

THE MORNING AFTER

*Highlights from the
Ross Town Council Meeting
of June 11, 2009*

Volume 3, No. 6

June 12, 2009



*Project Planner
Christine O'Rourke*

Think Second Units!

Every five to eight years, the State of California requires all California cities to update their housing element and plan for the development of a state-mandated number of housing units. After working with many cities on their housing elements, I can assure you virtually no one likes this process or the state mandates! As the Town's hands are essentially tied, the best approach is for the community to work together to find sites that can accommodate rental units, either through multi-family development, apartments mixed in with commercial buildings, or second units on private property. Second units are an excellent way to both meet the housing needs of our community and satisfy the state requirements, as they can be blended into existing neighborhoods and preserve our small-town feel. In addition to supplying extra income, second units can provide homes for aging parents, recent college graduates getting on their feet, home health care workers and childcare providers. Many of you may have secondary buildings that may only require a second unit permit for occupancy, or living space that could easily be converted into a second unit. Also, do seriously think about creating a second unit when planning any major remodel. You'll be glad you built the flexibility into your design – and you'll be helping your town!

Council Holds Joint Meeting with Ross School Board

The Town Council unanimously voted to approve the Ross School District request for an easement to permit the construction and use of a stage partially located on the Ross Common and an easement running along the east side of the school's lot line for a pathway from the school gymnasium to Lagunitas Road. Ramps and stairs leading from the pathway to the school would also encroach on Town land.

In approving the easements, Mayor Bill Cahill said, "We are only talking about a few feet. The stage will be a huge benefit to the town and will be enjoyed for generations. I am very much in favor of it."



Council Approves FY 09-10 Budget

The Council adopted a FY 09-10 general fund budget with expected revenues of \$5,487,613 and operating and capital improvement expenditures of \$5,549,071. The draft budget presented to the Council showed an excess of revenue over expenditures of \$1,745, but the Council voted to allocate additional capital improvement funds for potential improvements along Shady Lane, resulting in a deficit of \$61,458. A general fund reserve balance of \$2,300,654 was still projected for June 30, 2010. Town Manager Gary Broad noted that through 11 months of the current fiscal year, the Town was operating with a \$300,000 surplus and that next year's budget offered enhanced services, not the cuts occurring in so many communities.

Additionally, the FY 09-10 budget includes over \$3,000,000 for the new Lagunitas Road Bridge and for roadway, drainage improvements and work in the community. It also includes almost \$400,000 for new pathways through Ross. The majority of these improvements – close to \$2.5 million – will be paid for with federal, state and local grant money.

The budget anticipates general fund revenues will increase 0.8% from last year's estimated revenues. Although property tax revenue, which contributes almost half of the Town's total revenue, is projected to rise by 4%, fees for applications, permits and licenses are projected to decrease nearly 32% due to economic conditions. The General Service Tax is expected to contribute approximately 12% of total general fund revenues.

General government expenditures, which include staff salaries and expenses for the administration, planning, public works and building departments, declined by 5.1%. The public safety budget, which comprises nearly 62% of all general fund expenditures, grew by 9.8% over last year's estimated expenses. The increases primarily resulted from hiring another police officer and additional fire and police pay and benefits.



Mayor Bill Cahill's Report

I want to acknowledge and congratulate the three young men from Ross who are the 2009 appointees to the military academies from Marin county. Alex Sagues, son of Paul and Debbie Sagues, and Tom Busterud, son of John and Gretchen Busterud, are going to West Point. Forest Kersetter, son of Bob and Becky Kersetter, is going to the Air Force Academy. We are incredibly proud of the call to service to our country exhibited by these three fine young men.

Many thanks to Don Santa and Woodlands Market for donating a portion of the proceeds from sales at the market this past Monday to a fund for the benefit of Officer Bob Besgrove's grandson to help with his medical expenses. The donation raised \$5,000. We are all very grateful for Don's generosity.

The Town is once again holding its annual Fourth of July parade and picnic with Officer Bob as the Grand Marshall. The parade will start at 11 a.m. from the College of Marin parking lot #10 to Ross Common, where the Fourth of July festivities will take place. For more information, please [visit the website](#).



Council Discusses Draft Housing Element



The Council agreed to remove the St. Anselm parking lot from the draft housing element inventory of affordable housing sites.

The Council authorized submittal of the Town's draft housing element for 2009-2014 to the State Department of Housing and Community Development. The housing element includes programs to provide the zoning, development standards and housing policies that will facilitate development of the state-mandated regional housing need allocation of 27 housing units over the next five years.

Eight new single family homes are projected to be built, satisfying the Town's requirement for housing affordable to above-moderate income households. State affordability requirements for the remaining 19 units are as follows: 8 units must be affordable to very low income households (a maximum household income of \$56,550 for a family of four); 6 units for low income households (maximum income of

\$90,500); and 5 units for moderate income households (maximum income of \$116,150).

Market rents in Ross are generally affordable to low and moderate income households. A two-person low income household, for example, could afford to pay up to \$1,810 in rent, while a four-person moderate income family could afford to pay up to \$2,850. The draft housing element relies on a mixture of new second units and small units built on “opportunity sites” at 37 Sir Francis Drake Boulevard, the Branson School and the Marin Art & Garden Center. In addition to satisfying state requirements for low and moderate income households, these units could provide housing for people who provide services in Ross, including teachers, public safety personnel, and those who work in downtown shops.

The very low income units are more challenging to provide as they typically require some sort of subsidy or deed restriction to ensure affordability. The draft housing element contains a new program to offer a living area bonus of up to 500 square feet to property owners who voluntarily deed-restrict their second units to be affordable to very low income households.

