

REGULAR MEETING of the ROSS ADVISORY DESIGN
REVIEW GROUP AND SPECIAL JOINT MEETING of the
ROSS TOWN COUNCIL
THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 26, 2009

1. 6:30 P.M. Commencement.

Present: Town Council: Mayor Cahill; Mayor Pro Tempore Strauss; Council Member Hunter; Council Member Martin; Council Member Skall; and ADR Group Members: Chairman Jim Kemp; Noreen Slivon; Joey Buckingham; and Mark Fritts. Dan Winey absent.

2. Posting of Agenda.

Town Manager Broad reported that the agenda was posted according to government code.

3. Advisory Design Review Group - Minutes of prior meeting

The ADR Group unanimously approved the minutes of the October, November and December 2008 meetings and the January 2009 meeting.

4. Advisory Design Review Group – Open Time for Public Expression

Diane Rudden, Willow Avenue resident, appreciated the ADR Group and is very impressed with their participation.

5. A presentation by SWA Group and Nelson/Nygaard of their initial design ideas and concepts for downtown Ross

Mayor Pro Tempore Strauss explained the goal is to enhance the downtown area and promote communication among the Town as well as look at the parking, circulation, street trees, tables and benches. They met with a small group of landscape architects and documented their input and then moved into a stakeholders meetings, which involved owners of commercial buildings downtown and users. They heard ideas and additional input from residents and all the information was documented. They received additional comments during the Town scoping session at the Post office, Ross Common and small Downtown Park. All the input received was provided to the SWA Group and they were asked to synthesize all the comments.

Elizabeth Shreeve, SWA Group, presented a Powerpoint presentation that included the following information:

- Aerial Photograph of downtown
- Downtown Plan Concepts – Modifications to intersections, grading and accessibility issues.
- Downtown Visioning Plan
- Aerial photograph showing awkward parking; roadway alignments; awkward pedestrian crossings; and wide cross-sections in roadways, which can be remedied to create a better plaza space downtown.
- Looked at primary open spaces, Ross Common and Allen Park and the disconnected nature of open space and the pedestrian system.
- Analysis involved: flooding issues; land use; retail; housing; trees; and regional wide circulation patterns for bicyclist, pedestrians and vehicles.

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- Lovely landscape spaces are provided downtown. There are pretty open, undefined streets mitigated by beautiful mature trees. Crosswalks at Redwood are high-speed geometry.
- Cross-sections show very wide paved areas.
- The Post Office is an important connection across Ross Common to the park. The other side has no entry to the park and has a narrow sidewalk. Also, the entry point is located off alignment.
- Provided images showing the disconnect between open space and the popular route used by bicyclist. Not a lot of generosity in sidewalk section.
- South on Ross Common shows diagonal parking on Main Street with single loaded diagonal on the other side. Not much accommodation for pedestrian traffic.
- Diagonal parking is hazardous for bicycle traffic and provides a higher chance of collision.
- Circulation occurs behind the Post Office entering Allen Park.
- Fish ladder is in the process of being designed and rebuilt.
- Post Office is a very gracious, lovely structure.
- Wonderful little spaces downtown that provide character and enjoyment.
- The goal is to provide a healthy vibrant pedestrian system.
- Downtown retail portion - the street is very wide and then narrows to modest small-scale section.
- Excessive speed is traveled by vehicles when the road is wider, which is not practical in the downtown area.

