



Staff Report

Date: August 13, 2020

To: Mayor McMillan and Council Members

From: Joe Chinn, Town Manager
Jason Weber, Ross Valley Fire Department Fire Chief
Rich Simonitch, Public Works Director

Subject: Modernizing Civic Center Facilities Related to Fire, Paramedic, Police, and Administration Facilities

Recommendation

This is a discussion item to receive input from the Council and the community related to modernizing existing facilities on the Town Civic Center site. The existing facilities being discussed are for fire, paramedic, police, and Town administrative facilities. This is the first Council meeting on this topic which will include additional public meetings with the goal for Council to make a decision in November or December 2020 on civic facilities to modernize in Ross.

Background and discussion

The current public safety facilities building was constructed in 1927 or 93 years ago. The current building is physically and functionally obsolete, and for many years has been in need of major repair and renovation. The building was designed significantly prior to 1986 Essential Service Act (ESA) requirements for public safety construction as well as modern wood construction techniques. There is a significant amount of deferred maintenance and the design is not up to current public safety standards. Furthermore, except for the construction of the rear apparatus bays in 1995, there has been no real annual investment in the main building to keep it up to minimal standards. The fire bays are below the one hundred (100) year flood elevation. Thus, the current facility needs a major overhaul to meet current public safety facility requirements to provide modern public safety services.

In February of 2016 and again in June 2020, Construction and Development Solutions Inc. (CDS) conducted a Property Condition Assessment of the property. The assessment included analysis by outside experts to report on the site topography, exterior and interior building, life safety,

exiting, ADA compliance, structural conditions, lead and asbestos, electrical, mechanical, and plumbing systems.

The CDS assessment found that there are a number of building systems and components with a diminished level of integrity and capacity. This is due to exceeding limits on their life expectancy, in addition to non-compliance with the Essential Service Act (ESA) requirements for public safety construction. Given the issues related to non-compliance with ESA due to the building's current use as a public safety structure, CDS's findings indicate that it would be cost prohibitive to correct the issues related to the non-compliance of the ESA due to seismic and flooding issues. Given the deficiencies found, the cost of re-construction within the existing building footprint could easily equal that of a new ground up facility. This finding is similar to what the Council was told around 2010 by Mack5, a construction management firm that the cost of remodeling the building was more than the cost of constructing a new facility.

The significant findings from the CDS assessments that relate to the condition of the structure are summarized as follows:

- **Structural Deficiencies:** There are several deficiencies to the structural integrity of the building including lack of seismic upgrades at the foundation, in-fill construction, lack of floor girder connections and seismic concerns due to irregular shapes of the buildings. It is concluded that the extent of these structural deficiencies alone would require substantial re-configuration and not likely feasible or cost effective to repair.
- **Mechanical Systems:** Most of the building's electrical and HVAC components are at the end of their life expectancy and need to be upgraded to Title 24 standards. This would require almost complete removal and replacement of these components.
- **Plumbing:** The domestic water system shows signs of corrosion and should be replaced in its entirety.
- **Pests and organisms:** termites, rodents, fungus, wood eating beetles and other organisms have affected various areas of the site and structure.

If the existing building were to be completely remodeled and rehabilitated to meet ESA and current building standards, there are still significant physical site constraints that make this option cost prohibitive:

- **Building layout and design:** The building layout which was put together over time is poorly laid out as shown in the Attachment 1 site plan. The fire and paramedic bays are at the back of the site away from access to Sir Francis Drake Blvd. The police station was built as a house for personnel and thus is not laid out for a modern police department. Two portables have been added to the site one for fire personnel sleeping quarters and the

other for Town planning, building, and public works staff. Overall, the buildings are inefficiently sited on a parcel which lacks depth due to the creek behind the buildings.

- Site traffic circulation: The onsite vehicular and pedestrian circulation present a potential safety challenge. Fire stations require a clear and unimpeded path of travel for apparatus and support vehicles to and from the site. Administrative staff and the public vehicles that go to and from the civic center campus present possible circulation and parking conflicts as well as safety concerns for pedestrian's visiting the various buildings. The site is constrained, and safety vehicle access should be separated from non-safety staff and the public. There is little to no room to separate access with the current building location and shape.
- Flood Risk: The existing apparatus bays were inundated with floodwaters during the 2005 flood (generally accepted as a 100-year flood) compromising the use of the entire station as a public safety building which must operate under emergency conditions for 72 hours following an emergency event. The 2005 flood also came very close to flooding the lowest floor of the firehouse which would therefore also need to be raised to 1' above the 100-year flood. Consequently, the paved areas around the site would require significant reconstruction to meet the new elevated grades of the apparatus bays and fire station.

