

January 6, 2025

To: Board of Directors, Ross Valley Fire Department

From: C. William Kircher, Jr., Mayor, Town of Ross and Elizabeth Robbins, M.D., Councilmember, Town of Ross

All towns need 1st responders for medical emergencies. But the Town of Ross finds itself in a situation where it might lose all of its 1st responders. The nearest 1st responders could be in a neighboring town, significantly increasing emergency response times. The response time for residents in Ross and many other Marin locations is currently under 8 minutes. Without 1st responders in Ross, response times could increase by a minimum of 2 minutes, based on available data. This could result in delayed emergency care.

Ross is at risk of losing its 1st responders because of a 2021 decision by the Ross Town Council to close the Ross fire station, effective July 2025. This decision was made after an extensive evaluation process lasting more than one year that considered resident needs, fire data, and construction costs. Ross's fire station and paramedic ambulance station are badly outdated, and the Town was faced with a decision about whether to rebuild both the ambulance facility and the fire station, or just the ambulance facility. Rebuilding both the fire station and the ambulance facility would cost \$14M more than rebuilding just the ambulance facility.

However, more important than cost considerations to the decision to close the fire station were data provided by fire officials indicating: (1) there are almost no structure fires in Ross, thus fire protection could reasonably be provided by a neighboring fire engine, and (2) the emergency medical response, even if the fire station were to be closed, would be unchanged for 85% of calls with the ongoing presence of the Ross Valley Paramedic Authority (RVPA) ambulance in Ross. Thus, based on the representations made at the time, closing the fire station was not expected to have significant consequences to public safety.

But the reality is quite different: it's now apparent that there's no certainty that an RVPA ambulance will be based in Ross long-term; furthermore, the RVPA could dissolve due to financial difficulties or other organizational

changes. And even if an ambulance remains based in Ross after closure of the fire station, its availability for Ross calls might be closer to 40% instead of 85%, according to a 2024 Citygate study and a Citygate associate. It's unlikely that Ross residents would have agreed to close their fire station, with its 24/7 emergency responders, had they known that closure would result in potentially life-threatening delays in emergency medical responses.

The Ross Town Council made its 2021 decision to close its fire station based on the understanding that the emergency medical function in Ross would continue to be provided by RVPA and that the level of service would be unchanged for most calls. If the Ross fire station closes now, emergency response times will increase significantly.

The Ross Town Council has asked the other member agencies of the Ross Valley Fire Department (RVFD) - Fairfax, Sleepy Hollow and San Anselmo – to delay the closure of the Ross fire station to give Ross, the RVPA and the RVFD time to develop a plan to ensure that Ross, like other communities served by RVFD, continues to have emergency medical responders available to respond rapidly. In many medical emergencies - cardiac arrest, stroke, head injury or serious accidents, among others – every second counts. Provision of lifesaving emergency medical services is an essential public safety function, and every jurisdiction should have excellent 1st responder service.