Larry Reed, SWA Group, stated they started reviewing the Visioning Plan, which was very aggressive on parking. The incredible road widths must be calmed. They started looking at the cross-sections and tried removing all diagonal parking off Ross Common and use 12-foot lane with 8-foot parallel parking stall. They were surprised to see that by better utilizing the parking court off the street and using parallel parking stalls, they gained 11 spaces. They shifted a lot of the parking density into the parking lot. They made Ross Common all 12-foot lanes with 8-foot parallel parking stalls on each side. They did not want to disturb the existing trees. They determined 60-degree diagonal parking within a landscaped wall to circulate one-way through and one-way out better defines a separate use area. That allowed a generous continuous pedestrian way along Ross Common. It allows incorporation of street trees that connect the end of the commercial district. The pedestrian way was given width and now they have an opportunity to incorporate benches and lights to close that gap. Also, they incorporated textural changes at the Post Office to provide additional traffic calming measures. They were able to incorporate a parking lot and revealed a space within the juncture of the path system. They were able to get vehicles parked and it became much more usable. They anticipate improvements to the fish ladder, so it seemed it would reveal a great opportunity for additional public plaza or park in Town. He then discussed the existing circulation patterns and the proposed circulation patterns where the road is narrowed down calms traffic. They provided more Ross Common without damaging or challenging any of the existing trees providing a 10-foot wide promenade enhanced with lights and so forth. The cross-section at the Post Office shows the proposed condition with an 8-foot sidewalk and two 12-foot lanes. They incorporated low walls and a hedge condition. They are still providing pedestrian circulation along the creek and gain extra room at the Common. The area is very constrained and the curb is shallow, so they gained valuable space by pulling that curb out without encroaching into Ross Common. He provided an elevation of the Post

Office showing the benefit of having street trees, a low hedge, diagonal parking behind and parallel parking on the street. He then discussed a variety of traffic calming measures such as pavers, textural changes in roadway, and bulbouts.

ADR Member Buckingham discussed the bicycle path at the tennis courts, and as designed with the new parking, she wondered how a bicyclist would be directed to stay on Lagunitas because the bicyclist must be managed. ADR Member Slivon agreed it is a difficult access in regard to kids turning into the school. Mr. Reed responded that there was a desire to have the bicyclist come out to Ross Common. They discouraged the bicyclist to continue straight through, but that matter has not been resolved at this point. Within the design of the plaza, they could provide a way to direct the bicycle traffic. He further agreed that they must make a delineation between vehicles and bicycle traffic.

Mayor Pro Tempore Strauss noted that two bicycle routes are identified right now for Marin County, which is going back along side the creek and out on Ross Common. They are trying to have a pedestrian path by the creek and they need to figure out specific widths. The identified bicycle path will move out to Ross Common, but they must have a conversation with the Bicycle Coalition. Ms. Shreeve pointed out that it is a very problematic area.

ADR Member Fritts suggested having the primary crossing across from the Post Office, but incorporate a path with the parking. He desired another pedestrian crossing to travel to Ross Common.

ADR Chairman Kemp did not see a large plan, only little ideas of how to focus pedestrian, vehicles and traffic calming measures. He desired a large vision of how the problem will be solved. It has been so focused on little bits and pieces. Areas still must be resolved. He suggested backing up and review the whole focus because he desired a large plan. Ms. Shreeve agreed it is stitching together rather than revising a radical change to the downtown. Mr. Reed stated that when reviewing they looked carefully at the visioning elements. Several were concerned about excessive tree removal and changing the character of Ross. They selectively thought enhancing access from the Post Office to Ross Common was a good direction. To make it simpler for pedestrians to move through that space rather than set Ross apart in terms of an idea, so they intentionally tried to be conservative.

ADR Chairman Kemp thought there would be more of a statement of how this plan relates to the commercial and retail aspects. He thought they would be reviewing a broader vision behind the street and parking. The plan is so focused in his view. Mr. Reed pointed out that this is a workshop to receive input, so they are still working. Ms. Shreeve did look at more radical approaches such as taking parking out and adding a building to connect the Post Office with buildings of downtown, but it does not function very well due to the constraints. Parking is so important to the merchants and those that pickup their mail at the Post Office. They looked at bulbouts, but the street is fairly narrow and parking would be lost, but temporary columns could be considered.

Jeremy Nelson, a transportation planner with Nelson/Nygaard, stated that the bones and urban fabric is so strong in Ross and the micro interventions are increasing safety, accessibility and connectivity. This is a testament to the quality of the fabric in Ross. These moves add up to drastic improvements on traffic, vehicle and pedestrian conflicts.

ADR Member Fritts expected connection and school access to be part of this plan. He wanted the plan to extend to encapsulate the drop-off for the school. Mayor Pro Tempore Strauss did discuss that matter and one entrance will remain on Lagunitas with another at Ross Common or it might be moved down to the crosswalk by the Post Office. Also, provide signage that parking is allowed during the middle of the day, but “no parking” during peak hour periods. It may be a project they identify early to avoid U-turns and set patterns rather than having police issue tickets, but resolve the issue by design. He further noted that this is open for discussion.