Service Options

The Town has several options of facilities that need to be modernized at the Civic Center site. The existing Civic Center site facilities were largely constructed in the 1920's along with the fire bay addition added around 1995 and the two temporary portable buildings. The Town has an option of whether to modernize the fire station and paramedic facilities on-site or have the services provided in another location outside of Ross.

The Town hired Mary McGrath Architects to look at the Civic Center site and determine the space needs for the various services if they were provided on-site, develop a conceptual site plan for each option to determine fit on site, and provide a rough cost budget to develop each option.

The four options are:

- Option 1 – Joint-use Police and Fire Station including paramedic quarters, and new administration space adjoining the existing Town Hall
- Option 2 – Joint-use Police and Fire Station without paramedic quarters, and new administration space adjoining the existing Town Hall
- Option 3 – Joint Police and Administration building; modular paramedic quarters, no fire station.
- Option 4 - Joint Police and Administration building; no fire station or paramedic space.

A rough site layout for each of the four options is shown in Attachment 2.

Fire and Paramedic Services in the Town of Ross

The Town of Ross receives fire suppression, emergency medical services, fire prevention and inspections, and disaster response services from the Ross Valley Fire Department (RVFD). RVFD is a Joint Powers Authority (JPA) that is comprised of the Towns of San Anselmo, Ross, and Fairfax, and the Sleepy Hollow Fire Protection District. In 2012, the Town of Ross went from having its own fire department to joining RVFD. RVFD currently has four fire stations (Station 18 in Ross, Station 19 in downtown San Anselmo, Station 20 on Butterfield in San Anselmo which is the closest station to Sleepy Hollow, and Station 21 in Fairfax). The department serves approximately 25,000 residents including Ross's 2,550 residents. Each of the four RVFD fire stations is staffed with a two-person fire engine. In the case, of the Ross Station (station 18), the on-duty fire personnel sleep in a portable trailer that the Town has leased since 2005 due to issues with the station's sleeping quarters.

The Ross Valley Paramedic Authority (RVPA) also has two paramedics housed at the Ross fire station. RVPA contracts with Marin County Fire Department for staffing including (2) Firefighter Paramedics on each shift. The paramedics are housed and operate out of the existing Ross Station 18. The paramedic ambulance serves an area from Highway 101 to the east and Woodacre to the west, thus a territory significantly larger than served by RVFD. The only RVPA staffing in the Ross Valley is located at Station 18 with the other RVPA ambulance located in Corte Madera serving Corte Madera and parts of Larkspur. Ross is the mid-point for the RVPA Paramedic Ambulance (M-18) service area - there are the same number of calls going both to the east and west of the Station. The paramedics provide emergency medical services to the entire RVPA area and also when not on a medical call will go to fire calls for service as the staff are all firefighters that are also paramedics.

Given this dynamic, there are different service options of: locating both fire and the paramedics in Ross (as is currently done at Station 18); just locating the fire services in Ross; just locating the paramedic authority in Ross; or neither.

Fire and Paramedic Operational Considerations

RVFD and the Town of Ross contracted with Citygate Associates, LLC (Citygate) in 2019 to provide a comprehensive Standards of Coverage (SOC) assessment to provide a foundation for future fire service planning for RVFD. As part of the study, Citygate provided an analysis of the impact on current level of services received in Ross if the fire engine in the Town was relocated, and alternatively, the fire engine and ambulance were relocated from their present location in the Town. Below is a summary of some of the findings from the Citygate study.

- Low number of incidents in Ross with very few "working" fires. In a two-year period Ross Station 18 ran 627 calls for service. Of those 292 were code 3 dispatches (lights and siren). Of the 292, the vast majority 247 (85%) were medical and 7 (2%) were dispatches to structure fires with 2 of those being actual fires and 1 a vegetation fire for a total of 3 actual fires or (1%).

