

Dear Ross Town Council,

March 9, 2021

We are writing to urge the Town Council to rebuild our town's fire station. There are many reasons why we believe that the path of closing and tearing down the town fire station is wrong and misguided. First, the council and staff have failed to fully appreciate and educate town residents on the serious consequences that may result from a delay in fire response times. As described below, not only is 2 minutes of delay a significant change in the response time, but also can be a matter of life and death. Second, the council and staff have failed to fully research the way in which the town facilities can be built, including obtaining multiple, informed bids. The council is relying on a flawed survey which, as outlined below, failed to fully disclose to residents the true impact of losing our fire station, and presented unpalatable options for over-priced rebuilds that no reasonable resident would get behind. Finally, the Town Council and staff have failed to take into account that our town buildings are on the historic registry and should not be torn down as contemplated. The town must comply with CEQA requirements for historical structures before any demolition can be performed.

The issue before the Town Council (TC) comes down to a simple choice: either this is a "can do" TC that finds a way keep the Ross fire station open, or it's a TC that prioritizes new administrative office space over the Town's fire safety, ignoring the criticality of 2 or more additional minute fire response time. That the fate of our fire station could even be up for consideration is mind boggling. Fire danger risks increase every year; our fire department knows every second matters. So it's astonishing that the potentially serious consequences of 2 additional minutes for response time has not been shared with TC and the citizens of Ross and has been so downplayed in the discussions regarding the fire station. When Ross joined RVFD, members of TC assured residents the fire station would remain open. Only a few years have passed, and the town is already breaking that promise made to Ross residents. The police and fire station structures are designated historic buildings, so they should not be torn down, and yet they are slated for demolition. The town has given virtually no serious consideration to remodeling these buildings, and instead, the perfectly fine, new Apparatus Bay is wastefully slated for demolition as well. TC should also explore remodel options which provides the greatest economic flexibility and cost effectiveness since our budget is limited. As this letter highlights, Ross needs to keep its fire station. TC needs to explore other options, other than what's been presented by Staff in the Staff Reports, before any decisions are made and therefore the TC should postpone making any decisions at this time.

1. Two (2) Additional Minutes Matters—This Should Have Been Disclosed In Staff Reports and to Residents

Two (2) additional minutes response time does matter in battling a fire. It is alarming that the criticality of these 2 additional minutes has been so downplayed and virtually ignored in all the Staff Reports, in presentations made to residents, and in emails and information sent to residents. It is very concerning as to why this important information has not been shared and why there has not been an educational campaign to educate Ross residents and TC about the criticality of 2 additional minutes in battling a fire.

Please watch these 3 short videos that show the criticality of 2 minutes in a house fire:

Time lapse video of fire spreading in a living room:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=piofZLySsNc&t=6s>

Time lapse video of fire in a bedroom:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eZJ6SorlpJo>

House fire caused by wildfire, real time video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JTIGFsP4JeQ>

On house fire spread:

<https://www.thisoldhouse.com/home-safety/21018283/what-really-happens-in-a-house-fire>

This article breaks down the sequence of events in a typical stove top kitchen fire to show how quickly the devastation can spread. It only takes 30 seconds for a small stove flame to turn into a full-blown life-threatening house fire.

Please also read the attached Washington Post article.

https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/home/house-fires-burn-much-faster-than-they-used-to-heres-how-to-survive/2017/11/20/1c1eb7f8-c890-11e7-aa96-54417592cf72_story.html

As reported in the *Washington Post*, it is well established that:

1. houses burn much faster than they used to because many more houses now have open floor plans that provide better oxygen to fires, as well as synthetic building materials and furnishings that burn at a much faster rate than natural products used decades ago.
2. **house fires can double in size every 30 seconds.**
3. "When asked 'If your house is on fire, how many minutes do you think you have to get out alive?' ...80 percent of Americans surveyed, ...say five or 10 minutes. Wrong! According to Underwriters Laboratories, you have three minutes or less. Most people underestimate the speed and power of fire and smoke, according to the National Fire Protection Association."

Hence, it's not surprising that when surveyed Ross residents would have been misguided and answered that they are not concerned about adding 2 additional minutes fire response time, and as such TC should not put weight on resident's opinions on this subject until all relevant information about the significance of this delay is shared with Ross residents. It is likely that many residents would reconsider the importance of the extra time when presented with all the facts in an unbiased manner.

As the 3 videos show, a 2 minute longer response time for fire trucks to arrive at the scene of a fire does indeed matter. And it is incumbent upon our Town leadership—our Town Council—to make the right decision—which is to keep the fire station open regardless of what uninformed residents think about having a longer fire truck response time.