ADR Member Slivon asked whether they explored the corner or across the Post Office for school drop-off in order to have a separate drive-through. Mayor Pro Tempore Strauss explained that so much of Ross Common would be taken, so it becomes problematic. Parking is shifted around in front of the Post Office and at Redwood. Once school construction is completed it will shift back, so they must suffer some, but know that the situation will be improved.

ADR Member Buckingham pointed out that a lot of activity at Ross Common is not held to the commercial area and asked if they considered any subliminal approaches to get people down to those shops. Ms. Shreeve responded that once the school reopens, the primary parking area will be off Lagunitas and Ross Common, which could be designated as a drop-off zone during peak hour times. It is safer to have drop-off zones on one side of the crosswalk. She believed any number of spots along Ross Common could be assigned and enforced as a drop-off zone. In terms of getting down to the downtown area, there is a 10-foot wide promenade that takes people along the edge to downtown. She further noted that the layout of Ross Common has yet to be discussed.

Transportation Planner Nelson stated that the courtyard-textured pavements would help bring commercial activity to the downtown area. Ms. Shreeve believed the textured paved areas could be used as a plaza for the farmer’s market as well as sidewalk vending. Mr. Reed explained that now it is impossible to travel to the Post Office, which is not very inviting. They will raise the parking apron so it would be more pedestrian. The inclusion of street trees and an easier flow along with additional parking would facilitate more pedestrian circulation to the Post Office and back downtown.

ADR Member Fritts stated they are missing an opportunity to stop bicyclist. They need a gathering place for cyclist. There is an opportunity to have a destination place. He wanted to provide a location for cyclist in that connection to downtown to enhance the area and allow cyclist to stop.

ADR Member Slivon suggested opening the park up to allow bicycle access. Mayor Pro Tempore Strauss noted that it is private and they are in discussions to enhance that area. In order to draw people downtown, they must look at zoning. If space is provided, they need the right operators, which is the next step to look at zoning and attract operators as well as promote the downtown.

ADR Chairman Kemp felt the plan presented provided some traffic improvements, marginal parking improvements and landscaping enhancements. Mayor Pro Tempore Strauss noted that they discussed underground parking, but they do not have the population base to capture a lot, so it is more about tweaks.

Council Member Martin discussed the overall objective, which is traffic calming and widening the sidewalks to make a more comfortable path, but are they trying to strengthen the merchant core and increase the amount of bicycles used in Ross to get to retail, school or just pass-through Town. He wanted to encourage people to use the pathways. He felt the connection with the creek is a major issue. During summer months, the creek is attractive and an asset. Mill Valley and San Anselmo use their waterways well. With Marin Art & Garden Center, it may be an opportunity to incorporate that more within the mainstream of the Town as far as its future and continued uses. With bicyclist, it is a great opportunity to get them to stop and shop, but in order to do that they must accomplish public amenities like restrooms, benches, tables and so forth. Ross Square is an asset that could be better utilized in the future. He likes what he sees, but agreed that this is a great opportunity to look at a broader based perspective and in that comes a budget and timeline and what realistically are they trying to accomplish. He further stated that the key is the objectives.

Ms. Shreeve stated that they derived objects from the visioning process and design professionals walking around Town. The objectives were to strengthen life of the street; manage traffic; calm traffic; encourage pedestrians; beautify streets; and build on the inherit character of the Town of Ross by stitching together pieces that are missing. A street based plan involves improving pedestrian connection and park space as well as managing traffic and parking. There is quite a bit of change, which is subtle and what they felt was appropriate for this issue. They did not address the merchant situation downtown because there are good bones to downtown streets. There is not a lot of retail. Revitalizing downtown might have more to do with signage and image making in another design. The objective is to strengthen the connection to Marin Art & Garden by bringing the intersection out and improving space in front of Town Hall. They want to tie into the bridge connection and get a through flow of walking facilities from the retail area all the way over to Town Hall continuously.

Transportation Planner Nelson explained their priorities, which were to reduce conflicts between different modes by narrowing the right-of-way; providing traffic calming options or additions to reduce vehicle speeds; and reduce speed differential between bicycles and vehicles.