- Ross enjoys good response times based on geography with an average response time of 7:55. Fire Response would increase approximately 2 minutes on average with no station which would be similar to outer suburban averages. If the ambulance remains in Ross, response times would be identical to current with the exception of when the ambulance is committed to other incidents which has averaged 15% of the time or 37 times in two years.
- There is no indication that the closure of the Ross Station 18 would substantially impact ISO ratings which insurance companies use to determine risk (thus costs to consumers). This is assuming neighboring fire stations can provide services to effectively mitigate incidents and are within 5 miles of the fire station providing response.
- In emergencies, without a fire station in Ross responses would be provided by either San Anselmo Fire Station 19 (1.1 miles to Town Hall) or Kentfield Fire Station (.65 miles to Town Hall). In non-emergency calls, principal responding station would likely be from the San Anselmo fire station. This reliance on neighboring fire stations (Kentfield and San Anselmo) would increase simultaneous calls in either jurisdiction. 1.5-2 times per week either engine would be unable to respond requiring response from a more distant fire resource.
- In 2017 and 2018 the Ross Engine 18 responded to – 60% of calls in Ross, 28% to San Anselmo, 2% Fairfax, 9% Kentfield, 1% east in 2017 and 2018. Ross engine went to other Ross Valley areas 145 times while other RVFD engines responded to Ross a total of 18 times. This is reflective of the limited need for multiple unit responses within the Town of Ross (fires, major traffic accidents and other multi-company responses).

Some other fire and paramedic operational considerations that were not part of the Citygate study:

- We estimate approximately 170 homes have sprinkler systems or approximately 20% of total homes. The Town is averaging approximately 18 sprinkler permits annually.
- The existing civic center site provides substantial challenges with limited ingress/egress. At best, it will be difficult to site all facilities and accommodate parking and traffic circulation safely.

Capital and Operating Cost Considerations

Public safety facilities typically encompass police, fire, medical response, rescue and other related operations. In contrast to general office buildings, facilities used by public safety agencies must be configured and equipped to be integral parts of the work their occupants do. This involves evidence storage, shops for repairing specialized equipment, separated

decontamination areas and equipment, communications and technical tools, secure spaces for specialized vehicles, ammunition storage, sleeping quarters, emergency operations capacity and a large number of other special facility aspects. These all drive up the facilities cost. These facilities must also be designed and built to keep them secure and functional in natural and man-made disasters.

The rough cost estimates for each of the four options range from \$12.2 million to \$28.4 million as shown below as estimated by McGrath Architects.

Option	Description	Services not Included on Site	Cost Estimate	Building Sq. Ft.
1	Police and Fire (2 company), Admin.	--	\$28.4 Million	15,200
2	Police and Fire (1 company), Admin.	Paramedic	\$24.4 Million	12,235
3	Police and Admin Bldg, Ambulance B.	Fire	\$14.6 Million	8,040
4	Police and Administration Building	Fire and Paramedic	\$12.2 Million	5,080

It is important to note in all cases that in addition to the capital cost being discussed above, Ross has an annual operating cost to the RVFD of \$2,159,000 to pay for the annual cost of fire personnel and operations and maintenance costs including a fire vehicle replacement fund. To assist in paying for a share of the annual fire and police operating expenses, in November 2016 the Town of Ross voters approved a public safety parcel tax with a 79% voter approval. The current tax rate is \$1,069 per parcel and the current tax expires at the end of Fiscal Year 2024-25. The public safety parcel tax is a critical funding source for the Town’s on-going police and fire annual operating costs and will need to be renewed ideally by November 2024.

Facility Funding and Potential Funding Sources

The funding sources for the facility will come from several sources – existing fund balances and additional fund balances that can be saved, a likely financing that would be backed by a new voter approved tax revenue source, and potentially some donations to the extent can be raised.

Currently, the Town Facilities Fund has approximately \$4.3 million that can be used for this project. In two years and briefly reviewing other fund balances the amount of cash available for this project could reasonably be in the \$7 million range.

