



Modernizing Ross Civic Center Community Workshop SUMMARY

Introduction

The Town of Ross sponsored a community workshop on October 29, 2020, from 6:00 to 8:00 pm using Zoom video conferencing. Forty-four (44) members of the public attended the workshop, as well as Town staff and MIG consultants. Of the participants who responded to an ice breaker poll, 90% indicated they live in Ross. The workshop recording can be viewed here: <https://www.townofross.org/civiccenter>

Town Manager Joe Chinn offered welcoming remarks and recognized all the Town Council members in attendance as well as members of Town staff. He then introduced the MIG consulting team and turned over the meeting to the facilitator Carolyn Verheyen.

Ms. Verheyen gave an overview of the workshop objectives and outlined the evening's agenda. She offered a few ground rules to help facilitate participation and followed with a brief orientation to the Zoom meeting platform, explaining to participants the tools for engaging in the discussion.

Background on the Civic Center

Next Mr. Chinn and Ross Valley Fire District and Marin County Fire Chief Jason Weber gave a PowerPoint presentation featuring background and technical information regarding current conditions at the Town buildings housing police, fire, paramedic, and administrative functions housed in a portable. They also presented conclusions from a variety of background studies and analyses of the facilities, a description of fire and paramedic service levels and an overview of potential costs of various options and funding mechanisms.

Framing the Discussion

Following the presentation, Ms. Verheyen polled participants on their initial opinions around modernizing Town facilities. These polls were not intended to be statistically

representative of the community, rather to take the pulse of workshop participants. Poll results are presented below:

- **What level of priority do you believe it is to modernize these facilities?** (30 total respondents)
 - High priority - 15 (50%)
 - Somewhat high priority - 5 (17%)
 - Neutral - 6 (20%)
 - Somewhat low priority - 2 (7%)
 - Low priority - 2 (7%)
- **Before tonight, had you heard about the need to modernize the Civic Center?** (30 total responses)
 - Yes - 27 (90%)
 - No - 3 (10%)
- **What do you consider to be the most significant public safety need for the Ross community?** (30 total responses)
 - Medical emergency response - 12 (40%)
 - Wildfire prevention and response - 12 (40%)
 - Police in the community - 3 (10%)
 - Public safety power shutoff preparedness - 2 (7%)
 - Other - 1 (3%)

Participants asked Town staff questions about the two options to address fire engine and paramedic ambulance facilities as well as the studies and process identifying those options.

Breakout Discussion Groups

The group then split up into three breakout rooms to discuss four questions:

1. *What is your vision for the new Civic Center Building?*
2. *How important is it to keep a fire station in Ross?*
3. *How willing are you to pay for this?*
4. *How important is having paramedic services stationed in Ross?*

Input collected throughout the workshop is summarized by question below. Video recordings of each breakout session have also been posted to the Town of Ross website.

What is your vision for the new Civic Center building?

Some participants saw this as an opportunity to create a sense of place and of history as new facilities are developed. It was observed that the phrase “Civic Center” denoted the idea of a cultural center or gathering place and some thought it shouldn’t be used to refer to the public safety functions as well.

Some people felt that the site wasn’t ideal with its potential for flooding. Some participants noted that having high-quality services and facilities was part of what makes the Town special. Several would like to see additional service options considered, including those that had been eliminated previously. There were requests for additional information related to costs and past studies.

How important is it to keep a fire station in Ross?

Several participants indicated they would prefer to keep full services in town given the increasing severity of wildfires and perceptions that excellent services are a selling point for the Town and help keep Ross property values high. Other participants disagreed and expressed feeling comfortable moving the fire station outside of Ross and increasing response times by two minutes.

One small group discussed the rare occurrence of fires in Ross, with only 3 fires two years. This group also discussed the likelihood of climate related fires, particularly in open spaces such as Mount Tam. Participants asked questions about potential costs, savings, benefits and drawbacks, such as potential changes in homeowner’s insurance or operational costs.

How willing would you be to pay for the fire station to remain in Ross?

Participants requested more information regarding upfront and ongoing costs. Several were willing to pay higher taxes to continue stationing services in town, while others were not. Participants requested additional options, including options that would lower costs and look at innovative service models. Participants speculated about Town opinions and preferences, the impacts of raised taxes for those on fixed incomes and no-cost options. One participant suggested that small fire stations might not provide career paths for in-house firefighters.

How important is having paramedic services stationed in Ross?

Participants asked questions about response time and requested data on a variety of indicators. Participants would like to know the number of medical emergencies that require paramedic services, and the impacts of longer response times. Several



people would prefer to keep paramedic services stationed in Ross, noting that medical emergencies are unpredictable and urgent.

Breakout Group Reports

At the conclusion of the breakout group sessions, everyone re-convened in the main “room” to hear a representative from each group offer highlights from the discussions.

Next Steps

Town Manager Joe Chinn stated that the participants asked very good questions in the workshop and the Town will provide additional information in response to those questions. A number of studies are also on-line to assist in providing information to residents. He described the next steps in the modernizing Town facilities process including: responding to questions; distribution of a Community Questionnaire; and further presentation and discussion of these issues at upcoming Town Council meetings. He mentioned that residents can email Town staff their questions and thoughts. He thanked all of the community members who participated in the workshop for the healthy discussion.