

October 14, 2024

Mr. Thomas Finn
Chairperson
Board of Directors
Ross Valley Fire Department
777 San Anselmo Avenue
San Anselmo, CA 94960

Dear Chairperson Finn,

On behalf of the Town of Ross Town Council, I am writing to request an amendment to the Ross Valley Fire Department (RVFD) Joint Powers Agreement (JPA), dated January 1, 2022, to allow for a one-year delay in the closure of the Ross Fire Station 18.

Since the RVFD JPA was amended in January 2022, the RVFD has been steadily moving toward its implementation which requires the closure of Station 18 by July 1, 2025. The RVFD Board and Chief Mahoney have been making personnel decisions and purchasing decisions based on this anticipated closure. The Towns of Fairfax and San Anselmo have been planning to renovate their fire stations in part to accommodate the six firefighters that will be transferred from Ross Station 18 to the other RVFD fire stations. Significantly, the RVFD Board voted earlier this year to increase staffing on its engines from two to three persons. This action is made financially feasible by the anticipated closure of Station 18 which allows six of the required nine additional positions to be gained from the transfer from Ross to the other three RVFD stations. The remaining three positions required by the increased staffing are funded via a substantial increase in annual costs to all four RVFD member agencies. The Town of Ross voted to implement this increased staffing model and has been cooperating with Chief Mahoney over this past year as he works towards the station's planned closure.

The Ross Valley Paramedic Authority (RVPA) has operated one of its two paramedic ambulances out of the Ross Fire Station since the early 1980's. On June 15, 2023 the Ross Town Council adopted a Master Facilities Plan that included a new paramedic ambulance facility. The estimated cost (based on 2023 construction estimates) to build this new paramedic facility is \$2 million. In December 2023, the Ross Town Council requested a long-term commitment from the RVPA to continue to base the paramedic ambulance in Ross. At the urging of Central Marin Fire Chief Martin, the RVPA Board decided to conduct a deployment study to confirm that Ross is still the best location in Ross Valley

to house its paramedic ambulance. The RVPA Board was not willing to enter into a long-term lease with Ross without conducting a deployment study.

On February 23, 2024 Larkspur City Manager Dan Schwarz sent a letter to the RVPA asking that the study scope be expanded, stating, "It also seems timely to evaluate whether a restructuring of the governance model for ambulance and paramedic services in the Ross Valley is warranted. Allowing Corte Madera and Larkspur to leave RVPA by authorizing CMFA to be the service provider for these jurisdictions might better align governance to the stewardship of jurisdictionally-generated taxes and resources." Due to this request and the difficulties of obtaining reliable data, the expanded study has not yet been completed. Please see RVPA Chief Weber's staff report to the RVPA Board for its October 7, 2024 meeting for an update regarding the status of the study (attached). In particular, please note the attachment to the staff report which lists the questions the expanded study seeks to answer. Specifically, Question #8 asks "Is the current service model adequate for the greater Ross Valley?" The results of this study will concern every member agency in the RVFD.

Unfortunately, the events and discussions unfolding at the Ross Valley Paramedic Authority (RVPA) over the past ten months have paralyzed Ross's ability to move forward with its plans to renovate its civic center campus with resulting cost increases of over \$800,000 annually. More importantly, the events and discussions at RVPA have compromised the foundation on which the Ross Town Council made its 2021 decision to close its fire station. The decision was based on the belief that the emergency medical function in Ross would continue to be provided by RVPA. If RVFD Station 18 closes and the RVPA reduces its jurisdictional boundaries as requested by the Larkspur City Manager or if the RVPA ceases to exist as a result of financial instability caused by the loss of the eastern portion of the RVPA, no emergency response personnel will be based in Ross resulting in a two-minute increase in response time for medical emergencies. The resulting ten-minute response time is considered an "edge suburban to rural level of response" time and would be a significant decrease in service levels to the Town of Ross. (Please see page 56 of the 2019 RVFD Standards of Coverage Study, revised on November 10, 2023 by Citygate Assoc, LLC)

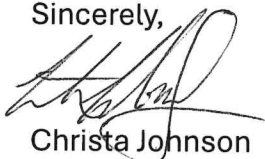
As recently as November 2023, RVPA Chief Executive Officer Jason Weber stated that the paramedics have operated out of the Ross station for 40 years without problems and he nor the RVPA Board have indicated their interest nor intention of relocating the RVPA paramedics to another location. However, over the past ten months it has become increasingly clear that this stated intention to remain in Ross may not be reliable enough to ensure that adequate emergency medical response will be available to Ross residents if the RVFD Station 18 closes on June 30, 2025. Therefore, the Town of Ross is requesting a one-year delay in the closure of RVFD Fire Station 18.

The one-year delay will enable the RVPA to complete its comprehensive study and engage in transparent Board discussion about the future of the JPA. Depending on the actions taken by the City of Larkspur and the Town of Corte Madera, the Marin County Local Emergency Medical Services Authority may become involved as this agency oversees the provision of emergency medical services in all of Marin County. This agency would need to approve any changes to the RVPA jurisdictional boundaries. During this time, the 2019 Standards of Coverage study could be updated to determine RVFD response times in the event the RVPA dissolves or changes boundaries. Other options for ensuring that all RVFD member agencies receive adequate emergency medical services could be explored.

In conclusion, in 2021 no one understood that the RVPA's jurisdictional boundaries or entire existence were in jeopardy. Three years later, the fragility of the RVPA JPA is clear and its viability is in question. It is reasonable to request a one-year delay in the closure of Ross Fire Station 18 so that every member of the RVFD and the RVPA can determine how best to maintain adequate levels of emergency medical response in the greater Ross Valley.

Thank you for your consideration. Please contact me at 415-453-1453 ext. 107 or at cjohnson@townofross.org if you have questions regarding the Town of Ross's request.

Sincerely,



Christa Johnson
Ross Town Manager

Attachments:

Chief Weber's staff report for the October 7, 2024 RVPA Board meeting

2019 RVFD Standards of Coverage Study, revised on November 10, 2023 by Citygate Assoc, LLC

cc: Board of Directors, Ross Valley Fire Department
Ross Town Council
RVFD Chief Dan Mahoney
RVPA Chief Executive Officer Jason Weber
Fairfax Town Manager
San Anselmo Town Manager