Financing will be needed to fully fund any of the options above. There are several options available all would require Ross voter approval at a two-thirds level. Some of the alternatives are provided below:

- General Obligation Bond (GOB) require a 2/3 voter approval, and is paid back by property owners as an ad valorem tax on property tax bills. The annual tax per property is based on the assessed value of each parcel. The Ross School had a GOB measure passed and it is currently being assessed on Ross School District property owners. The annual debt service on a GOB is typically lower than other types of local government funding because

of the credit quality tied to the ad valorem tax base of the community and the efficiency of the financing.

- Certificates of Participation (COP's) backed by a parcel tax to pay the debt obligation. No public vote is required for a COP. However, the COP needs a revenue source to repay it and the most likely source would be a parcel tax which does require a 2/3 voter approval. The Town only has a total of approximately 837 taxable parcels.
- Community Facilities District (i.e., Mello-Roos Districts) levies a special tax that can pay for public facilities including police and fire stations. Property owners in a CFD are taxed annually for their share of the debt service on any bonds the CFD has issued to build facilities. The annual special tax on each parcel is a fixed amount and is not tied to the assessed value of the parcel. CFD's require a 2/3rds majority vote of residents living in the CFD. It would work similar to the parcel tax.

The Town had a preliminary bond financing analysis performed on the General Obligation Bond and Certificates of Participation options. The interest rate on COP's is higher than a GOB and the financing is less efficient, and thus the annual debt service costs are approximately 10% greater than a GOB's debt service.

The table shows a comparison of tax rates needed to support a 30 year bond debt service (thus 30 years of taxes) for a General Obligation Bond and a COP backed by a parcel tax.

Tax Rates of GOB and COP Financing

Construction Proceeds	Annual GOB Tax per \$1M Assessed Value	Annual COP/Parcel Tax per Parcel
\$10,000,000	\$243	\$708
\$20,000,000	\$485	\$1,417

Please note that interest rates are currently at very low rates. The tax levels above assume a small increase in interest rates from current rates at the time bonds would be issued. If interest rates are higher than assumed, either the tax rates will have to be higher to get the same amount of bond proceeds or the amount of construction proceeds will be lower than shown at a given tax rate.

Another potential source of some funding for new facilities may be donations. It is said that much of the fire bay addition that occurred around 1995 was funded by donations from residents.

Questions to Consider

Below are some sample questions for the Council to consider:

- What is the long-term vision for public safety facilities in Ross?

- What is the likelihood the current public safety parcel tax approved by voters in November 2016 will be approved in or before 2024 if a new capital tax is requested before then? The public safety parcel tax is a critical component to providing a large share of the annual staffing and operating costs of police and fire services.
- What is the process the Town should follow to receive significant public input on this major decision? In the end, voter approval will be needed to construct the facilities with different tax levels needed depending on the facilities that are to be constructed. Town staff is recommending adding additional workshops and/or Council meetings related to this topic, a resident survey, Town emails and newsletter, and materials on the website related to this topic to assist the public in getting additional information and being able to provide input on this critical Town topic.

Fiscal, resource and timeline impacts

The rough draft cost figures were provided by Mary McGrath Architects based on their experience with design and construction of public safety and other governmental facilities in the Bay Area. Many of the expense estimates are very preliminary and are anticipated to change as scopes and designs move forward on the respective projects. Figures will be updated as better information becomes known. Potential funding sources are discussed above and the funding sources will be dependent on the facilities the Town decides to rebuild with the cost range being from \$12.2 million to \$28.4 million.

Timing and Process

Development of a project concept is anticipated to take place from September through November of this year. This will involve substantial community outreach in the form of a project website, resident survey, workshops, Town emails and newsletter, and/or Council meetings on the topic. December 2020 is the target for the Council determination of a final project concept. Following this determination, the Town will hire a Civic Center Master Plan consultant to move the project forward, further developing the concept and design of the site facilities. Environmental analysis, which could include preparation of an initial study, public scoping meetings, and development of an Environmental Impact Report will run concurrently with development of the Civic Center Master Plan through the first three quarters of 2021. A vote on a potential ballot measure for funding would likely occur after certification of the environmental review and Council approval of the Civic Center Master Plan. Staff time and consultant costs associated with this project will be derived from the Town's Facilities Fund.

