



June 9, 2017

Jay Hamilton-Roth, Foreperson  
Marin County Civil Grand Jury  
3501 Civic Center Drive, Suite 275  
San Rafael, CA 94903

Dear Mr. Hamilton-Roth:

With regard to the Overcoming Barriers to Housing Affordability, please accept the following response:

***R1: Each planning department should begin regularly scheduled meetings at which developers can speak, early in the process with all relevant members of staff to discuss impacts of proposed development and potential solutions to problems.***

Response: This is a very good suggestion and one that the Town of Ross has been implementing for decades. The Town of Ross employs the following practices and procedures to encourage direct and consistent communication between the applicant and Town staff:

- The Town of Ross offers public counter hours Monday through Thursday from 8:30AM to noon and by appointment. Town staff is available to meet with any interested party to discuss any aspect of development. The Town of Ross has also prepared a comprehensive submittal checklist with detailed information regarding specific submittal requirements to ensure a more streamlined review process.
- The Town offers both a Pre-Application and a Conceptual Design Review process. Essentially, these processes provide preliminary review and feedback on a concept or schematic project before formal development applications are filed with the Town. The feedback provided to the developer by the Pre-Application (in-house staff review) and Conceptual Review (early design feedback from the Advisory Design Review Group) processes will usually flush-out major policy issues or matters of code compliance very early in the review process. This early feedback has proven to save a developer time and money.

***R2. Each planning department should develop a proactive community outreach strategy for any project that might be considered potentially controversial (including going beyond legal noticing minimums and initiating outreach efforts as early as possible in the development cycle).***

Response: This is another very good suggestion and one that the Town of Ross has been implementing for decades as well. The Town employs the following practices and procedures to facilitate community outreach:

- For inquiries received at the Planning Division public counter that relate to a discretionary development related permits, applicants are required to reach out to their neighbors. Specifically, as required by application submittal checklist number 21, neighborhood outreach descriptions are required to be prepared by the applicant. The description includes how neighborhood outreach was

conducted, dates neighbors were contacted, any meetings held, the specific concerns of neighbors, and how those concerns were mediated (through changes to the proposal, site visits, etc.). Staff also provides the applicant with direct contact information for the neighboring residents that are expected for be notified for a public hearing or action.

- As noted above and consistent with the Town's General Plan's vision to solicit input early in the discretionary review process, the Town requires Conceptual Design Review for all discretionary projects. The Conceptual Review process encourages early feedback on project design through a public forum process. A preliminary review by the Advisory Design Review Group offers an opportunity for feedback on building scale, mass and design. As the Advisory Design Review Group holds public meetings, the public has an opportunity to comment.
- Application and plan transmittal referrals. All planning applications that are filed require a referral of the application and plans to Town departments and utilities for review and comment. The applicant and plan transmittal referrals provides additional contact with Town staff (e.g., the Building Department, the Department of Public Works, the Ross Valley Fire Department, the Marin Municipal Water District, and the Ross Valley Sanitary District. and the developer.
- Above and beyond sending out public notices for discretionary projects, and posting the Town related public hearing agendas at the Town Hall and the Post Office located at 1 Ross Common, the Town actively uses the Constant Contact software to send out notifications to a Town-wide email list. Currently the Town has 1,131 subscribers. Examples of information that is sent to the subscribers includes, but not limited to the following:
  - Posting of agendas for all public meetings (e.g., Town Council and Advisory Design Review)
  - The Morning After (monthly Town newsletter)
  - Marin County Flood District notices
  - Storm and flooding updates
  - Utility Improvement updates and notices
- Another proactive communication method the Town employs that covers a variety of important information would be through the Town's monthly newsletter known as the Morning After. The Morning After provides a mayor report identifying notable points of interest impacting the Town, as well as other information such as friendly reminder zoning regulations, Town Council actions, notable planning related items, emergency and storm preparedness, and public safety updates.
- It is also important to point out that every municipality is required to comply with the California Environmental Quality Act, which means for larger and more controversial projects that require the preparation of an Environmental Impact Report, a mandatory public scoping meeting occurs to solicit input from the public and affected agencies. The scoping meetings are publicly noticed meetings.

***R3. Each planning department should use succinct "plain-speak" to convey issues in their outreach.***

Response: This is a reasonable suggestion and one that the Town of Ross has been implementing. The Town's Planning Department has developed a standard public noticing template consistent with state and federal law that contains a brief synopsis of the project location and project description while a lot of information. The Town's public notice template is similar to the City of Mill Valley (referenced as a good example in the report).

***R6: Each jurisdiction should adopt procedures so that low-income housing projects are fast-tracked through the planning and permitting process.***

Response: It should be noted that the Town of Ross is primarily zoned for single family residences and almost completely built out. Accordingly, the Town has not received any low-income housing projects in the past two decades. Most of the projects received are additions and remodels to existing single family residences, with the occasional new construction of an accessory dwelling unit. While there is mention in the Report about encouraging accessory dwelling units, the discussion is not in the context of permit process streamlining and strict adherence to the Permit Streamlining Act requirements. Additionally, the construction of accessory dwelling units have proven to be a good source of affordable housing and can often be approved ministerially. Specifically, in January 2017, the State laws mandating accessory dwelling units were significantly changed, resulting in a requirement for local jurisdictions to adopt and administer a permit process that is ministerial (non-discretionary provided that specified standards are met) and subject to processing time limits (applications must be processed and action taken within 120 days). Since January 2017, the Town has been operating under the new accessory dwelling unit provisions set forth in the State law.

Should you need further assistance, please contact Heidi Scoble, Planning Manager, at (415) 453-1453 Ext. 121 or via email at [hscoble@townofross.org](mailto:hscoble@townofross.org).

Sincerely,



Kathleen Hoertkorn  
Mayor

Enclosure

## RESPONSE TO GRAND JURY REPORT FORM

Report Title: Overcoming Barriers to Housing Affordability

Report Date: April 6, 2017

Response By: Town Council of the Town of Ross

Title: Mayor and City Council

### FINDINGS:

- We agree with the findings numbered N/A
- We disagree wholly or partially with the findings numbered N/A

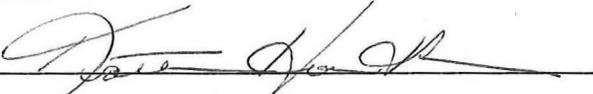
### RECOMMENDATIONS:

Recommendations numbered R1, R2, R3, and R6 have been implemented.

(See Attachment A)

- Recommendations numbered N/A have not yet been implemented, but will be implemented in the future.
- Recommendation numbered N/A requires further analysis.
- Recommendations numbered N/A will not be implemented because they are not warranted or are not reasonable.

Date: June 15, 2017

Signed: 

Number of pages attached 3

## ATTACHMENT "A"

### RESPONSE OF THE CITY OF SAN RAFAEL TO GRAND JURY REPORT "OVERCOMING BARRIERS TO HOUSING AFFORDABILITY"

#### RECOMMENDATIONS AND RESPONSES:

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