

**TOWN OF FAIRFAX
STAFF REPORT**

TO: Mayor, Members of the Town Council

FROM: Michael Rock, Town Manager
Jim Moore, Director of Planning and Building Services

DATE: October 7, 2009

SUBJECT: Approval of a “Town Fire Forum” in partnership with Ross Valley Fire to discuss Hydrant Upgrade Costs, Fire Sprinklers and Defensible Space

RECOMMENDATION:

Direct staff to plan and prepare for a “Town Fire Forum” to review and discuss existing and proposed State, County, District and Town Codes and/or Ordinance regulations related to (1) fire hydrant and related infrastructure upgrades, (2) sprinkler system improvements on new and/or existing residential properties, and (3) “defensible space” requirements. Further, direct staff to publically notice the “Town Fire Forum” so that all elected and appointed officials may attend; and hold this event on a Saturday in the Town of Fairfax before the end of 2009.

DISCUSSION:

At the last Town Council meeting of September 2, 2009, during the public comment period, the Council heard from a member of the Planning Commission about concern over the cost of hydrant upgrades applied to relatively small remodeling projects. Likewise, the Council directed staff to investigate and report back to Council.

Staff has investigated the hydrant upgrade requirements and reports that yes, hydrant upgrade costs (to minimum standards) are currently applied to new and remodeling projects – with the exception that if the cost of the upgrading the fire hydrant exceeds 2% of the cost of the project based on building permit valuation an upgrade is not required. Importantly, if the exception applies – no mechanism is in place to collect a fee equal to 2% of the cost of the project based on building permit valuation to be applied to future hydrant upgrades. Staff believes that this is a short-coming in the Town Ordinance that works against a fair distribution of fire hydrant improvement costs.

Concurrent with the fire hydrant issue arising, staff has become aware of considerable public concern over the fire sprinkler requirements on residential remodeling projects - and on second units applying for “legalization” under the Towns Second Unit Amnesty; as well as with new state and/or insurance company requirements for “defensible space” around residential properties in urban / wild lands interface areas (i.e., most of Fairfax). All three of these subjects are very complex; and staff believes that the entire Town would benefit by coming together to be educated by learned professionals on each subject - and give policy feedback to Town Council members on where pertinent codes, ordinances and/or policies should be maintained,

strengthened or relaxed.