Please also read the below.

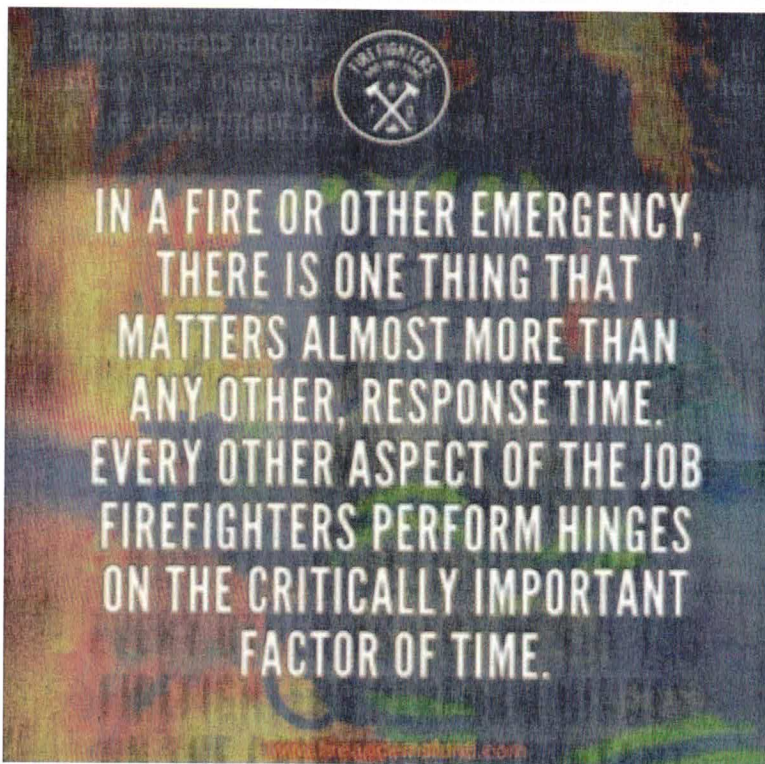
<https://www.fireandemsfund.com/three-things-to-know-about-fire-department-response-times/>

Three Things to Know About Fire Department Response Times

November 21, 2019 [Firefighter Health and Safety](#)

In a fire or other emergency, there is one thing that matters almost more than any other, response time. Every other aspect of the job firefighters perform hinges on the critically important factor of time. A few minutes could be the difference between preserving life and property or allowing it to be completely destroyed.

Fire departments throughout the country obsess over their response times, and it is a defining statistic on the overall effectiveness of public safety. Here are three key things you should know about fire department response times.



Response time data is critical for fire departments to determine where best to allocate their resources. ...

Seconds are critical

When fire departments analyze their response times, they are really analyzing seconds in time. For example, [National Fire Protection Association] [NFPA 1710](#) standard states that "The fire department's fire suppression resources shall be deployed to provide for the arrival of an engine company within a 240-second [4 minute] travel time to 90 percent of the incidents." That means every second counts, including call answering time (15 seconds), call processing time (60 seconds), and turnout time (80 seconds), Indeed, it is a very hard standard to meet.

When measuring the effectiveness of fire departments, response times are the key indicator. It determines if more resources are needed to effectively serve and protect communities. **Therefore it is crucial that local governments take these statistics seriously and allocate resources according to the specific needs of their local fire departments.(emphasis added)**

Please read below:

<https://www.purvis.com/current-state-of-turnout-times/>

Current State of Turnout Times [ie Fire Truck Response Times]

The National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) has set **a six-minute guideline for fire department response time to a fire emergency**. The composition of the standard is one-minute for the dispatcher to receive the alarm and then notify the first responders; one-minute for the fire station personnel to get on the road; and four-minutes of drive time to the fire. **The NFPA further recommends that each of these goals should be achieved 90 percent of the time.**

The specific NFPA Guidelines are:

- NFPA 1221: 1 minute for dispatch time
- NFPA 1710: 1 minute for turnout
- NFPA 1710: 4 minutes for drive time

As is well known by any firefighter, time is a critical element in the equation that ultimately leads to saving lives and property.

