



THE TOWN OF
CORTE MADERA
MARIN COUNTY CALIFORNIA

CORTE MADERA PLANNING COMMISSION STAFF REPORT

REPORT DATE: April 14, 2020
MEETING DATE: April 28, 2020

TO: PLANNING COMMISSIONERS

FROM: PHIL BOYLE, SENIOR PLANNER

SUBJECT: STUDY SESSION TO REVIEW PRELIMINARY PLANS FOR CORTE MADERA'S TOWN HALL REMODEL AND ADDITION PROJECT AT 300 TAMALAPAIS DRIVE

APPLICANT: THE TOWN OF CORTE MADERA

PURPOSE:

Town Staff and the project design team are seeking input from the Planning Commission and the public regarding the Town Hall Remodel and Addition Project (Project). The purpose of the Project is to create a more resilient, functional, and inviting Town Hall that will be a community asset for the next 50-100 years. The project is intended to provide adequate facilities to meet the existing demand for Town services, hold public hearings, and conduct Town business. It is expected that the project will allow the flexibility to minimally increase staffing (approximately five additional employees) if the need should arise in the future. The Project would be constructed to the latest building, seismic, and fire standards, while upgrades to the existing Town Hall facility would also be made. Sustainability and durability will be an integral part of the design, construction and operation of the new facility. The Town Hall will also be designed and built to serve as a resource in times of emergencies by providing backup power, communications and other vital services.

This Study Session provides the Planning Commission and members of the community with an opportunity to gain an understanding of the project and provide preliminary feedback on issues of design, planning entitlements and policy early in the development process. The Planning Commission will not take any actions or make any decisions at this meeting. This meeting is intended to serve as guidance only, based on information available at this time and is not a substitute for future public hearings by the Planning Commission that are required to render a decision on this Project.

BACKGROUND:

Corte Madera's existing Town Hall was constructed in 1931 and originally served as the Town's firehouse. In 1966, the Town purchased the building from the fire department and converted it to Town Hall. Since 1966, there have been minor renovations to the building's interior and exterior, the most recent being in 2015 when the arched western entrance was enclosed as part of an interior remodel of the Administration and Finance Offices.

The existing 5,447 square foot two-story Town Hall is comprised of offices/workspaces, the council chambers, the public counter, a small staff kitchen, storage areas, restrooms and other ancillary areas. There are currently 19 full and part time employees working within the existing Town Hall as well as five additional employees in a 627 square foot temporary trailer located in the parking lot between Town Hall and the Fire Station.

Public Engagement and Guiding Principles

In December of 2018 town staff began the process of developing a design for the Town Hall Addition and Remodel Project with the selection of the architectural firm of Kappe Architects a local company known for their work with public buildings as well as commercial and residential projects. Along with Kappe Architects, the Project team consists of town staff from the departments of Building and Planning, Public Works with regular consultations with the Town Manager and other town departments. Throughout the process the Project team has engaged the public through working groups, public workshops, neighborhood and one-on-one discussions, and public meetings of the Town Council.

In the first quarter of 2019 a working group was established made up of a variety of stakeholders including two councilmembers, a planning commissioner, staff and two community members. The group discussed a wide range of project issues and long-term goals including the need to evaluate not only the existing site but also the Park Madera Center and the southwest corner of Town Park across from the fire station. The project team and working group analyzed all three sites and a significant majority concluded that the current site is preferred based on an evaluation of opportunities and constraints. Some of the key factors in this decision were the lack of financial and tenant constraints at the current site, the ability to use the existing building and infrastructure to reduce project costs, the General Plan policies focused on improving the existing Town Hall site, and that of the three sites only the current site is not in the flood plain. One of the many recommendations from the group was that a new council chamber/community room be incorporated into the design of the new building. The group also proposed that the project should preserve the redwood trees to the extent possible, provide public outdoor space and that the building be energy efficient, sustainable and a structure that the Town can be proud of.