Depending on the option selected by the Town Council of what facilities to construct, other negotiations and agreements with other entities may be needed. For example, if the Council elects not to re-construct the fire station in Ross then the RVFD JPA would have to be re-negotiated with all four partners of the JPA – San Anselmo, Fairfax, Ross, and Sleepy Hollow. In addition, there could be impacts to related existing labor contracts with RVFD firefighters. Additionally, an agreement may be needed with the Kentfield Fire District Fire Protection District

for any services they provide. In addition, a new lease agreement would be needed with the Ross Valley Paramedic Authority if they stay on-site.

Environmental review (if applicable)

Council's consideration of this report is not subject to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). Once the Civic Center Master Plan project is scoped and defined, the appropriate level of environmental review will be determined.

Alternative actions

Alternatives are to be discussed throughout this process.

Attachments

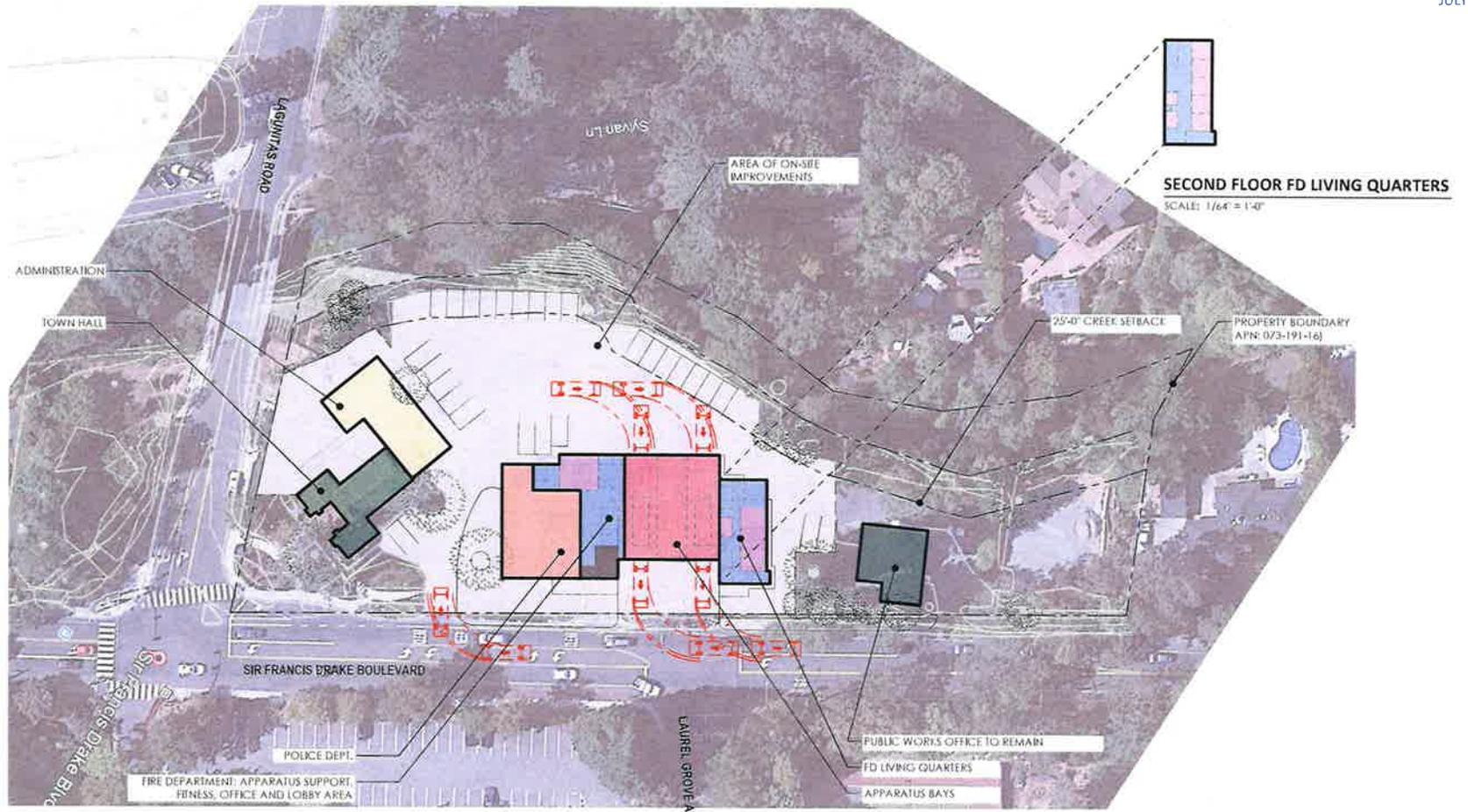
1. Current Civic Center Site Layout
2. Mary McGrath conceptual site arrangement diagram for Options 1 - 4

