

ROSS VALLEY FIRE DEPARTMENT
Minutes of the Ross Valley Fire Board Meeting of November 10, 2021

1. 6:33 pm Call to order. Announce action in closed session, if any.

Board Present: Hellman, Kuhl, Shortall, Finn, Goddard, Burdo, Greene, Brekhus

Board absent:

Staff present: Weber, Yeager, Zuba, Attorney David Lim

Town Managers Present: Politzer, Chinn, Donery, Johnson

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2. Open time for Public Expression: The public is welcome to address the Board at this time on matters, not on the agenda. Please be advised that pursuant to Government Code Section 54954.2, the Board is not permitted to take action on any matter not on the agenda unless it determines that an emergency exists and that the need to take action arose following the posting of the agenda.

None

3. Board requests for future agenda items, questions, and comments to Staff, staff miscellaneous items.

Dir. Hellman asked for an introduction since new people had joined the meeting that she had not met yet.

Christa Johnson introduced herself as the new Ross' Town Manager.

Jeff Zuba, the new San Anselmo Finance Director, also introduced himself.

David Lim, the Attorney for Ross Valley JPA, also introduced himself.

All Board Members, Town Managers, and Staff introduced themselves.

No public comment concerning this item.

4. Chief Report – Verbal Update by Chief Weber

MWPA: Chief Weber reported that we have evacuation routes work projects going around the Towns and District; generally, the feedback has been very positive. Further, we hired a part-time contractor to manage the crew and be a liaison with the residents to alleviate some of the

challenges. Additionally, the defensible space program has been completed with over 15,000 inspections in the Ross Valley and County service areas.

Emergency Preparedness Coordinator: Chief Weber reported that we had interviews for the position, and three candidates will be moving to the Chief's interview, and the goal is to extend an offer to one of them.

Town of Ross – Joe Chinn: Chief Weber thanked Joe Chinn for his service with the Town of Ross and as a member of the RVFD Managers Committee. Town Managers Donery, Politzer, and RVFD Board of Directors thanked Chinn for his work and said that it has been a pleasure working with him.

No public comment concerning this item.

5. **Consent Agenda: Items on the consent agenda may be removed and discussed separately. Discussion may take place at the end of the agenda. Otherwise, all items may be approved with one action.**

No public comment concerning this item.

M/S Brekhus/Goddard – roll call vote, all ayes.

6. **Receive Update Surrounding Ross Station 18 Options – Consider Proposed Options to Amend JPA and Direct Staff on Preferred Option.**

***For detailed information regarding this item, please refer to the zoom video recording and staff report. ***

Dir. Greene explained that the Board is being asked to make preliminary decisions concerning option #2. Greene asked if everyone had seen the presentation and if anyone would like to see it again. No Board member requested to see it again. Additionally, Greene emphasized the importance of unanimity embedded in the JPA Agreement; however, it is not necessarily required since the consideration implicates the current JPA language, yet to effectuate the changes, the existing JPA will have to be modified. He provided the steps to do so. Further, he mentioned that David Lim would respond to any legal questions regarding the Fire Board Council should any Board member have any questions.

Chief Weber said that this was not an easy decision; we have done an exhaustive job looking at the multiple options and trade-offs and that Ross would prefer to be in this situation, and their choice would be to rebuild the fire station. Weber thanked the Board for the thoughtful questions and patience throughout the process. Further, he mentioned that for this item, we are looking for direction regarding the proposed option #2, which entails eliminating engine 18 and moving staff west. Further, Chief Weber referred to the staff report—"policy considerations" section for the Board to discuss and provide direction to Staff to move forward to amend JPA language and bring

to Board for consideration and then take it to the four-member agencies for ratification. He then asked if anyone had questions about this item's current or previous staff reports.

Dir. Greene explained that the Board would first ask questions, then the public, and then go back to the Board for discussion. There were no questions from the Board

Fairfax resident Frank Egger expressed that the biggest threat for Ross, San Anselmo, and Fairfax is wildland fires and that any fire that hits our towns must be "hit hard and fast." He also stated that it is a huge mistake to close a Ross firehouse, and he urged the Board to help Ross in any way they can to keep the firehouse open and urged RVFD to add six firefighters and Staff a type-3 engine in Fairfax 24/7.