Council Member Martin asked if there is a defined bike path on Ross Common. Transportation Planner Nelson responded that a dedicated bicycle path is on just this one segment where there is a right-of-way between Lagunitas and Redwood Drive. By narrowing the lanes through traffic calming, bicycles could maneuver with vehicles.

Mayor Cahill discussed the area between the Post Office and creek and adjacent to Lagunitas Road. Currently there is a sidewalk at the same grade as the asphalt pavement. He asked if there will be a separation for that pedestrian path. Ms. Shreeve agreed to place bollards or some sort of vertical separation. They will draw a section and provide a proposal. Transportation Planner Nelson suggested having back-in angled parking for better visibility, which is becoming increasingly common with larger sized vehicles and it takes up no extra space and it is very workable.

Council Member Skall liked the circulation and subtle changes proposed and asked if whether this is the scope of the entire work or is this phase one of what will come. This is a

traffic circulation plan, not a downtown. Mayor Pro Tempore Strauss noted that there are more phases. Most critical was to deal with the intersection of Lagunitas, Sir Francis Drake and Ross Common. The third part is zoning and enhancements to the downtown.

Council Member Skall asked if there is thought about expression of what is proposed as relating to the Post Office with the school and the entrance. Mayor Pro Tempore Strauss stated that they must check with Director Pam Riley to reduce the size of the backstop to fit more graciously and by extending the sidewalk they capture more area, but it still must be discussed and explored. He wanted to have a workshop with the school in that regard. Discussions occurred across from the Post Office in regard to having a Gazebo or open trellis, but the specifics are still being worked out and public input is needed.

Mayor Cahill believed it is important to make sure circulation patterns consider the new design of the school. There is a significant entrance and that is important for the school, Post Office and circulation along Ross Common.

Mayor Pro Tempore Strauss asked if the "*Share the Road*" signs are effective. Transportation Planner Nelson responded that it is a Bay Area invention and it is a benefit to both pedestrians and vehicles. It is an official allowable marking. It helps guide less aggressive cyclist to the path to be followed. It keeps them out of the door zone. It is quite effective and it is a great strategy when there is not a full bicycle lane.

Mayor Cahill opened the public comment on this item.

Barbara Call, Redwood resident, stated that it is disturbing that many residents have no idea a downtown plan is occurring. She suggested that a questionnaire be sent out to residents informing them of what is occurring and test the pulse of the community to see what they are interested in and what they believe needs to be done, if anything. She expressed concern for narrowing Ross Common. She likes Ross because it is not like all the other cities. The open square is quite lovely. She wanted Allen Park to be addressed down by the tennis platform. She wanted to beautify downtown Ross without spending huge amounts of money and recommended just maintaining what is present.

Diane Rudden, Willow Avenue resident, stated that restrooms and bicycle racks must be provided. The walkway across the Post Office is a concern and suggested some type of textured material in order to slow vehicles down. She liked the fact that it is narrower.

Police Chief Jim Reis stated most of Kentfield, the medical hospital and younger kids use the bicycle path and there is a delineation between the bicycle path and parked vehicles, which is old railroad ties that help protect pedestrians and bicyclist using the path. If the amount of vehicles are doubled there is conflict with vehicles exiting that one lane. He suggested widening the area to allow a left hand turn lane and a right hand turn lane, which would reduce conflict and facilitate people in their turning maneuvers. He wanted to encourage bicyclist to utilize one of the two lanes to enter the roadway safely. He just expressed concern for restricted visibility. He recommended an asphalt curb line that delineates bicycle and pedestrian pathway from the parking area to avoid backing into a pedestrian or bicyclist. He suggested continuing the curb line all the way down, remove some railroad ties and make a nice smooth path with a few breaks to smoothly travel out to the traffic lane. He liked the idea of having an arbor or place for people to gather and relax, which would be very

attractive. In terms of revitalizing the downtown, San Rafael has small LED lights downtown that create an ambiance during the evening and it would encourage people to spend time downtown.

Council Member Hunter asked staff if 12-foot lanes eliminate U-turns. Police Chief Reis noted that there is a dip in the road and his recommendation is to flatten out the dip, which would encourage people to continue down the road. Make it more conducive to traffic that might facilitate people moving through downtown without the U-turn in front of the Post Office.