ATTACHMENT 1

SITE PLAN - ROSS CIVIC CENTER

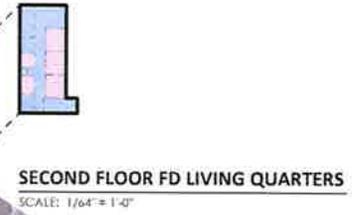
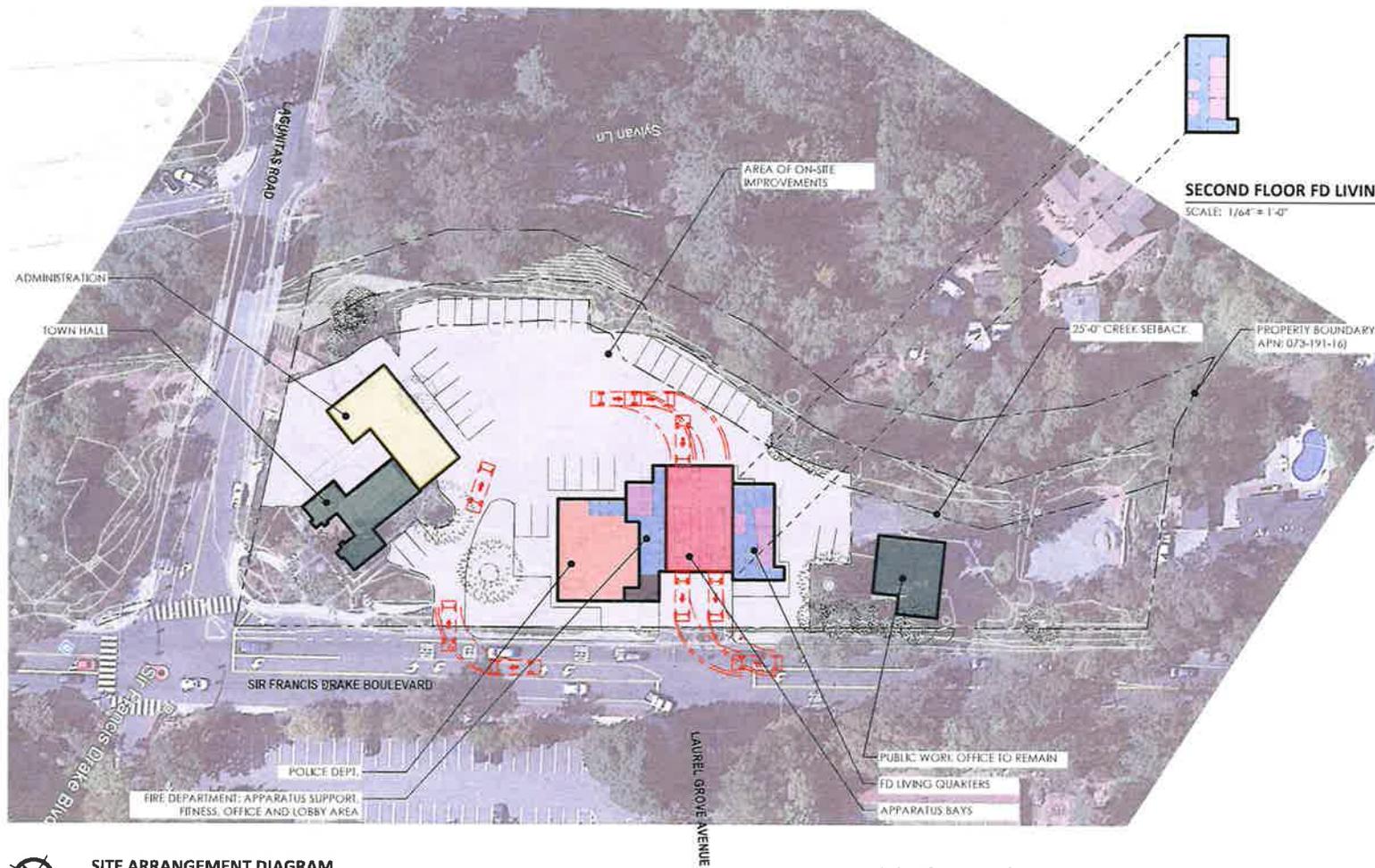