Traditionally, a rule of thumb has been that a fire doubles in size for roughly every minute it has to burn, so long as it has oxygen and fuel. However, modern energy-efficient construction retains more heat, the latest furnishings are made with materials that tend to burn faster, and even the new prefabricated roof trusses break down more easily into kindling than do older, solid wood rafters. **In 1970, the National Institute of Standards and Technology found that on average, after a house fire breaks out, people have about 17 minutes to escape before being overcome by heat and smoke. Today, this estimate is closer to 3 minutes.**

Ross residents should be educated on the criticality of 2 or more additional minutes time in responding to a fire and of the NFTA's 6 minute fire truck response time guidelines.¹ That every second of fire response time is critical cannot genuinely be disputed and in fact, staff relied on this very point. In the January 14, 2021 staff report, staff says "modern facilities are designed to create paths....ensuring faster response times". Obviously, if it comes between relying on another fire station 2 or more minutes further away because it costs too much to build a new fire station with a better layout, versus keeping open and using our existing fire station with a faster response time, the choice is clear: keep the old station open because faster response time is everything.

Currently, the Ross RVFD response time is 7 min 55 sec which is about 2 minutes more than the firefighting response guidelines. It would be grossly negligent for TC to make the decision to close the Ross fire station resulting in 2 plus additional minutes for a fire truck to arrive at the scene of a fire, which would mean at least 4 minutes longer than fire response guidelines.

Furthermore, Staff's Report ignores and leaves out the following key findings in the Citygate Report. The following findings should have been included in Staff's report and/or Citygate's findings were misstated. Citygate's findings are consistent with the above that adding an additional 2 minutes plus of fire truck response time would fall below the best practices guidelines set for responding to suburban fires in Ross. Specifically, the Citygate Report states:

1. **"the hilly geography and the limited road network, which is dependent on one main connector road, makes the area very difficult to serve efficiently from a small number of fire stations." [ie. with the 4 current RVFD stations which includes Ross] Page 1 Citygate Report.**

- As it is, with the Ross fire station operating along with the 3 other RVFD fire stations, Citygate states that the geographic area is already difficult to serve because the hills and limited number of roadways.
- This fact was omitted from Staff Report and info sent to residents. Even with 4 fire stations it's difficult to serve the Ross Valley.

2. "Fire service deployment, simply stated, is about speed and weight of the response." Id.

3. "Most suburban communities desire outcomes to include limiting building fire damage to only part of the inside of an affected building....To do so, the initial units [first trucks responding to the fire] should arrive within 7:30 minutes from the 9-1-1- notification...." Id. at 2.

- This was omitted from Staff Report and info sent to residents.
- Again, fast response time is everything.

¹ We would hope that TC would want residents to be educated about this information and recommend that an email be sent to residents sharing these links and the information contained in our letter. We would assume TC would have no objection to sharing this important information via email especially since the Town just sent a video email to residents.

4. “[Currently,] *all* station areas [within the RVFD] receive service *longer* than a best practices goal point of 7:30 minutes.” Id.

- In other words, Citygate found that currently none of the 4 RVFD stations meet Citygate’s goal of a 7:30 minutes response time (which is even 1 minute more than national guidelines discussed above) for suburban areas. Id. at 5. This was omitted from Staff Report and info sent to residents.
- Ross’s response time is 7:55 minutes, the other 3 RVFD times are 7:45, 8:47 and 9:07. Id. at 2. Adding an additional 2 minutes would make the response time to Ross a minimum of 2:30 minutes longer than Citygate’s best practice response time.

5. “The overall longer-than-desired first-due unit travel times are *not* the result of a lack of fire stations. [and this is with 4 current stations, including the Ross station] They are the result of the non-grid street network design, simultaneous incidents at peak hours of the day, and traffic congestion—particularly rush hour and tourism on weekends”. Id. at 3. Citygate’s best practices travel time is 4:00 minutes Id. at 5;

- At that, Ross fire station had “the best travel time of any of the four stations at 4:40 minutes” which is still 40 seconds slower than Citygate’s best practices; the other 3 RVFD times are much slower at 5:38, 6:24 and 6:30 minutes. Id. at 3, 6.
- Imagine just how much slower these travel times are going to be if the other 3 RVDF stations in Fairfax, Sleepy Hollow, and San Anselmo have to travel to Ross.

6. “**Closing Station 18 [Ross Fire Station] will add about 2:00 minutes minimum of travel time into that station area**”. Id. at 6.

- Staff Report and the information sent to Ross residents mischaracterizes Citygate’s finding: Citygate states that the delay would be a minimum of 2 minutes, not “approximately 2 minutes”.

7. Ross is in a suburban area. Increasing the response time 2 minutes “from 7:40 to 9:40 would be more like an edge suburban area or emerging rural area. First unit response times of 10:00 minutes-plus means small fires will become larger....” Id. at 6.

- Again, the language used in the Staff Report and info sent to residents is misleading and misstates Citygate’s findings. Citygate did not state that the increased time for Ross would be “similar” to suburban areas. Rather Citygate stated that the increased time would be like the response time for emerging rural areas or the edge of suburban areas; it did not say it was similar to “outer suburban averages” as Staff characterized.
- Small fires will become larger if the response time is increased by 2 minutes.

