

Cyndie Martel

From: Dan Rosenthal <danr100@comcast.net>
Sent: Wednesday, February 12, 2025 12:40 PM
To: CouncilAll
Subject: [EXTERNAL] My Thoughts About Ross' Participation in the Ross Valley Fire Department
Attachments: Ltr To Ross Town Counsel Re RVFD 20250212.pdf

Importance: High

Dear Mayor and Council Members,

I have spent some time looking at some statistics and thinking about other facts related to Ross joining the Ross Valley Fire Department.

Attached is a letter that provides you with my thoughts, some suggestions and a few questions.

I'm sure you think this issue is as important as I do, though we may not agree with the current long-term plan.

I am just as sure that I don't have all the facts.

I welcome your thoughts and any information you can provide me that is missing from my letter. And I would appreciate it if you would let me know how to get the answers to my questions.

Thank you. And thank you for your service as Mayor and Council Members.

Dan

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February 12, 2025

To: Members of the Ross Town Council

From: Dan Rosenthal

Re: Ross Valley Fire Department
Let's Take Another Look At The Plan For Ross

Dear Members of the Town Council,

I would like to thank each of you for your service on the Town Council. I am sure at times your positions give you a much-deserved feeling of satisfaction, maybe even elation. And at other times they give you more stress and grief than you want to feel.

It seems like this is one of those stress and grief times. Difficult decisions about deploying the Ross emergency equipment and personnel have been made, and not everyone in our Town agrees with the direction that has been taken. With a belief that nothing is ever set in stone, I would like to better understand how the Town of Ross came together with three other Marin towns to provide a consolidated Ross Valley Fire Department (RVFD). Specifically, I have several questions for you that I'll ask later in this letter. The answers to these questions will help me conclude what I think about the situation.

In this letter it will be clear that at this time I think joining the RVFD is not the best course of action for the Town of Ross. But until I gather more information, I can't believe that my opinion is the best perspective.

Before asking my questions, I'd like to state the most relevant facts that I know. I gathered these facts from attending the Ross Property Owners' Association meeting held on February 10, 2025, and from an article in the Marin IJ, (Nov. 28, 2023, text attached).

The attached chart, "Ross Valley Fire Department Member Towns Population and Contribution Stats" shows the member Towns' populations and RVFD initial funding contributions. Most of my opinions in this letter are based on what the critical numbers on that spreadsheet tell me, as well as my own admittedly subjective opinions about how people make decisions.

The following are the facts I'm working with. It's likely that I haven't listed all the most important facts, so I welcome any you would like to add to this list.

Fact 1: Ross is committed to being part of the RVFD. If Ross wants to leave the RVFD, a 1-year's notice is required.

Fact 2: The Ross fire station will be closed on July 1, and the fire and EMT equipment and personnel will join the Ross Valley Fire Department (RVFD). (Possibly the EMT equipment will remain in Ross.) I understand that is a commitment Ross has made, and it cannot be changed at this time. Frankly, as things might unfold, this may be more of a blessing than a curse that some think it might be. I'll explain that a little later.

Fact 3: Ross has the smallest population among the four towns that make up the RVFD: San Anselmo, Fairfax, Sleepy Hollow and Ross. Ross accounts for about 9% of the approximately 25,000 people in the four-town area.

Fact 4: By contributing \$2.4 million, Ross accounts for about 24% of the \$10 million RVFD total budget. That percentage will increase with additional funding requirements and methodologies.

I don't know how those town-by-town contributions/assessments were derived. But it sure appears that Ross is overpaying, based solely on comparing our share of the monetary contributions to our share of the four-town population. From the chart you can see that Ross is paying the RVFD \$1,048 per person, which is 2.59 times the average \$404 per person for the four-town area. Because, in addition, Ross is contributing personnel and equipment to the RVFD, I assume that imbalance is or will become even greater.

According to the Marin IJ article, additional funding will increase disproportionately and unfavorably to Ross through the 2026-27 fiscal year.

Back to my "more of a blessing than a curse" statement about closing the Fire Station on July 1st. Let's assume that the Town Council will: (1) re-look at the decision; (2) it is decided to keep our fire station in Ross; and (3) it will take one or more years to re-build the fire station.

Where would our emergency personnel and equipment be housed as the buildings are re-built? Ross' membership in the RVFD just might be a safety valve that would provide a way to keep our equipment and personnel in use and at the ready, and housed elsewhere during the construction.

I believe our Town Council made good decisions about our emergency equipment and personnel at the time they had to make those decisions. But we are now in need of looking at the situation with additional perspectives.

To help me and other people of Ross understand the issues better, here are my questions:

1. What are the original and on-going contributions/assessments for each town, and how were they determined?
2. What are the pre- and post-7/1/2025 emergency vehicle response times for each of the four towns?

3. How were the response times in question 2 determined? It seems there is some reluctance to talk about the response times calculation methodologies because they are "very complicated." Having worked with complicated information my entire business career, I'd like to see the methodologies. Where or from whom can I obtain the details of this information?

I'm sure there are other critical questions to be answered, but these are the ones that are now my priority. Because July 1st is the date for closing the fire house, I'd like this information to be provided as soon as possible. If it helps to direct me to the person or persons who did the work, I am happy to interview them. My interest here is to look toward having a plan in place before our emergency people and equipment move. The urgency is, no matter what we decide, to know what we are going to say to insurance companies and rating agencies.