ATTACHMENT 2



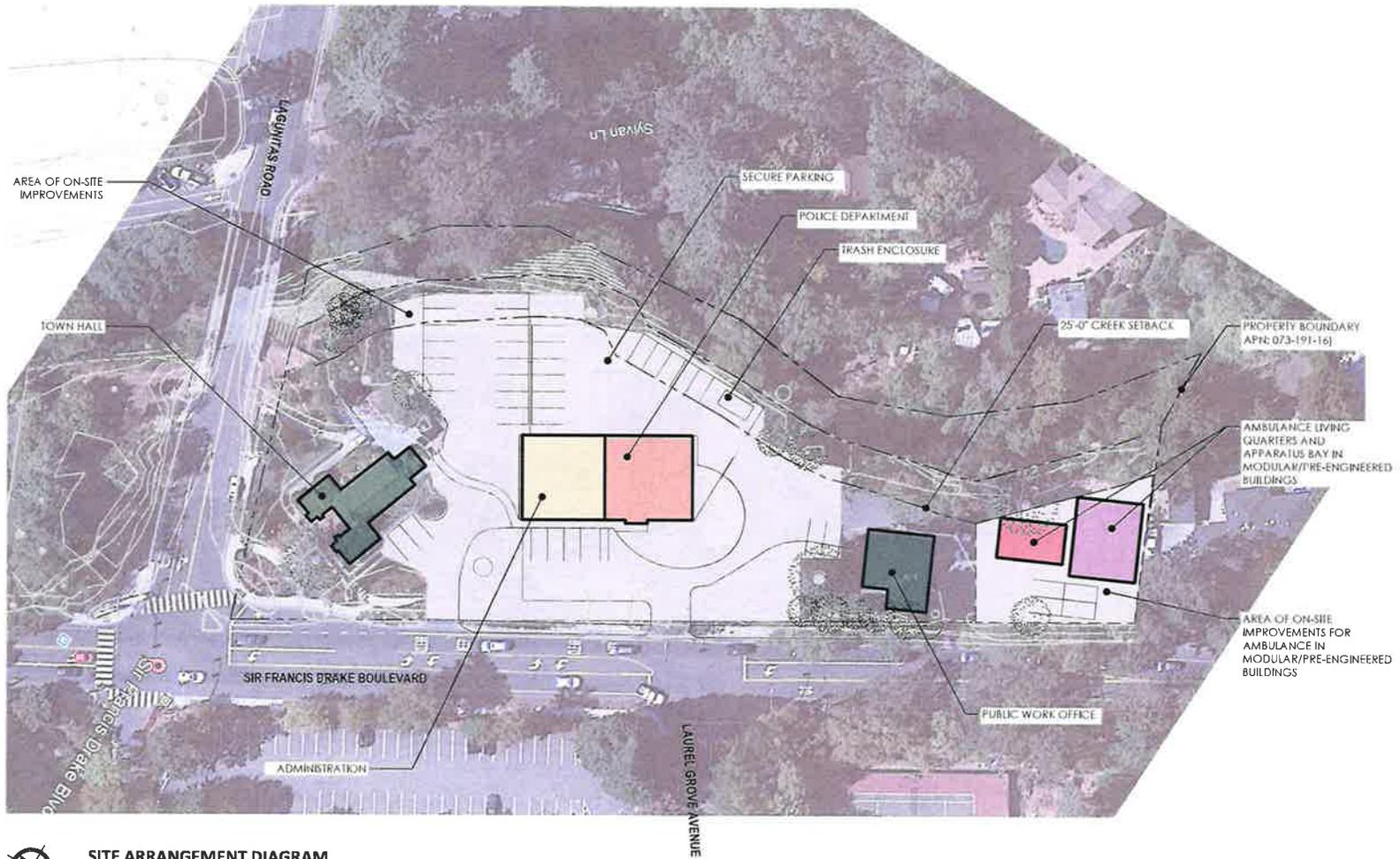
 **SITE ARRANGEMENT DIAGRAM**
SCALE: 1/64" = 1'-0"

