

THE MORNING AFTER

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

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Ross Brings Home the Bacon

Christmas came early (or late?) last week as Ross was awarded \$442,900 in federal Highway Safety Improvement Program grant funding for Sir Francis Drake Boulevard (SFD) and Lagunitas Road intersection improvements. We were the only Marin jurisdiction to receive funding from the \$49.8 million federal program money allocated to California and one of only eighteen projects funded in the nine county San Francisco Bay Area. The grant will correct safety problems, remove pedestrian islands, reconfigure right turning lanes, and add new curbs and signalized crosswalks to create safe pedestrian crossings. This project will follow and dovetail perfectly with this summer's SFD overlay project (a \$250,000 grant) and SFD pathway project (a \$197,000 grant). Thanks to the Ross School and MAGC for their letters of support and congratulations to Town staff!

– Town Manager Gary Broad

Council Tables Update of Business License Taxes

The Council unanimously agreed to continue until next year a proposal to update the Town's business license taxes. Under state law, any increase in general taxes must be approved by a simple majority of local voters.

Town business license taxes have not been increased over the last 25 years while inflation has caused prices to almost double. The Town collected nearly \$33,000 in business license tax revenue in FY 2008-2009, with an average of \$80 per license. By contrast, Belvedere collects approximately \$70,000 per year and charges \$160 for nearly all business licenses.

Staff proposed streamlining existing business classifications and approving a flat tax of \$125 for most business types, with fees for retailers and restaurants set at \$65. Staff also proposed indexing the tax to the Consumers Price Index, with rates resetting every five years beginning in 2016. The Council agreed to revisit the issue once business conditions had improved.



Separately, the Council passed a resolution requesting Marin County to consolidate the Town's election for two vacant Town Council seats with the general election on June 8, 2010. Council members Mike Skall and Bill Cahill's terms are expiring. The filing period for Council candidates begins on February 16 and extends through March 12. If either Council members Cahill or Skall choose not to file for re-election, the date will be extended to March 17. Please contact Linda Lopez for more information at 453-1453 ext.105 or llopez@townofross.org.

Advisory Design Review Members Appointed

The Council reappointed five current members to serve on the Advisory Design Review Group and established staggered terms to avoid the complete turnover of members at one time. Jim Kemp and Mark Fritts will serve two years and Josefa Buckingham, Dan Winey, and Noreen Slivon, one year. The Council could consider appointing up to four alternate members in the future if additional residents express interest in volunteering.

The Council also amended the resolution establishing the Advisory Design Review (ADR) process to avoid conflicts of interest. The resolution requires an ADR member to recuse himself if he has a financial or personal relationship with the applicant that would prevent him from offering an unbiased opinion.



Mayor Rick Strauss' Report

Don and Denise Ahrens have sold their business at the Ross Grocery to Woodlands Market owner and Ross resident Don Santa. We thank the Ahrens family for their 36-year contribution to the community, and we look forward to seeing the changes that are planned for the store.

Congratulations to Town Manager Gary Broad and staff on obtaining a \$442,900 grant for work on the Sir Francis Drake and Lagunitas Road intersection.

Mayor Pro Tempore Scot Hunter and I met with Joe Nation to discuss energy efficiency programs available through PG&E. Mr. Nation may attend the March Council meeting to further discuss greenhouse gas reduction measures.

David Parisi, a traffic engineer and Safe Routes to School representative, is studying Shady Lane intersection improvements at Lagunitas Road, Ames Avenue and Locust Avenue and will be presenting recommendations by letter in the coming week.

Pipeline Replacement to Disrupt SFD Traffic

The Council approved an encroachment permit for the Marin Municipal Water District (MMWD) to replace 2,500 feet of mainline piping on Sir Francis Drake Boulevard between Lagunitas Road and Bolinas Avenue. Construction is proposed to take place between May 3 and June 15. Only one lane of traffic will be open between 9:00 a.m. and 3:30 p.m. and between 6:00 and 9:00 p.m. on weekdays. Work may also take place between 9 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. on two Saturdays. The construction contract will contain incentives to finish the project on-time, including a \$3,000 per day bonus for early completion and penalties for missing the deadline.



MMWD said the majority of the existing, substandard piping was installed in 1910 and would not withstand the impacts of the Town's construction projects in the area. Pipeline replacement is scheduled to be completed before the start of the Lagunitas Bridge reconstruction project on June 15. Sir Francis Drake Boulevard repaving and pathway construction is scheduled to begin on July 5.

Council Discusses Ballot Initiative Aimed at Marin Energy Authority

The Council unanimously agreed to consider a resolution in March opposing the "New Two-Thirds 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.

If passed, the amendment would impact Ross' ability to join the Marin Energy Authority (MEA) in the future as such action is likely to require two-thirds approval of both the voters in the existing MEA territory and the voters in Ross. The Council's January 2010 decision to withdraw from MEA was partially based on an assumption the Town could consider rejoining the Authority at some point in the future.