Dir. Goddard expressed that their council has concerns regarding the timeline and is requesting an explanation from Staff as to why the year 2025 was selected. Chief Weber responded that one of the reasons is that the Town of Ross would like to keep fire protection for as long as possible, and they have to go through the extensive planning and funding process to rebuild. Greene asked if by rebuild it meant the paramedic's facility and not the fire station. Weber clarified that it was the paramedics, police, and Town Hall.

Ross Town Manager Chinn added that they would like to keep the fire station open as long as possible, and it would have been ideal for maintaining and rebuilding it to continue the services in Ross. Further, he added that the planning process would take several years.

Greene asked if July 1, 2025, is a hard or flexible date. Weber responded that for the other stations to move forward with any remodels and for planning purposes and to acquire any of the proposed savings; we need to stick to this date, mainly because he would like this Fire Board and these councils to finalize the decision of the JPA before there is a transition of either fire board members or Town councils to avoid having to start the process again.

Goddard also asked what Labor thinks about the timeframe. Weber responded that he appreciates Labor's partnership and willingness to work with us through the process. The organization is looking for a firm idea of where we are heading, and while 2025 seems like a long time, it is about compromise, and Labor is pleased that decisions are being made.

Dir. Kuhl stated that he agrees with the Staff's recommendations and that probably no one in Ross would like to close the station, but financially, we have no choice. And the way we are headed, we will probably have to pass a "fire tax" to fund the rebuilding, which is one of the planning items that will take some time. And though he wishes it would all be done sooner, it cannot. Additionally, he thanked everyone involved in the process (Board members, Labor, Managers, Staff—especially Chief Weber); Ross appreciates all the effort and work to do what is best for the JPA.

Dir. Shortall expressed his concern since he has favored a three-person engine company, and he would like to see uniform staffing across the service area since we would have a station staffed with two firefighters. And it would be difficult for him to support any funding until that issue is addressed, and he would like to hear Labor's perspective on it. Greene asked if that was his only

concern, and Shortall responded that it was. Greene then asked if the concern was regarding sta20—Sleepy Hollow, and Shortall answered that it was not, that it relates to what is best for the JPA and service delivery for the Ross Valley area; and that most of the calls that come to sta20 go to San Anselmo. Therefore, he would like to see a commitment to add a third person to the engine company before any funds are returned to anybody. Greene stated that the major component of option 2 is the migration of six positions west (three to San Anselmo and three to Fairfax), making it a three-person engine that would address the deficiency found on the "Standards of Cover" study. Greene then said that he was confused by Shortall's concern and asked again if he referred to sta20—Sleepy Hollow, which would have a two-person engine. Shortall responded that it was important for everyone to understand that sta20 does not serve Sleepy Hollow exclusively since a minority of calls go to Sleepy Hollow. Most of them go to the Town of San Anselmo and sometimes to Fairfax; therefore, it is not the Sleepy Hollow fire station. Shortall is simply expressing his concern for sta20 being the only two-person engine in the county and would like to know the long-term solution. And he is reluctant to think that it is a good idea for RVFD, the residents, and JPA to return any money--\$300k to Ross—until the issue is addressed.

Dir. Finn commented that 80% of the sta20 calls are for San Anselmo, and 20% are for Sleepy Hollow. And now, Sleepy Hollow is being asked to accept a continuation of a two-person engine in the whole County of Marin if option two is approved. Further, he added that the two-person engine had been proven to be an obstacle to mutual aid training since the City of San Rafael has been reluctant to request mutual aid from RVFD due to the two-person engine. Finn agrees with Shortall and would like some commitment to remedy the issue.

Shortall added that he respects each Town's financial situation and knows that there are not a lot of surplus funds, and he is not asking to have a three-person engine on day one. Yet, there is a window of time coming up where funding will be available, and it needs to go to the third person at sta20. He also mentioned that it is not about sta20, but the Fire Department service level and this department may be looking at some type of consolidation since there have been talks about it. Shortall knows it is difficult, but he has to look at the safety aspects for the firefighters and the residents. Greene asked Shortall if they had any ideas, and Shortall responded that the saving (\$300k) be accrued, and as it becomes available, it is to be considered towards "full staffing or uniform staffing" across the Ross Valley service area. Greene said that the \$300k is not enough to support that third position over time. Shortall added that most of the Fire Board members had expressed their concern about a three-person engine, and he would like to hear from them.