Note: Concept for square footage visualization purposes only, actual arrangement of buildings may be different



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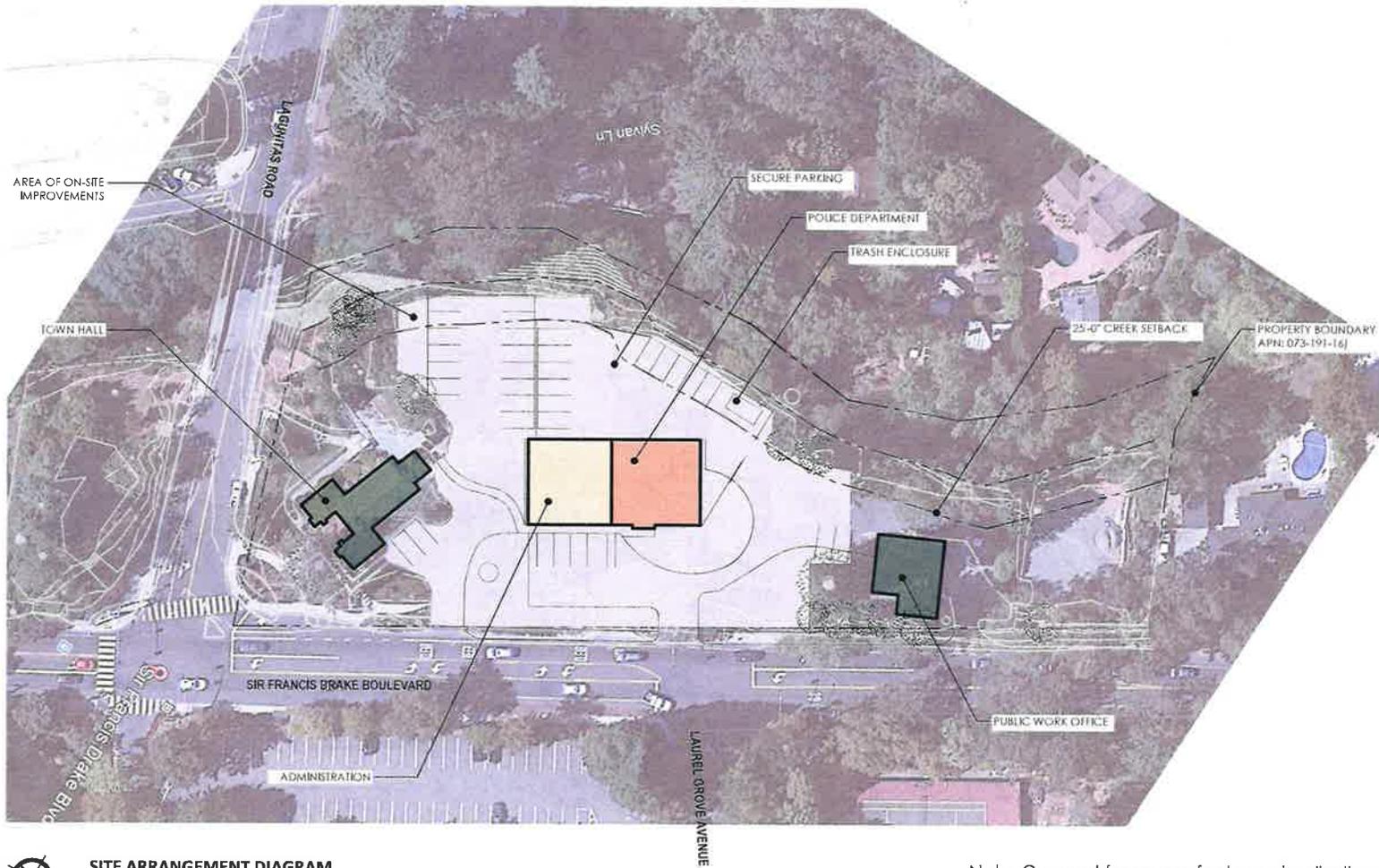
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