

ROSS

Town Council approves upgrades at arts center



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The Marin Art and Garden Center is embarking on a project to update the Livermore Pavilion, above, and other areas of the historic property on Sir Francis Drake Boulevard.

By **Giuseppe Ricapito**
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The Ross Town Council has approved a plan for renovations at the Marin Art and Garden Center.

The plan includes installing a new stage and upgrading the outdoor event space known as the Livermore Pavilion.

“Boy, that’s a popular project. No opposition? Wow,” Mayor Bill Kircher at the council meeting Thursday.

The 9.8-acre site at 30 Sir Francis Drake Blvd. dates to the 1860s. It was owned by the Worn family and the Kittle family until the 1940s, when environmentalist

Caroline Livermore bought the estate to preserve it from development.

Developed in 1945 as a war memorial, it was the site of the Marin County Fair until the 1970s. It received a National Register of Historic Places designation in 2022.

The site has structures that date to its foundation. The updates are inspired by historical designs from the era. The effort has been dubbed the “Sowing the Seeds” project.

An update has been in the works since 2016 when fundraising began. It is estimated to cost about \$7.5 million.

The work includes upgrades to

the buildings that were built before regulations were set in place to ensure safety near creeks and waterways. The planned updates will reveal parts of the creek and ensure that the structures are sound.

Roberta Feliciano, the town’s building and planning director, said the Livermore Pavilion updates include new redwood screens, a trellis, new windows, roofing, posts, railings, stairs, landings, decking and guardrails. The stage will be reduced by 31 square feet to include a shade cover, platform, siding and steps.

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ROSS VALLEY SCHOOLS

Parcel tax based on building size favored by board

By **Keri Brenner**
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Ross Valley School District voters will be asked to decide in May whether to renew and increase the district’s parcel tax.

Trustees tentatively agreed to switch from a flat tax — where every property owner pays the same rate — to a per-square-foot-tax based on the developed portion of the property. The measure requires approval from two-thirds of voters.

“This seems to be the wave of the future,” board vice president Chris Landles-Cobb said after a presentation by the district’s tax consultant Charles Heath at a meeting on Jan. 8. “Pretty soon we’ll be seeing the flat tax as archaic.”

Voters in the Sausalito Marin City School District approved the county’s first per-square-foot parcel tax in November.

“Why this makes sense to me is that it’s a more equitable structure,” Landles-Cobb said.

Board members agreed at the meeting to decide on Jan. 29 whether to place the issue on a special mail-in-only ballot on May 6. The deadline to submit to the Marin County Elections Office is Feb. 7, said Dan Miller, a county elections official.

If approved, the proposed new tax rate would be 52 cents per square foot of developed property. That would include 32 cents per square foot to renew and extend the existing Measure E parcel tax for nine years.

The basic tax would generate about \$4.85 million annu-

ally to maintain the district’s existing operations and payroll. In addition, there would be a tax increase of 20 cents per square foot to generate an extra \$3 million needed to allow the district to pay its teachers competitive wages.

For the average district home of about 1,901 square feet, the total tax would be about \$988 annually, Heath said. For a 1,100 square-foot home, the tax would be \$572 annually.

If the district stayed with the flat tax rate, it would translate to \$1,165 per property annually — regardless of the size of the home, Heath said.

The tax would increase annually by a 3% cost of living adjustment.

“Ross Valley is the lowest-funded school district in Marin,” said Tyler Graff, district superintendent.

“We are losing ground with comparable districts,” he said, referring to teacher salaries. “Three million dollars would allow us to at least be competitive with our comparable districts.”

Graff said the tax represents “an inflection point” for the district to avoid losing quality teachers to other districts or having to cut programs.

“We want the voters of Fairfax and San Anselmo to know that we are trying to be reasonable — we are not asking for the moon,” Graff said. “We think the future of Ross Valley School District is bright, and we want to keep it moving forward in that direction.”

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