Chief Weber added that the packet involves trade-offs and that Sleepy Hollow made a great point, and the last bullet point can be stronger. He also added that the \$300k is not a front-loaded saving piece, and it won't occur until 2025. Chief Weber also added that the vacation relief personnel would be stationed at sta20, giving them the third person; however, they are not usually there due to covering injuries and vacation. Yet, we should start looking for more options to add the third person at sta20. Regarding the consolidation, he said that if we are successful with this item, the next discussion should be related to RVFD's service level future. Finally, regarding the bullet point about staffing, it can be revised and update the language to make it stronger.

Dir. Finn mentioned that they would consider the savings to be applied as follow: (1) first applied as matching funds for any grant to fund the third person, (2) and then any leftover savings can be applied elsewhere.

Dir. Brekhus said that it would have been nice to get a heads up about what is being mentioned tonight, and she feels frustrated because these points could have been dealt with at previous meetings to be able to discuss with their council. She also added that Ross is already paying more than other Towns, and they pay the highest amount in the district and have the highest amount of fire sprinklers and the lowest calls' volume, and the waiting response time is increasing. Additionally, she is not happy with this option, as her vote was for option one, and the three-person engine should be a separate discussion since we do not have the cost data for it.

Dir. Finn clarified that Sleepy Hollow is not trying to scuttle option two; they are asking for a commitment that when/if funds become available, they will be used towards a third-person engine at sta20. Further, they are not asking for a specific timeframe or that it will obstruct the adoption of option two.

Greene added that the challenge is that we need each other to move forward, and Ross has made it clear that they want the \$300k savings. Finn said it is \$300k annually in perpetuity for Ross. Then, Greene asked Chief Weber for clarification. Weber responded that the \$300k annual savings are coming from the attrition of three captains and three engineers to six firefighter paramedic positions, and the savings would be accrued by 2032 approximately. Then it would be annual and ongoing. Greene stated that he thought it was a one-time savings amount.

Brekhus added that even after they get the \$300k savings in 2032, they will still be paying more per resident and fire than any other jurisdiction in the district. Chief Weber said that what Brekhus is saying is accurate and that Ross will never pay less of what they are paying today.

Dir. Burdo said that he agrees with Finn and Shortall regarding a three-person engine, and his understanding from the last meeting was that we committed to working towards achieving it. Burdo would like to see the savings used toward the third person at sta20, and he understands Brekhus' point, but there is room to discuss what happens to the extra savings as a good faith effort.

Greene asked Brekhus what her thoughts were and added that he did not realize the \$300k savings would be annual savings. Brekhus said that she would not vote to move forward with option two as modified and go back to her council. She also mentioned that when Ross entered the JPA it was not largely understood how expensive fire services would be. Further, Ross explored going to Kentfield Fire since it represents a closer location. Brekhus would have voted for a tax to keep the station open, and she would only vote for option two as it is now, but if changed, she would not. Finally, she mentioned that the 27% capital improvement fee for San Anselmo is being under looked.

Kuhl added that we need more details regarding what Finn and Shortall are asking for, and he understands why they are requesting it but believes this is a different issue.

Ross Town Manager Joe Chinn summarized how the savings would occur over time due to personnel attrition and referenced the staff report stating that Ross pays \$904 per capital per resident, Sleepy Hollow pays \$495, and San Anselmo and Fairfax about \$300. Therefore, the savings would be permanent, yet the cost will continue to increase.

Throughout the meeting, Finn and Shortall reiterated that they do not expect a three-person engine right away, but when and if any savings are realized, that they are utilized to fund the third person. Finn is not asking to get the savings Ross is trying to achieve, yet he does have a problem with its perpetuity.

Chief Weber explained the cost of adding a third person, which is approximately \$1.8M. He also added that the JPA has language that has not been exercised, and perhaps it should be. For example, 2012 amended JPA states that it should be reviewed every three years to discuss equity, fairness, and staffing policy items. Further, if we can reach a decision, reviewing the JPA would be appropriate. And if the last bullet point needs to be strengthened, add language that sets a goal to bring sta20 to a three-person engine by 2025.