The Council agreed to remove the St. Anselm parking lot site on Sir Francis Drake Boulevard and Bolinas Avenue from the inventory of affordable housing sites and to remove three-story, mixed-use development from consideration in the downtown. In a separate action, the Council voted to retain use of the Town’s property at 6 Redwood Drive as a single family home available to Town employees to rent. The property needs an estimated \$20,000 in repairs.



The Council agreed to repair the Town-owned house at 6 Redwood Drive and rent it to a Town employee.

Revised Downtown Plan Discussed

Mayor Pro Tempore Rick Strauss unveiled a revised downtown plan which incorporates comments and ideas from previous public hearings. The revised plan includes enhanced entrances to the Commons and new creek park access points as well as additional spaces for residents to congregate near downtown shops. There are two versions of the plan to address parking on Ross Common: one narrows the roadway and includes only parallel parking, and the other preserves some diagonal parking next to the Commons. The plans are posted in Town Hall and will be available on the Town’s website. Please review the plans over the next few weeks and let us know what you think.



Grand Jury Report on the Homeless

The Council approved a formal response to the Marin Grand Jury's report on homelessness entitled, "Marin's homeless: the 'invisible' problem that won't disappear." The report concluded that hundreds of homeless in the county need shelter. The Grand Jury found that many of the homeless sleep in Marin's open spaces or in their cars, having been turned away by nonprofits because of bed shortages or drug and alcohol restrictions. The Grand Jury also determined that the majority of the homeless population are found in San Rafael, Novato, Sausalito and in the unincorporated areas of Marin. The Grand Jury recommends all Marin jurisdictions to jointly launch a comprehensive campaign to heighten public awareness of homelessness. The Council responded that the County of Marin would be the appropriate entity to take the lead in this endeavor and Ross would be willing to participate.

Council Agrees to Not Raise Taxes

The Council voted to keep the Ross Valley Paramedic Authority (RVPA) tax at the same rate as last year. Typically, the \$42 annual parcel tax is increased by \$3 each year. This year, however, the RVPA Board decided that no increase was necessary due to sufficient reserves on hand, no major planned expansion of programs or capital investment, and poor economic conditions that make it difficult to justify a tax increase unless absolutely necessary.

The RVPA was formed in 1983 to provide medical emergency services and transport to local medical facilities.



In a separate action, the Council voted to keep the Municipal Services Tax at \$775 per developed parcel. The tax was reduced in 2007 from \$1,000 per parcel to \$775 and has remained at that level for the past two years. Ross voters first approved the Municipal Services Tax in 1984. It is in effect through 2012.

Council Makes Progress on Ross Pathways



The new pathway will run along this west side section of Sir Francis Drake Boulevard.

The Council accepted final revised plans for the Sir Francis Drake Boulevard Pathway and agreed to release two separate bids for the project – one for an asphalt pathway and one for a decomposed granite with binder pathway, similar to the Shady Lane pathway.

The revised plans incorporate street tree planting and pathway alignment modifications determined during two public meetings held in May. The 4-foot wide pathway will begin on the east side of Sir Francis Drake Boulevard just north of Ross Terrace Drive, cross over to the west side at the Lagunitas Road intersection, and terminate at or just south of Bolinas Avenue. The pathway will be field staked by the contractor at the start of construction, and minor adjustments may be made at that time.

The Town received a \$200,000 federal grant for the project. Estimated construction costs for an asphalt pathway are \$202,000. Decomposed granite would add \$54,000 to \$90,000.

In a separate action, the Council accepted Ghilotti Brothers' bid of \$153,529 for construction of the second phase of the Shady Lane pathway. The bid came in 21% under the Town Engineer's estimate of \$195,000.

Parmenter Project Approved

It took more than six years, but the Town Council approved an application by Ross and Ligia Parmenter to construct an 839 square foot residence on a 20,971 square foot undeveloped lot at 54 Baywood Avenue. The project complied with the guideline floor area in the Town Hillside Lot Ordinance. The Council approved a setback variance to allow the entrance walkway and driveway to be constructed

within the front setback of the hillside lot. The Council also approved a variance from the covered parking requirement to allow one of the three required parking spaces to be screened by a landscaped wall and garage door, but no roof (see full staff report [here](#)). The initial 2003 application sought approval of 2,081 square feet of floor area.

In supporting the project, Mayor Bill Cahill referenced the applicants' "excellent job in reducing this design to something that is very attractive and meets the requirements of the hillside lot ordinance." Council members Hunter and Strauss concurred and voted for the project. Citing the 196 residents listed as opposing the application, the testimony of 13 past Council members and violation of the hillside lot ordinance, Council members Michael Skall and Chris Martin voted to deny the project.



The Council also indicated that, based on concerns raised about the Hillside Lot Ordinance during these hearings, it will solicit public input and explore making changes to the ordinance.



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 at <http://www.townofross.org/town-council/current-meeting-reports/>. The minutes of this meeting will be available on the website at www.townofross.org after approval at the July Council meeting.

Senior Planner Elise Semonian

Address	Applicant	Approved	Denied	Continued
30 Ross Common	Joseph and Deborah Montero and Marcella Arana			
58 Shady Lane	Bradford and Michelle Shaffer			
39 Fernhill Avenue	The Branson School			
54 Baywood Avenue	Ross and Ligia Parmenter			
10 Laurel Grove	Richard Fullerton			
33 Spring Road	Geoffrey Franklin			
51 Wellington Ave.	Craig and Melissa Slayen			

Upcoming Town Council Meeting

The next regular Council meeting is on Thursday, July 9, 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.