Nancy Livingston, owner of the building containing Café Marmalade, agreed that bicycle racks are necessary otherwise they lean against merchant buildings. Also, she thought a survey was going to be sent out to residents of Ross to see how they felt about the downtown plan. She then encouraged bicyclist, but bicycle parking must be provided. Ms. Shreeve agreed to provide bicycle parking and agreed with adding lighting to make the commercial area more attractive.

Denise Ahrens, Ross Grocery owner, agreed there is a need for public restrooms downtown, but had no idea how that would work. Mayor Pro Tempore Strauss responded that they are in discussions with the school, so they understand the need for restrooms. The idea is to have a restroom in the new gym that faces the playfields. He proposed a sit down meeting with the school architect and Council to work out the issues, but it is being explored.

Ken Fineman, School Board member, stated that a Town survey would be sent out within the next three weeks. A professional survey writer helped along with volunteers, so that survey should be distributed in three weeks and he encouraged all to fill it out. They want to hear public input on traffic, pedestrian safety, bicycle and traffic calming measures.

Cynthia Zak, Ross resident, pointed out that the school restrooms are open during school activities, but that does not address bicyclist. In Carmel, some restaurants have bathrooms that are easily accessible, but they are paid restrooms. Having more than one restroom and having one in the downtown area with signage covers the different groups coming through Ross. She suggested that the Town explore all possibilities.

Brian Racine suggested eliminating all parking to the west of the Post Office in order to give an opportunity to make one north/south access. Go back to single loading the parking. Also, it is a good idea to give merchants more parking spaces. Make a strong west/east pedestrian and bicycle crosswalk and make it up to the merchants by drawing more people from the neighborhood. Mr. Reed explored a variety of different scenarios. They wanted to test the waters with the proposal before the Council and ADR tonight. It would be a great opportunity to open up to the creek. Mr. Racine did not want it to be a patchwork plan. Ms. Shreeve noted that they are under strict orders not to lose parking. Ross Resident Brian felt diagonal parking on Ross Common on the north side with bulbouts at the intersection, the parking spaces lost behind the Post Office will be gained on Ross Common. Make it up to merchants by getting a few bicyclist and pedestrians to visit their store. They must survey Ross Grocery and merchants on how many come on foot and how many travel by vehicle.

Don Ahrens, Eddie's owner, is disappointed with this proposal. When he first looked at plans presented one year ago they had diagonal parking all across down to the Post Office.

Downtown Ross is not a quiet downtown. It can be extremely crowded during the weekends. Lack of parking is not for the merchants, but for residents as well those headed to Ross Recreation. He is disturbed that some much attention is being focused on bicyclists that never stop and only drive-through Town.

Kathy Strauss, Ross Resident, discussed issues around bicycle path and the park combined with bringing the path down to the exit should be explored. Having bicycles exit at the squeeze point is very dangerous and does not work with circulation. In terms of the main street, she is not convinced about parallel parking. It is more dangerous. On Ross Common side there are so many dropping kids off at school and sports events. She agreed with traffic calming measures and narrowing the road, but keep all the diagonal parking spaces. She really liked the connection across from Post Office. Her concern is that kids will step off the sidewalk and wanted the bulbouts sooner. Transportation Planner Nelson responded that bulbouts have been discussed at the mid level cross.

Neal King, Sylvan Lane resident, agreed it is a good idea to get people to move on the south side of Lagunitas and not try to encourage crossing the street because there is no turnaround. He suggested a hard turn to force or encourage pedestrians to cross in that vicinity of Lagunitas and Ross Common. Mr. Reed responded that Police Chief Reis reinforced that comment because there is an opportunity for a queue to encourage such travel. Mr. King stated they are improving the creek side, so enhance the turning at the corner of the bridge and Lagunitas to get them to move down the street rather than cross over.

School Board President Bernhard appreciated the work of SWA Group. On the school end, bids came in and they came in lower than expected and contracts will be signed next week. Also, he wants to understand Ross Common and how it interfaces with the gym and the location of the baseball diamond. Mayor Pro Tempore Strauss desired a meeting in the very near future to discuss the issues. Mayor Cahill agreed that representatives from the school and the Public Works Subcommittee should schedule a meeting and discuss alternatives to determine an acceptable resolution. Council Member Martin believed Ross Rec should be involved in that conversation as well. The Council agreed.

