

**Ross Valley Fire Department  
Staff Report**

For the meeting of: Wednesday, May 14th, 2014

To: Board of Directors

From: Mark E. Mills, Fire Chief *MEM*

Prepared by: Battalion Chief Jim Hanson

Subject: Renewal of the Ross Valley Paramedic Authority Four Year Tax for 2015-2019

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**RECOMMENDATION:**

For the Board's information

**BACKGROUND:**

The Ross Valley Paramedic Authority (RVPA) is an 8-member joint powers authority (JPA) that was established in 1982, for the purpose of delivering Fire Department paramedic services in the Ross Valley region. The primary funding mechanism for the RVPA is a property tax. Each residential unit is taxed, along with every 1,500 square feet of non-residential structures. This taxation-funding source has been in place since the inception of the RVPA. It financially supports a significant portion of the approximately \$2.3 million dollar annual budget.

Every four years, the citizens who reside within the member communities of the RVPA service area vote to fund the tax for a four-year period. The current tax expires on June 30, 2015. In order to maintain this revenue stream, each JPA member agency must place the matter on the November 2014, ballot. The purpose of this staff report is to remind each Fire Board member of their agency's obligation to place this matter on the November 2014, ballot.

**DISCUSSION**

The 8-member communities of the RVPA consist of:

- Corte Madera\*
- Kentfield
- San Anselmo
- Fairfax
- Larkspur
- Ross
- Sleepy Hollow
- Unincorporated areas (CSA 27) in the Ross Valley area

The RVPA JPA is one of the oldest and most successful regional partnerships in Marin County. The JPA was established in 1982 as a way to share costs among the member agencies in order to provide Fire Department based paramedic first response and ambulance transport services to the communities in Ross Valley. Since its launch, the JPA has evolved in order to continually provide exceptional levels of advanced life support care to our citizens.

*It is important to note that Fire Department based paramedic response, holds service to our communities and patient care as one of our foremost objectives. The seamless combination of Fire Department paramedic engine companies and ambulance units ensures rapid, seamless, and highly professional levels of care.*

## **CONCLUSION**

In November 2010, the RVPA proposed and the voters in all member agencies (excluding Corte Madera\*) approved the current tax that began at \$42 plus a 50-cent administrative fee paid to the county, and could incrementally increase each year by \$3. In the fourth year (2014-15), the tax will top out at \$51 plus the 50-cent administrative fee that is paid to the county.

For the next four years, the RVPA Board of Directors has approved a tax rate containing \$6 annual increases as follows:

2015-16	\$57
2016-17	\$63
2017-18	\$69
2018-19	\$75

It should be noted that currently, the RVPA property tax is substantially lower than paramedic taxes in other areas of Marin. In fact in 2014, a \$75 tax is considered the norm. More significantly, current RVPA revenues are not keeping pace with expenses. In FY 2014-15, it is estimated that the RVPA will have to transfer approximately \$425,000 from reserves in order to balance the budget. Also, future anticipated expenses would continue to force the RVPA to draw from reserves unless additional revenues are generated. These cost increases include:

- A 5% increase to the contract for ambulance staffing, that equates to approximately \$64,500.
- Increase in cost of disposable medical supplies.
- A potential future adjustment in ambulance boundaries that could result in a negative revenue shift for the RVPA.

Annually, each member agency confirms the tax. At this time, the RVPA and staff from member agencies assess the financial condition of the RVPA and then make a recommendation on the rate for the next one-year period. If the financial condition of the paramedic program is stable, the JPA and member agencies can maintain the tax at its present level and defer the annual increase approved by the voters. This has been

done in the past. Thus, while voters approve annual incremental increases, the JPA and member agencies can hold the tax at a lower level. The ballot language and argument are in Attachment A.

\* Corte Madera is a sub-contractor of the RVPA and sets tax rates that are separate from the other member agency areas.

## Attachment A

The RVPA Board has approved the following ballot language and ballot argument for use by the member agencies:

### Ballot Language

*Shall there be a continuation of the four year special tax for paramedic services in the amount of \$57 in the first year and raising the tax \$6 annually to a maximum of \$75 per taxable living unit, or per 1,500 square feet of structure on a developed parcel in non-residential use, with the appropriations limit increased by the amount of said tax for the next four years?*

### Ballot Argument

*Since 1982 the voters of the Ross Valley have continued to approve a special tax to help fund the fire department based paramedic service. You are being asked to again support the tax with modest annual \$6 incremental increases for four years to a maximum rate of \$75. The Ross Valley Paramedic Authority is a partnership of 8 Ross Valley communities that have combined efforts to deliver this exceptional level of care.*

*The initial Ross Valley Paramedic Authority tax provided for a single ambulance. The expectation for paramedic care from our citizens has dictated that service levels continue to expand and evolve. Paramedic care is now provided through a system that includes state of the art fire department paramedic ambulance units and with trained paramedics aboard fire engines so that advanced emergency care can arrive as quickly as possible.*

*The Ross Valley Paramedic Authority will continue the responsible, transparent approach to managing the costs of our emergency medical response service and adequately provide for the long-term safety of our community.*

#### *A Yes Vote Will:*

- Ensure the existing high level paramedic emergency medical response services*
- Continue local control over these tax revenues*
- Maintain rapid emergency response times*

*Your tax pays for a significant portion of the paramedic program. Additional funds are collected from insurance companies through third party billing and from billing of non-resident customers. In addition, your tax covers continuing paramedic training, the cost of supplies and equipment and the replacement of ambulance units when needed.*

*Our goal is to continue to provide state of the art paramedic care in the Ross Valley. We need your vote to continue this vital service. Vote YES on Measure \_\_\_\_.*