Two town-wide community workshops were held in early May of 2019 at the Community Center; one on a weekday evening and the other on a Saturday afternoon. Kappe Architects provided a summary of the work completed to date and participants were invited to complete a questionnaire and join in a group discussion. The reoccurring themes from both workshops were, concerns about the overall cost of the project, the need for a larger and more spacious council chamber/community room, impacts to parking and concerns regarding the safety and code compliance of the existing building. Finally, the participant's echoed the sentiment of the working group that the building should reflect the Town's values regarding durability and sustainability.

The information and feedback from the community led to the development of these guiding design principles:

- A centralized stair tower with an elevator for accessibility
- A community outdoor plaza focused around the redwood trees
- An expanded community room/council chambers, public permitting center, and lobby to meet multiple civic needs, organized on the same level around the public plaza
- The integration of sustainability and adaptability into interior and exterior spaces

By the end of 2019 the design team was exploring several two-story and three-story options for the addition, which generally explored the trade-offs between additional parking and additional building height. In order to address the concerns and potential impacts to immediate neighbors at the beginning stages of the design process, the project team held a neighborhood meeting on December 12, 2019, open to all, yet primarily designed to hear from Town Hall's closest neighbors. About 19 residents attended and were given the opportunity to take a tour of the existing Town Hall offices and see what current working conditions are like. The project team presented massing studies, floor plan concepts, space allocation tables and a detailed description of the Town's 10-year infrastructure fiscal plan to fund the project without additional taxes. Following this meeting, staff also met individually with nearby homeowners and other meeting participants to hear and see their particular prospective on the project.

On January 30, 2020 the project team hosted a well-attended community workshop at the community center, which allowed participants to visit various stations highlighting different aspects of the project. The interactive workshop stations focused on program and project costs, project size, height and massing, architectural style and character, environmental sustainability, project budget and process and public participation. Participants were given the opportunity to select various features that they would like to see incorporated into the project including the number stories, window and ceiling styles, features of the public plaza, sustainable design features, etc.

All meeting notes, public notices, and presentation information, detailing the entire public engagement process to this point, including relevant Town Council agenda items, are posted on the Town Hall Remodel and Addition project webpage here: <https://www.townofcortemadera.org/867/Town-Hall-Project>.

PROPOSED PROJECT:

The existing Town Hall building will remain and the addition will extend approximately 90 feet east into the parking lot and landscape area. The current proposal is to remodel ~3,700 sq. ft. of the existing Town Hall and add a ~7,600 square foot two story addition. The new fully ADA compliant Town Hall will be a total of ~11,300 sq. ft., including a ~750 square foot public permitting center, a new council chamber/community room, offices/workspaces that could potentially accommodate a small increase in in the Town's workforce if needed at some point in the future, and an outdoor plaza built around the existing redwood trees. The new Town Hall will contain offices for the departments of Building and Planning, Public Works, Code Enforcement, Administration and Finance, all in one building accessible from both Tamalpais Drive and the

parking lot. A central circulation corridor including an elevator, stairway, lobby and restrooms will connect all levels of the existing building and the addition.

Parking

The parking lot will be reconfigured to maximize the number of standard, ADA, and electric vehicle parking spaces as well as improve vehicular and pedestrian circulation and safety. As discussed below, the new building and site plan will result in a minor change in the total number of off street parking spaces and a parking variance will be required. Overall the existing site layout and access points will not significantly change, however there will be a slight decrease in the number of parking spaces from 36 to 33 spaces to accommodate the larger building. As part of the project analysis, a parking study was initiated that will analyze the existing and proposed parking layout. The study has been postponed due the Covid 19 shelter in place order.

General Plan and Zoning Designations

The project site has a land use designation of Public and Semi Public Facilities in the 2009 Corte Madera General Plan. This designation includes uses that serve a public or semi-public function, including public and private schools, places of religious assembly, and public buildings such as Town Hall. The General Plan includes the following policy and implementation program outlining the future of Town Hall:

Policy LU-6.7

Create a Town Commons Plan that provides for improvements to the Town Hall area.