Brekhus added that the permit fees cover the sprinkler system Finn mentioned and not a tax. She said that it is frustrating to have the conversation shift and that the fact that we are paying more is under looked, and if it is not going to be addressed, then Ross needs to look for its options.

Burdo added that he would like to hear from Fairfax. He came in ready to vote for option two and still is in favor and has received the commitment from Chief Weber to get us the three-person engine at sta20. Burdo is open to exploring options where some savings stay with the district.

Shortall mentioned that adding a third person is not a new topic; it has been discussed before, and he referenced the last board meeting. He also noted that he is flexible and raised it as a concern. Shortall said that no one likes to pay too much, but unfortunately, wealthier communities pay more for fire services, and it is not common that everyone pays the same. Further, when Ross was negotiating to join the JPA, the savings were straightforward, and that the fourth wealthiest zip code in the United States is Ross. Shortall remains open and will vote on what the group thinks is best. Shortall would like to hear from Fairfax and the firefighters.

Dir. Goddard asked what could be done to reach a consensus and that Fairfax would also like to see a three-person engine across the service area. She would like it to show in the agreement and accept the cost savings allocation presented in the staff report.

Finn mentioned all the benefits Ross is getting by not rebuilding the fire station and by housing the ambulance, which is one of the prize assets of our service area that not all JPA members enjoy.

Dir. Hellman agrees with Goddard and Sleepy Hollow. She asked Ross if the savings that Finn mentioned about maintenance and not rebuilding, etc., and the cost associated with going with Kentfield Fire, were shared with their council and community. Brekhus responded that not knowing what the actual savings would be was shared with the residents in the survey to figure out whether people wanted to move forward with eliminating the station and that the discussion

regarding Kentfield happened a while ago. Hellman said that it seems like the discussion occurred when it was decided to decommission the station and asked if they had shared anything more recently when they got guidance from their council. Brekhus said that the possible savings within the JPA were shared, but not what the cost would be if they went with Kentfield Fire. Moreover, Hellman said that as she had previously mentioned, this is a great exercise for us to think ahead and express a commitment and agrees with the member who would like the language for the third person engine to be strengthened.

Kuhl explained that they reviewed the four options and sought direction from their council about how they should vote, and on a split vote, we were instructed to support option two. Therefore, he cannot and will not vote for any other proposals tonight other than what was already proposed.

Greene asked Finn and Shortall what their position would be if the last bullet point's language was strengthened, but there was no commitment to how the \$300k saving would be allocated. Shortall responded that as he has said throughout the meeting, he expressed concern and wanted to have a discussion, and if everyone wants to vote for the option as it is, he will not vote no; he would go along with it. Finn also supports option two with the modifications suggested, and we need to reach a decision tonight. Shortall asked the group if they supported strengthening the last bullet point. Goddard responded that she would like to see that, as long as it did not stop the process because Ross had to take it back to their council, which is understandable. Burdo supports making changes to the last bullet point.

Attorney for the JPA David Lin made some legal recommendations regarding public comment and taking any votes.

Sid Jamotte, President of the RVFD Firefighter Association, thanked the Board for having a passionate, intensive, detailed conversation regarding the issue, especially staffing. Jamotte stated that they stand with Chief Weber and are confident we will solve the need for a third person through the Labor Management Committee, and it will take some time. Regarding the station and moving Staff, the sooner it happens, the better it will be for the community and the firefighters.

Shortall stated that based on Jamotte's comments, there is no need to modify the language as he seemed confident the language sets a mechanism for future discussions. And Shortall is good with the language as it is. Finn also agrees.

Greene said that this is a good compromise that protects the JPA, and option two harmonizes and shares the burden, and he is in complete favor of it.

Goddard asked what the process would be like for the December 8 meeting. Greene responded that the JPA language modifications would be presented to be vetted and hopefully approved. Then, the Board Member would take it to their respective agencies for an approval vote on a majority vote basis. Goddard also asked how Sleepy Hollow voted. Finn responded that they have a three-person Board of Directors that meets quarterly or as necessary at other times.

M/S Burdo/Kuhl – roll call vote, all ayes.

7. **Adjourn**

The next meeting is scheduled for December 8, via zoom video conferencing.

Respectfully submitted,

s/Mariana Gonzalez
Administrative Assistant