8. “Covering the Town of Ross from either Station 19 [SA] or 17 (Kentfield) depends on essentially one road being open and not congested with traffic. **Any one accident or natural emergency could close the road, effectively making the Town of Ross a cul-de-sac served from one direction, and in a sub-regional emergency, either Engine 19 or 17 would be shared with a larger service area**”. Id. at 6.

- This important finding was omitted from Staff Report and info sent to residents.

Hence, the Citygate Report further supports that closing the Ross fire station and adding 2 minutes more to the response time would be a poor decision.

2. When Ross TC Agreed and Approved The 2012 Merger with RVFD, It was Under Condition That Ross Fire Station Would Remain Open

In 2012, when Ross Town Council voted to merge the Ross Fire Department with the RVFD, it was on the condition that the Ross fire station would remain open and staffed. That's what residents were told. That's what Town residents were promised by the then TC: in merging with RVFD, there would be no discernable change. Today, TC must keep its word to residents.

At the time, RVFD was comprised of 3 communities each of which had their own fire station—San Anselmo, Sleepy Hollow and Fairfax. Ross would retain its fire station. It is very important to note that it was emphasized that every community would have their own fire station. IF Ross were to now close its fire station, Ross would be the only community within the RVFD that does not have its own station! This is a very important fact which should not be glossed over and ignored. We do not want to be the town with no station.

The September 16, 2011 Morning After reported:

Council Discusses Fire Department Consolidation The Council discussed expanding shared fire services with the Ross Valley Fire Department, as well as fire department consolidation with the Kentfield Fire Protection District, but asked for more information before moving in any particular direction. **Under both scenarios, the Ross Fire Station would remain open with current staffing levels.** The Kentfield option appeared to be less advantageous. An initial analysis showed it would cost \$93,500 over current Ross costs to pay salary and benefits for the six existing firefighter positions. Administrative costs would be in addition to that amount. The study also determined that consolidation would require a new governance structure and 50% of Ross property taxes to permanently shift to the new fire protection district. Despite this additional cost, Kentfield does not currently have a dedicated fire inspector or a battalion chief available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. According to Fire Chief Tom Vallee, a merger with the Ross Valley Fire Department (RVFD) would result in some cost savings and improve the level of fire services for Ross. **RVFD currently provides fire protection services for three communities – San Anselmo, Sleepy Hollow and Fairfax. Each community has its own fire station,** but the Fire Chief, Battalion Chief, Fire Inspector and Administrative Assistant work out of the San Anselmo Station. **Under consolidation, Ross would maintain existing staffing levels at the Ross Fire Station.** The Morning After Page 3 The apprentice firefighter program would remain **and 3-person engine staffing would not be affected.** The Ross Valley Paramedics would also stay in Ross. **The Ross Fire Station could be housed within existing remodeled space, rather than in a new, expanded facility.** Last year, the Town estimated that a new public safety building with expanded office space would cost approximately \$10 million. **A remodeled building would cost substantially less, and could be eligible for Federal Emergency Management Agency grant funding.**

On May 4, 2012 the *Marin IJ* reported:

After years of study and discussion, the Ross Town Council voted Thursday to merge its little fire department with the larger Ross Valley Fire Department, a move that is expected to cut costs and improve fire safety in the woodsy community.

"Consolidation of services is one of the few ways available to government to provide constituents with better quality service and at the same time save money," said Councilman Scot Hunter, head of the town public safety committee. "It's win-win any way you look at it."

With the merger, effective July 1, **Ross will share fire services with San Anselmo, Sleepy Hollow and Fairfax. Those communities each have their own fire stations, and Ross will keep its station and maintain its three-person staff.** The town's apprentice firefighter program will not be affected and the Ross Valley Paramedics will remain based in Ross.

Although the town is expanding its fire services, its small-town character will not be diminished, [Council member] Hunter said.

"This change will not be discernible to our citizens," he said.

It would be completely disingenuous for TC to now vote to close the fire station, after clearly promising Ross residents that the fire station would remain open when the predecessor TC voted originally to merge the Ross Fire Department with RVFD.

Mayor McMillan asked at the January, 2021 town council meeting whether, if Ross doesn't have a fire station will Ross have lower priority? If there are raging wildfires in several locations throughout the Ross Valley like we saw this past summer in the Napa Valley, and the prior years in Santa Rosa, who are we kidding? If there's a fire in Sleepy Hollow, the Sleepy Hollow station is going to prioritize those fires. If there's fires in Fairfax, the Fairfax station is going to those fires. If there's fires in San Anselmo, where are the San Anselmo fire trucks are going? The San Anselmo fires? Or to the teeny, tiny, rich Ross community?