I firmly believe that there are always scarce resources, and the allocation of those resources will usually be deployed most efficiently to the largest group. **We now live in the era of what I call "explosive emergencies." Huge, sudden, fast moving, devastating.** I believe there is little doubt that **given an explosive emergency, the largest population group (San Anselmo then Fairfax) will receive the greatest share of benefits from those scarce emergency vehicles and personnel.** Despite what agreements are made now, in the crucible the people in charge will simply, and perhaps appropriately, state "I'm making the best decision for the most people possible as this emergency explodes." Ross is the town in the RVFD with the smallest population.

Should we or should we not be permanent members of the RVFD? I see this as a very large issue that is going to require a lot of information gathering, discussions, debates, and planning in a very short period of time. I suggest that a task force comprised of Ross council members, residents and emergency personnel be gathered to develop the best plan for "where we go from here." We do not have much time to come to a resolution to our problem.

The problem, if I may state a draft, is to determine what is the best way for Ross to staff, organize and equip an emergency organization, especially given the new realities of explosive emergencies?

I hope we can complete our plan by May 1st, if not earlier.

My suggestions in this letter in no way seek to have someone take over any responsibilities of the Town Council. They are suggestions of what actions I think are needed in a very short amount of time, some of which you might want to supplement the Town Council with a task force recruited from among the residents of Ross and from existing senior emergency management people.

I am available at any time by phone, email, text, or meeting in person.

Thank you for your time.

Dan Rosenthal

Ross Valley Fire Department Member Towns Population and Contribution Data

File: Ross Valley Fire Population & Cost Stats 20250210
2/10/2025

Town	Population *		Contribution (Million \$) **		\$ per Person	Index
San Anselmo	12,498	50%	\$4.0	40%	320	79
Fairfax	7,417	30%	2.4	24%	324	80
Sleepy Hollow	2,644	11%	1.3	13%	492	121
Ross	2,290	9%	2.4	24%	1,048	258
Total/Avg	24,849	100%	\$10.1	100%	406	100

Source Google Marin IJ * 100 = Avg

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** The population figures were pulled from al google search. It's likely that the actual current populations are available from each town. I doubt that any changes will materially change the critical findings shown in boxes.

Calif. council approves funding to increase fire engine staffing

A funding plan will increase firefighter staffing on Ross Valley fire apparatus to three-person engine companies

November 28, 2023 09:03 AM

By Giuseppe Ricapito
The Marin Independent Journal

SAN ANSELMO, Calif. — Ross has signaled its support for an increased funding plan that would augment staffing at the Ross Valley Fire Department.

The Town Council reached a consensus at a meeting on Nov. 9 that it would support the plan. The fire board is set to vote on before the end of the year.

The funding plan would increase staffing to three people per fire engine. Effective July 1, the town would see a \$147,705, or 5.9%, increase in the required member contribution.

"It's obvious that the Ross Valley Fire Department needs to go to three people," said Councilmember Elizabeth Robbins. "That's the county standard. I don't think there's really much to discuss."

The authority overseeing the department, a consolidated agency serving Ross, San Anselmo, Sleepy Hollow and Fairfax, includes representatives of each jurisdiction.

The department is the last in Marin with two-person engines. Since the creation of the joint powers authority in 1982, the agency has been largely augmented by a volunteer firefighter service.

The updated staffing plan would require an increase of approximately \$632,000 to the department's budget for the 2024-25 fiscal year, with each member jurisdiction paying a proportional share of the total.

The bolstered budget would enable the department to hire three more firefighters, purchase their gear and train the new recruits. If the board approves the funding, the agency would hire a firefighter-paramedic to join the team at Station 19 in San Anselmo next summer.

In 2019, an analysis of the Ross Valley agency recommended three-person engines for its San Anselmo, Sleepy Hollow and Fairfax fire stations. Station 18 in Ross would remain a two-person company because it also has ambulances from the Ross Valley Paramedic Authority.

The remaining engine companies will be staffed with three people after the Ross station closes on July 1, 2025. The three fire captains and three firefighter-engineers from the Ross station will be moved to the other stations once it shuts down.

During the meeting, the Town Council held a discussion on the planned closure of the Ross fire station and on the status of emergency medical services in town. Despite concerns about coverage, town officials urged adherence to the closure plan.

"I don't think we should be overreacting right now based on the path we're taking," Councilmember Julie McMillan said about the possibility of building a replacement station in Ross. "First of all, we don't have the funding."

According to the department's 2023-24 budget, San Anselmo pays the fire agency about \$4 million; Ross, \$2.4 million; Fairfax, \$2.4 million; and Sleepy Hollow, \$1.3 million.

The cost for each agency would increase under the proposed staffing change. San Anselmo would pay another \$256,161, Ross and Fairfax about \$147,000 each and Sleepy Hollow another \$80,900.

Those amounts would increase incrementally through the fiscal year ending in 2027. Ross would pay \$156,503 in the 2025-26 fiscal year and \$164,607 in the 2026-27 fiscal year.

"We really tried to be as transparent as possible with all costs," said Marin County Fire Chief Jason Weber, who addressed the council. "The department needs to make a paradigm shift to maintain an effective response force in the modern world."

The department's 11-member labor management subcommittee, composed of staff and officials, voted unanimously at a meeting on Oct. 5 to recommend approval of the proposal.

The department serves about 25,000 residents.

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