There being no further public testimony on this item, the Mayor closed the public portion and brought the matter back to the Council for discussion.

ADR Member Slivon discussed parallel parking and most drive faster at Café Marmalades, so it can be argued in both ways in regard to parallel and diagonal parking. Also, there is a real problem at the corner of Eddie's. There is no room to pass bicyclist in regard to parallel parking and stated that they must measure the width to make sure there is enough room. Mayor Pro Tempore Strauss wanted to have the Bicycle Coalition review the proposal and determine the best solution.

ADR Member Fritts agreed that two bathrooms could be proposed, one at the playground area and then a public bathroom downtown. Also, the park north of the Post Office does not serve much of a purpose and there might be an opportunity to enhance that area. Mayor Pro Tempore Strauss responded that enhancements are being explored.

ADR Member Fritts stated that at Eddie's and Ross Common there is an opportunity for seating areas and believed there is an opportunity to provide a connection piece to the downtown area in order to have a congregation area.

ADR Chairman Kemp wanted a larger vision expressed tonight. It has to do with eliminating vehicles. Comments about school drop-off and pick up is the main priority. Ross Common could become a real gathering place for bicyclist and pedestrians and enhance the commercial and downtown area by limiting parking. He further desired a pedestrian friendly community.

ADR Member Buckingham stated that school access is the elephant in the room and in terms of trying to create a strong access to the Post Office she wanted to know how that would relate to the school entry. Also, she wanted to encourage more commercial activity in Ross to ensure that merchants survive.

Council Member Hunter stated overall he likes the plan. He believed great ideas were discussed tonight. Extending the bicycle path along the back of the parking lot for safer entry to the street is appropriate. He agreed there is a need for bathrooms. Also, they have not addressed the creek, which is an asset and they should not turn their backs on it. As they move forward, windows should be provided along the creek. He further believed they made a lot of progress tonight and appreciated all the input.

Council Member Martin discussed the bicycle path along the creek and asked who maintains that area because it is very hazardous. Public Works Director Mel Jarjoura responded that the gate to Allen Park is part of County Flood Control. The sign states "*shared path*" and County of Marin Flood Control maintains that path. Council Member Martin stated that work is needed. He liked the idea of extending that bicycle path to a multipurpose path along the creek. It is used both for rehab individuals at Kentfield and younger riders and a desirable pedestrian path is needed. That creek could be a visual asset. He likes the idea of that extending all the way down to Lagunitas where they are having an enhanced sidewalk and footpath with the new bridge, which would remove the hazard of turning earlier into traffic.

Mayor Pro Tempore Strauss appreciated all the comments tonight and will take all the information provided tonight and at prior meetings in regards to the downtown plan, pocket park and talk to the merchants. They will have another meeting to define what projects to move forward with as well as discuss the budget.

Mayor Cahill appreciated SWA's work. He is heavily influenced by ADR Chairman Kemp's comments about a larger vision, particularly with comments on the west side of the Post Office. That area is underutilized, awkward and there are conflicts. He is not afraid to reduce the amount of parking in that area in order to enhance that part of the downtown. He added that pervious pavers in certain areas must be explored as they look at flood control issues to the extent they can use pervious paving in a large part of this plan in terms of hardscape design that would be beneficial for flood control and storm water runoff. He further agreed that this has been a terrific meeting.

Council Member Hunter asked if bicycle racks could be provided with wider sidewalks. Ms. Shreeve responded in the affirmative.

Council Member Martin asked if there is funding for enhanced bicycle path and/or multipurpose path along the creek with bicycle racks. Transportation Planner Nelson responded that there is always funding, if one know where to look. They can talk more about where funding might come from for specific improves as the Town moves forward with budgeting.

Council Member Martin suggested, in working with the Bicycle Coalition and County, to utilize College of Marin parking lots to become a place to park and point in the direction of bicycle path for less street traffic on the downtown.

6. Adjournment.

By order of the Mayor, the meeting adjourned at 8:30 pm.

William R. Cahill, Mayor

ATTEST:

Gary Broad, Town Manager