There won't be enough fire trucks to go everywhere if there were wildfires like we saw in Santa Rosa, Napa, and Sonoma. There weren't enough fire trucks to fight those fires, it won't be any different in the Ross Valley. At least if there's a Ross fire station, the Ross fire station would respond to the fires in Ross. Otherwise, Ross would be the only community in the Ross Valley Fire District that doesn't have its own station. And that's not a good position to be in when there's a shortage of fire truck when the "big one" comes.

3. The Police and Fire Stations Are Historical Buildings Listed on The California Register as a "Historic Resource" And Should Not Be Torn Down

The Historic Resource Evaluation Report prepared in 2016 by Ver Planck, which is discussed in the CDS Report and is Appendix H thereto, identified that the Ross fire station and police station are historic buildings (collectively referred to therein as the Ross Public Safety Building). Specifically, it states that **"Ross Public Safety Building is individually listed in the California Register, meaning that it is already considered to be a 'historical resource' under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA)".** Page 2 Ver Planck Report dated September 10, 2016.

There is no mention of the important historical significance of our police and fire station in any of the Staff Reports. The Ver Planck Report states that the Ross Fire Station and Police Station met the criteria for listing in the California Register of Historical Resources (California Register) based on two criteria: it is part of Ross's first Civic Center buildings and because it is **"an excellent example of a civic building designed in the Spanish Colonial Revival style. Id. at 3. It is also the work of a master architect, John White. White was an early associate of Bernard Maybeck, as well as a prominent society architect in his own right, who designed many important buildings in Ross [eg. Lagunitas Club] and other affluent Bay Area enclaves during the early twentieth century. The Ross Civic Center is the best remaining example of a civic project by the architect, who also designed public buildings in Atherton, Hillsborough, and Burlingame".** Page 8 of CDS August 2020 Report; Pages 1-2; 30-34 of Ver Planck Report.

Why is the Staff Reports silent regarding the historical designation and significance of our police and fire stations? This should have been included in their report and disclosed to Ross residents. Since the police and fire stations are historic resources and qualify as such, they should be preserved and remodeled, and absolutely not be demolished. Yet, they are slated for demolition in the Town's proposed plans shown in the Mary McGrath architectural budget document. Any demolition of these buildings require compliance with CEQA. Has this been done? We would anticipate a CEQA lawsuit if the town fails to follow CEQA requirements and attempt to demolish these historical buildings.

4. No Estimate Has Been Provided For Cost to Contract With Kentfield FD or New RVFD Contract

This project should also be rejected from consideration at this time because no estimate has even been provided for the cost to have a contract with either the Kentfield FD and/or with RVFD for new services. TC and Ross residents would need these numbers to determine what the true cost over time would be if we shut down the Ross fire station because whatever this annual cost is, it would go on indefinitely and this cost needs to be factored into the cost analysis of the overall project. If we give up our fire station and are reliant upon RVFD what long term control will Ross have regarding future cost increases?

It makes no sense that “exact amount cannot be determined until after negotiations with other members of the RVFD” as stated in Staff Report. Those negotiations can be held now, and should be held before TC reaches any decision on this project. Ross residents have a right to know all the facts.

Moreover, the most favorable time to negotiate for the best possible fee would be NOW before a decision is made whether to close our fire station. If negotiations are conducted after the fact, Ross would be in its weakest bargaining position to negotiate favorable terms.

Other information that should be provided and analyzed includes:

- What is the estimated cost of outsourcing for fire services over the length of time had there been a fire station remodel/building bond?
- Analyzing the true cost of outsourcing the Fire Chief services between 2009-12 compared to what the cost would have been if we had hired a fire chief. Did it actually end up costing us more, the same, or saving us money? It would be good to know whether savings were actually realized as hoped to know what we could expect.
- Analyzing the true cost from 2012 to present for Consolidating with RVFD. Did it actually end up costing us more, the same, or saving us money? It would be good to know whether savings were actually realized as hoped to know what we could expect.

5. The Survey Is Flawed And Should Be Disregarded

The survey, flawed, biased and poorly written, leaves out critically important information, and as such should be disregarded by town council. The survey instructions assured residents that it would be a quick survey—“should take less than 5 minutes to complete”, thereby conveying to respondents not to spend much time thinking about their answers or the ramifications and consequences of their answers, or about shutting down the fire station. In addition, it was not an objective, comprehensive survey designed to truly garner objective information on what the townspeople want and was not drafted to clearly elicit residents’ opinions on different options or scenarios.

