



## Agenda Item No. 13.

### Staff Report

**Date:** August 13, 2020

**To:** Mayor McMillan and Council Members

**From:** Richard Simonitch, Public Works Director  
Erik Masterson, Police Chief

**Subject:** Town Council and staff discussion of preparations for coming PG&E Power Safety Power Shutoff (PSPS) related to facilities and communication operations including cell tower coverage.

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#### Recommendation

Staff and Council discuss the Town's progress toward preparing for future PSPS and emergency events related to facilities and communications, including measures taken by the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) to improve the availability of cellular coverage by local cell phone providers.

#### Background and discussion

The purpose of this discussion is to talk about a range of topics related to the Town's planned response to the coming PSPS season such as communication systems (internet, cell phones, land lines, radios), generators, road safety and traffic signals, power for Town operations, and charging stations at the Civic Center for public use. The PSPS is PG&E's pre-emptive wildfire prevention safety response to a predicted strong wind event combined with high fire danger conditions.

PG&E is working to reduce the scope, duration and impact of future PSPS events by developing and deploying microgrids. For 2020, PG&E's microgrid solutions focus primarily on creating grid resilience by isolating the power grid into smaller, geographically similar segments. Based on recent conversations with PG&E staff, the less fire-prone (i.e. Tier 1) sections of Ross may experience reduced power outage times while other sections in the Tier 2 and 3 zones may not.

Ross experienced an extended townwide PG&E power outage beginning the evening of Saturday, October 26, 2019 through the evening of Tuesday, October 29, 2019. The impact of the October 26 power shutoff was widespread with nearly 1 million meters in northern California without

power including 123,000 meters in Marin County. Throughout the following months, staff worked with Town Council and other local agencies to identify strengths and weaknesses and implement a plan to improve the Town's readiness for the next PSPS and related emergency events.

Areas that were identified as requiring specific attention included:

- Cell phone service reliability.
- Traffic signal outages at major intersections along Sir Francis Drake Boulevard.
- Power supply to Public Safety Building and Town Hall.
- Power supply to Development Services Portable.
- Provide portable cell phone and laptops chargers for equipping Town Hall to be a public charging station.

The Town of Ross has taken the follow actions in response to these specific areas of concern:

- Replaced old battery backup system and installed generator hookup and transfer switch for traffic signal operation at Laurel Grove and Lagunitas intersections. Purchased a portable 4000-watt inverter type generator to power both intersections.
- Installed generator hookup and transfer switch for Development Services Portable. Purchased a 2<sup>nd</sup> portable 4000-watt inverter type generator to power the portable (except for HVAC).
- In the process of procuring a large capacity portable refueling station and trailer to service the large Public Safety and Town Hall Building generator during extended power outages. Previously the refueling was done manually by the fire station personnel using individual 5-gallon drums.
- Purchased equipment to set up temporary charging station on the porch area, outside the Police Department and the Town Hall Council chambers.

Cellular phone service reliability is directly related to the ability of the individual cell phone providers to power up their cell towers under their own individually dedicated and separate generator power. Of the three providers that are leasing space at the Ross Civic Center for their cell tower infrastructure, none have permanent emergency backup power on site. The Town is working with Marin County OES and other agencies to develop a method to contact cell phone providers to obtain up to date information on plans to provide backup power plan at each of their cellular sites.

The problems related to loss of cellular coverage during power outages is a statewide concern. On November 13, 2019, the CPUC instituted an investigation to determine if PG&E and other California investor-owned electric power utility companies prioritized safety and complied with the regulations and requirements established by the CPUC with respect to their PSPS events in late 2019. At the same time, the CPUC notified the Communications Industry Leaders (AT&T,

Verizon, Comcast, Sprint, T-Mobile, etc.) that cellular customers have a reasonable expectation that these critical telecommunications services will be operational even during a power outage and that despite advanced notice in 2019 by investor-owned utilities (such as PG&E) of possible PSPS events, failures in the communications network occurred on a significant scale.

On July 16, 2020 the CPUC ordered California’s wireless companies to develop comprehensive resiliency plans to ensure necessary planning and network investments are made to maintain service to customers during a disaster or power outage, including Public Safety Power Shut-offs (PSPS). Under the Decision, wireless providers must:

- Submit to the CPUC within 60 days emergency operations plans that detail their protocols for responding to a disaster, to the CPUC, the California Governor’s Office of Emergency Services (Cal OES), and local emergency response agencies. Wireless providers must also provide emergency points of contact, verification of annual emergency preparedness exercises, and plans for communicating with the public during disasters and outages impacting their networks. These plans must be updated and filed annually.
- Adopt a 72-hour backup power requirement to ensure that a minimum level of service and coverage is maintained during disasters or power outages in Tier 2 and Tier 3 High Fire Threat Districts. Wireless providers must have this infrastructure ready for use within 12 months.
- File comprehensive Communications Resiliency Plans with the CPUC that detail their ability to maintain a minimum level of service and coverage during a disaster or power outage. The plans must detail their use of an array of strategies, including backup power, redundancy, network hardening, temporary facilities, preparedness planning, and communication and coordination with other utilities, emergency responders, and the public. Minimum level of service and coverage includes 9-1-1 service, 2-1-1 service, ability to receive emergency alerts and warnings, and to access evacuation and de-energization websites.

Wireless providers must submit these plans within 6 months of the date of the order.

**Fiscal, resource and timeline impacts**

The total Town costs for the equipment and labor for the items discussed above is about \$15,000.

**Alternative actions**

None.

**Environmental review (if applicable)**

N/A