance also prohibited outdoor smoking in Town-owned parks and recreation areas, outdoor dining areas of restaurants, service areas such as ticket lines and bus stops, and within 20 feet of any opening of an enclosed area within which smoking is prohibited.



The Council majority was concerned that many Ross residents were not aware of the proposed ordinance and had not had an opportunity to voice their opinion. The Council agreed to allow more time for community input before revisiting the issue. The Council also directed staff to include a provision that would designate smoking areas on Town-owned property.

Goal 10

Provision of Affordable Housing Opportunities

Home ownership in Ross and throughout Marin County has become an ever more distant dream for many people. The median sales price for single family homes in Ross for the three-month period from August through October, 2006 was almost \$2.0 million. The double-edged sword of steep home prices is apparent as we see subsequent generations priced out of the local housing market. Similarly, people who work in Ross are often forced to live far away where housing is more affordable.

OUR VISION OF ROSS IN YEAR 2025

The Town has obtained funding to provide affordable housing for teachers, Ross Town personnel and others. Some of the affordable housing units are apartments above the retail establishments.



The Cedars of Marin Ross campus

Major New Ideas

- Housing Element Update by June, 2009
- See Other Programs in the Town of Ross Housing Element Adopted January 13, 2005