Below are a few examples of flaws/biases in the survey:

- Fire is fire. Regardless of whether it starts as a house fire or a brush fire. Yet, Question 1 breaks out and separates structure fires and wildfires into two separate categories, thereby reducing the overall number of responses for fire by ½ since the question only allows the respondent to choose 3 out of 6 choices.
- In Question 2, the survey lumps the police station and administrative offices together. Separate questions should have been asked about the police station and a separate question about administrative offices, rather than combining both together.
- The word “replace” in Q2 “replace outdated town facilities” is vague and ambiguous. Does that mean remodel or tear down and rebuild?
- The survey didn’t test or ask about all options including the option to renovate existing Police and Fire station buildings.
- The survey didn’t ask respondents how they felt about tearing down the historically significant police and fire stations.
- The survey did not ask whether residents want to:

- Only spend \$7M the town has saved
- spend money to build new administrative offices
- spend money to remodel the fire station building only (which is the building that needs the most remodeling) vs. building new
- spend money to remodel the police station vs. build new
- keep the existing facades of the police and fire station
- The survey only presented 2 options to vote on without presenting the various other scenarios for consideration.

In addition, while the December 3, 2020 Notice sent to residents about the survey said “we are seeking input from our residents on various options”, residents were not given a complete list of options to consider. It appears that Staff has not genuinely considered various options the community has proposed. Rather, the same plans keep being proffered with no modifications, with complete disregard to any comments from residents. Zero. Nothing has changed since the August and October community workshop or the survey. It’s as if someone just wants the existing proposals rubber stamped.

6. Bids From Other Architects Should Be Obtained

The Town only presented bids from one architect, Mary McGrath (MM), a firm which, from its website, specializes in buildings for large municipalities, which we clearly are not.

The Town should obtain bids and consult with other architectural firms that remodel and build fire stations such as the LCA Architects firm for more competitive, realistic budgets. LCA recently completed the 8,000 sf Alamo Fire Station 32 for under \$5M. In addition, LCA’s fire station designs look in keeping with a small town feel. <http://lca-architects.com/portfolio/public-safety/>

The Town should utilize the knowledge and expertise of several Ross residents who are in the commercial construction and development business and have them be involved in the project’s design and construction process to insure the project is done in the most cost effective manner and scope.

1. The architectural style for any new addition/building should be the same as our existing fire & police station, namely Spanish Colonial Revival. In 1995, the new Apparatus Bay was built in Spanish Revival style.
2. The MM is cold and sterile and not in keeping with the ambiance of Ross. How was the MM firm even selected? Were other firms contacted? If so, which ones? This information should be included in the Staff Report.
3. The only input on the project scope and design has come from the Town Manager and Staff, RVFD Chief and the Ross Police Chief. Town residents should have been included as part of this design process especially since residents are the ones paying for the project. Again, the Task Force comprised of Ross residents experienced in construction and development should be involved. The town should take advantage of our own residents’ expertise.

4. Estimates for redevelopment of the North Wing should be obtained.
5. Please provide detail as to how many square feet is the existing admin office space (portable and existing) and the square footage of the proposed administrative office space in the MM plans. How many offices? How much bigger is the proposed space compared the current space?

7. There's No Need to No Rush This Project

There is no need for this project to be rushed forward now before many issues raised in this letter and by others can be addressed. As TC and Staff know, CDS first assessed the town buildings 5 years ago-- in Feb 2016 and then re-inspected them in June 2020. "With a very few exceptions, nothing had changed".² This in and of itself supports that there's no need for TC to rush this project through now. It can wait until more information is obtained and, at a minimum, certainly TC can wait until the weather is better to allow the community to collaborate in person at outside community workshops on the scope and design of this project.³

8. CDS Property Condition Assessment Clearly Sets Forth the New Apparatus Bay That Houses Our Fire Trucks is in Good Condition And Other Areas Are in Fair Condition.

A. Don't Throw the Baby Out with the Bathwater—No Need to Demolish the New Apparatus Bay

The Staff Reports, town emails and mailers, and the recently emailed video sent to town residents are misleading regarding the overall condition of the police and fire stations, and the operability of the police and fire stations. Ross has a very nice fairly new "Apparatus Bay" building that houses our fire trucks that was built with private funds in 1995. CDS reports the Apparatus Bay building to be in "good

² It was very disappointing to read in the CDS August 2020 Report that the Town has not been maintaining the existing facilities and instead letting them further deteriorate. The Report is riddled with examples of where there has been years of neglect and failure to do routine maintenance. And why in the last 4 years hasn't a pest control company been called in to take care of simple pest control and mold problems? Why, as a tax payer would I want to agree to pay a tax or donate money to a project when the Town 1) ignores routine maintenance of existing buildings and 2) is seriously advocating for tearing town a perfectly fine, relatively new Apparatus Bay that residents donated money to build?