Winey Appointed to Mosquito Board

The Council appointed Iris Winey to serve a two-year term as the Ross representative on the Marin/Sonoma Mosquito & Vector Control District Board of Trustees. Many thanks to Ms. Winey for answering our (repeated) call to civic service!



Animal Control Fees Increased



The Council agreed to increase animal control fees as recommended by the Animal Control Joint Powers Authority. Fees were last set in 2003. In establishing the recommended countywide fee schedule, the Authority looked at fees charged in comparable Bay Area jurisdictions.

The 3-year dog license fee will increase from \$24 to \$34 for sterilized dogs and from \$70 to \$77 for unsterilized dogs. Impound fees will increase an average of 18% and board fees an average of 25%. Potentially dangerous and vicious dog permits will increase the most at 150%. The Marin Humane Society said the new fees do not exceed the cost of providing the associated services.

Council Postpones Response to Grand Jury Report on Marin Clean Energy

The Council agreed to continue discussion of an official response to the Marin Civil Grand Jury Report entitled, "Marin Clean Energy: Pull the Plug." As a response is due within 90 days of the report date, the Council will schedule a special public meeting on or before March 2.

The controversial Grand Jury Report urged the county, cities and towns to abandon the Marin Clean Energy program, concluding that the business model is based on over-optimistic assumptions and that local governments and ratepayers are exposed to too much financial risk. Staff had prepared a response that agreed with seven of the report's findings, disagreed or partially disagreed with seven findings, and stated the Town had implemented all three of the Grand Jury's recommendations. Council member Chris Martin submitted at the meeting alternate responses for six of the findings. In order to allow time for adequate consideration, the Council determined a special meeting would need to be scheduled. A staff report containing all proposed responses will be posted on the Town's website.

Mid-year Budget Review

Mayor Pro Tempore Scot Hunter reported that at mid-year the Town's revenues were \$33,000 over budget and expenses were \$25,000 under budget. Revenue accounts that had been trending lower than budgeted – including building permits, planning fees, and property taxes – are showing signs of recovery. Larger than expected expenses for town attorney fees and fire personnel overtime have also been resolved. Town Manager Gary Broad agreed that the worst budget news looked to have taken place in the first six months of the year.



The Council agreed to continue discussion of recommended budget amendments, including a proposal to hire a full-time Town Engineer, to the March Council meeting.

Council Members Report on 09-10 Goals

Mayor Pro Tempore Scot Hunter reported on the Town's unfunded liabilities. The Town currently has a retirement fund deficit of \$1.7 million and pays CalPERS 7.75% interest on this outstanding balance. Since the Town's reserves are currently earning a return between .6% and 3.0%, it may make sense to shift funds to the CalPERS account. Mayor Pro Tempore Hunter will consider upcoming projects that may need to be funded and return next month with a recommendation to deal with the unfunded liabilities.

Council member Mike Skall announced the next Hillside Lot Ordinance review public meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, March 2, at 7:00 to 9:00 p.m. at Town Hall. Staff will present draft ordinance revisions for meeting participants to review and refine.

Council member Chris Martin said the County has identified the Unit 4 flood control project as the top funding priority and neighboring communities and Ross Valley organizations are beginning to adopt a resolution similar to the one Ross adopted to encourage the Army Corps of Engineers to complete the channel improvements and fish ladder replacement. Since the Unit 4 project likely will not be completed for 10 years, the Town and the Ross Valley communities are working together to develop alternatives such as detention basins and stormwater control regulations.

No Parking Zone on Fernhill Avenue on Hold

The Council unanimously agreed to delay adoption of an ordinance to prohibit parking on the residential north side of Fernhill Avenue from Norwood Avenue to Glenwood Avenue in order to review Branson School proposals to mitigate parking problems in the area. Council members agreed that the elimination of parking spaces on Fernhill Avenue could lead to overflow problems in other areas, and that a comprehensive approach needed to be taken. Fernhill Avenue resident Andy Sheehan disagreed, stating, "This issue has been under discussion for over a year. All you are doing is kicking the can down the road. The Council needs to take action now."



The Public Works Committee will discuss the Branson proposals at their March 2 public meeting. The Council agreed to table discussion of the ordinance for no more than three months.



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 March Council meeting.

Senior Planner Elise Semonian

Address	Applicant	Approved	Denied	Continued
2 Chestnut Ave.	Daniel and Iris Winey			
186 Prospect Ave.	James Proctor			
36 Glenwood Ave.	John and Lisa Pritzker			
6 Hill Road	Matt and Courtney Seashols			
57 Laurel Grove Ave.	Jennifer Maxwell			
29 Upper Road	Stuart and Sara Ryan			

Clarification

Last month, *The Morning After* reported that Marin Sanitary Service offers a senior discount on trash collection rates. We should have also mentioned the senior rate is only available for bi-weekly service for a 32-gallon can. It seems to us the less expensive 20-gallon can with weekly pick-up is a better value for low-trash residents of any age.

Upcoming Town Council Meeting

The next regular Council meeting is on Thursday, March 11, at 6:30 p.m. 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.