³ Moreover, it's premature and would be a waste of time to spend money on a Master Plan Consultant now since it's not possible for "public participation" to be held in person. At a minimum, this needs to be postponed at least until the summer when the weather is better and people could at least meet and hold socially distanced workshops outside.

condition". Page 5-6 CDS August 2020 Report. This fact is glossed over in the Staff Reports, video, and emails to town residents.

Built with hard earned, donation money ---ie, private funding, there's nothing wrong with the Apparatus Bay building. It is fully functional and more than adequately houses the fire trucks. It should not be torn down, and the fire station should not be closed, risking life and property just so TC can build new administrative office space instead of having an operating fire station. Fire safety must take precedence over the desire for more appealing administrative office space.

A resident who donated money in 1995 to build the Apparatus Bay only to have it now torn down, would likely be quite upset at the waste of their donated money and especially if it's demolished and the fire station is shut down.

While it may be ideal to have this structure elevated out of the flood plain this is not grounds to tear the new Apparatus Bay building down and have no fire station. Apparatus Bay in the rear of the building? It's better to have it at the back of the building than not having an operating fire station at all. Once you demolish the fire station and new apparatus bay, there's no going back and deciding to re-establish our fire station.

Moreover, as discussed below, while the north wing needs the most repairs and deferred maintenance work, it doesn't warrant a decision to permanently close down the Ross fire station when we have a fully functioning, fairly new Apparatus Bay that houses our fire trucks.

B. CDS Only Describes the North Wing And Original Apparatus Bay as Being in Poor Condition.

CDS described the Apparatus Bay building housing the fire trucks as in good condition and the Police Department as in fair condition.

The CDS Report describes the condition of the police and fire buildings as follows:

- "The apparatus bay is in good condition".
- "The Police Department (south wing) is in fair condition".
- "Much of the firehouse was remodeled in the mid-1990s, presumably when the addition of the apparatus bay was constructed. Most recently a pre-engineered metal structure was installed adjacent the rear apparatus bay doors".
- "The north wing is in poor condition".
- "The Fire House (middle section) is in poor condition." Pages 3-4, CDS August 2020 Report

The CDS Report describes the interior condition as follows:

- "The south wing, which houses Police staff, is in good condition".
- "The new apparatus bay is in good condition".
- "The fire house kitchen and second floor areas are in fair condition, showing signs of wear and tear".
- "The original apparatus bay is in poor condition due to age, multiple changes and structural additions performed over time. There is visible cracking in the interior walls... In addition to

being small the washroom contains a furnace and water heaters along with exposed framing and wiring”.

- “The north wing is in poor condition. A section of the interior has been demolished exposing the wall framing and electrical wiring... There is also visible mold and dry rot.” Id. at 5-6.

Without a doubt, the police and fire station buildings are in need of deferred maintenance work and repairs from years of neglect. However, CDS’s report only identifies the North Wing and the middle section (the original apparatus bay) as in poor condition and in need most need of major deferred maintenance work, repairs, and enhancements.

The CDS August 2020 Report did not state that the entire police station and fire station are “physically and functionally obsolete with significant structural deficiencies” as stated in the January 14, 2021 Staff Report, in emails, and other materials sent to residents. Again, the Staff Report downplays and virtually ignores that the CDS described the Apparatus Bay building housing the fire trucks is in good condition and the Police Department as in fair condition.

C. The Town Should Obtain an Estimate on the Cost To Do Repairs, Deferred Maintenance and Other Enhancements to North Wing and the Original Fire Station Building

Since there’s no guarantee that Ross taxpayers are going to approve any type of bond, the town should also obtain estimates for what can be accomplished within the \$7M the town has set aside for this project. The Town should obtain estimates on the cost to do repairs, deferred maintenance work and other enhancements to the existing fire and police buildings, especially to the North Wing and the middle section.

1. There is no need to tear down the Apparatus Bay—it is a new building and perfectly fine. Under this scenario, there would be more flexibility to install modular units if necessary if that is all that can be afforded by the budget.
2. Under this scenario, the facades of our iconic police and fire station are maintained, which are of historic importance.
3. While some of the building layouts may not be ideal, it’s still better to have an operating fire station than no operating fire station at all if that’s what the budget allows.
4. Bays at the back? At least we have an Apparatus Bay to house our trucks. It’s better than having no fire station. It’s still significantly less time to drive from the back of the building out to the front, than to drive from the west side of downtown San Anselmo or Kentfield.
5. Police Station—The CDS report said it was fine. It had been remodeled in the 1980’s and while it does look dated and could use improving, it doesn’t mean the building needs to be completely torn down.
6. Firefighters sleeping in portables— While not ideal, it’s better to have firefighters on site in Ross sleeping in portable buildings than having no operating fire station in Ross. Many schools have permanent portables as classrooms. For example, at Bacich elementary, it has had several portable classrooms on its campus for years. We could always replace the existing portable with new portables or add an additional portable if needed.

Of course, in an ideal world, if money were no object, we could do a lot of things and could build new facilities. However, having a fire station even if old where we've done repairs is still better than having NO fire station at all, even if it's not ideal.

9. We Don't Have A lot of Earthquakes, Yet We Still Plan for Them

Regarding the argument that we hardly have fires so 2 additional minute response time for fire trucks isn't a big deal, we hardly have big earthquakes either. Yet, we still prepare for them as if there's going to be one tomorrow. Why? Because we know if there is an earthquake it could be catastrophic with great potential for loss of lives and homes.

Likewise, we have had very few house fires and wildfires, but we still need to be prepared for them for when they do happen, and we need to prepare for them as if it's also going to happen tomorrow. Hence, it's imperative that we keep an operational fire station in Ross, so we have the shortest fire truck response time (not a longer response time) because we already know that as is, Ross's fire response time exceeds the guidelines by at least 2 minutes.

The bottom line: if it's an earthquake caused fires or a wild fire in the Ross Valley, like we have had in Santa Rosa or Napa, the neighboring fire stations are likely going to be overwhelmed and have their hands full. Ross does not want to be the ONLY locale that doesn't have its own fire station and is at the mercy of another fire station to come to our rescue. We know that in a fire, time is critical. 2 extra minutes of response time could be disastrous. Hence, it's imperative that we keep an operational fire station in Ross so the response time for responding to a fire remains the same---whether it's a house fire or a wildfire or a fire caused from an earthquake.

10. There is NO Guarantee that Home Fire Insurance Won't Be Cancelled

There is no guarantee that homeowners fire insurance policies won't be cancelled if Ross closes its fire station and fire truck response times increase by 2 minutes.

The Staff Report is only guessing when it says: "no indication that closure would substantially impact ISO ratings which insurance companies use to determine risk".

1. What is this comment based on? One of the factors ISO evaluates in fire response time.
2. Did Staff get a written commitment from AAA, State Farm, or other home insurance companies that residents' rates and coverage will not be affected if the Ross fire station is closed?
3. Please provide any documents or evidence to support this comment.
4. Have ISO be asked to rate Ross if it has no fire station?

Is the Town of Ross or the RVFD willing to indemnify a homeowner if they're wrong and a homeowner's fire insurance policy is cancelled?

11. What Will Go Next?

The Town and TC are going down a slippery slope. What will be next? Please don't fall victim to the argument of making every decision to "save money". Under current rationale of saving money, should we close ...

1. The town planning department, eliminate the town manager, and other staff offices and contract or merge with San Anselmo, Larkspur or Corte Madera? Surely it would be cheaper;
2. Our Police Department and merge with San Anselmo or Kentfield? Surely it would be cheaper than having our own police department; or
3. Ross School District and become part of San Anselmo or Kentfield school districts? Surely it would be cheaper than having our own school district.

The contemplated upgrades to our Ross town facilities and the fate of our fire station are two of the most important decisions that has been in front of the Town Council in a decade. It requires a robust discussion with meaningful input from the residents of Ross who could be negatively impacted for decades to come by the decisions made by the council. This is most certainly NOT the type of decision that should be rushed into, by sending out a flawed questionnaire without providing a thoughtful process to determine actual needs and realistic cost options. An additional 2 plus minutes of response time is critical and therefore we must keep our fire station open. We urge town council to utilize the Task Force of Ross residents with expertise in the construction and development business to be part of the project's design and construction process to obtain competitive estimates so that it will be a win-win for all –new fire station, police, and administration and to insure the project is done in the most cost effective manner and scope.

We are a Town, and Ross is unique. We are small but we have been completely autonomous until we merged with RVFD. As a town, we should have and control---our own school, police, town administration, and fire. Period. Our fire station must remain open. We need to choose a plan that ensures that.

Respectfully submitted,

Laura and Bill Conrow

Ross Citizens for the Responsible Development of Town Facilities