Implementation Program LU-6.7.a: Town Commons Planning

Identify short- and long-range needs for Town facilities, including the Town Hall, Fire Department, Post Office, Town Park, Community Center and Teen Center. Designate the area as the “Town Commons” to recognize its identity as the geographic heart of the community. Include, relative to joint-use facilities, Neil Cummins School in the planning process. Among the possible projects to be considered:

- Upgrade and expansion of the Town Hall and Council Chambers.
- Improvement of parking facilities at Town Hall and provision of bicycle parking.
- Upgrade to or construction of a new Community Center.
- Design, landscaping and pathway ties between the Town Commons facilities.
- Construction of a large public gathering plaza, perhaps designed as a primary community focal point.
- Posting of informational and decorative “Town Commons”-themed signage.
- New Town signboard or informational kiosk.
- Necessary parking facilities.

The project parcel has a Zoning Designation of Public and Semipublic Facilities (P/SP) as defined in the Corte Madera Municipal Code (CMMC) Section 18.16.300. The P/SP District applies to most public and semipublic facilities and public service installations. The public use districts are established to provide sites for necessary public facilities and public service installations in accord with the general plan.

Required Entitlements

The following entitlements will be required pursuant the CMMC for the project as proposed at this time. The project will go before the Planning Commission at a formal public hearing at which time the required findings to approve or deny each entitlement will need to be made.

- I. *Lot Merger*: Decades ago the Town Hall, the Fire Station and the shared parking lot were developed on what is commonly seen as one lot. However, there are actually three separate parcels (APN'S 24-136-13, 14 & 15) that comprise the site, with the existing fire station crossing one of the property lines and as proposed the town hall addition would also cross a property line. To bring the lot into compliance the three lots will be merged into one as part of the application.

- II. *Design Review*: This project requires Design Review approval because it includes exterior modifications and an addition to the existing structure and site.

- III. *Variances*
 - a. *Parking Variance*: Parking requirements for development projects are determined by area (sq. ft.) of the particular use. The number of parking spaces required for public buildings is 1 space per 200 sq. ft. of gross floor area and the number of parking spaces required for administrative offices is 1 space per 250 sq. ft. of gross floor area. The project site including the Town Hall, Fire Station and parking lot do not meet the current parking standard and the project site is considered existing non-conforming. The table below summarizes the existing, required and proposed parking for the project, using both the public building and administration office requirement. In either case, the project will increase the level of nonconformity by added square footage and therefore a parking variance is required. As part of the project analysis, a parking study is underway that will analyze the existing and proposed parking configuration and provide justification for the proposed variance.

	EXISTING CONDITION (with trailer)	REQUIRED (without trailer)	PROPOSED (w/o trailer)	DELTA (proposed vs. required)
Town Hall		57 or 45 spaces ⁽¹⁾ (11,310 sq. ft. proposed town hall)		
Fire Station		44 or 35 spaces ⁽¹⁾ (8,810 sq. ft. existing fire station)		
Total	36	101 or 80	33	-69 or -48
(1)Parking for public buildings is 1 space/200 sq. ft., parking for administrative offices is 1 space /250 sq. ft. CMMC (Section 18.20.030).				

- b. *Height Variance:* Maximum height allowed for buildings in the P/SP District is 30 feet and the maximum height of the proposed project is 33 feet 9 inches from the northeast corner of the new building down to the parking lot on the north side of the building. Therefore a height variance of 3 feet 9 inches is required. The maximum height of the building from the sidewalk on Tamapalis Dr. to the peak of the southeast gable is ~27 feet.
- c. *Front Setback Variance:* The front setback requirement in the P/SP District is a minimum of 20 feet from the front property line. The current building is existing non-conforming at 8 feet from the front property line and the majority of the proposed addition will be 6 feet from the front property line and extend a distance of ~37 feet parallel to Tamapalis Dr. Therefore a 14 foot front setback variance for the ~37 foot wide addition is required.
- d. *Conditional Use Permit:* The CMMC specifies that all facilities, including buildings and grounds, owned, leased or operated by the town are permitted with the approval of a Conditional Use Permit (CUP). As part of the entitlement process the Planning Commission will need to make the required findings to approve the CUP.

Landscaping

The three existing redwood trees are the natural focal point for the landscape design of the project illustrated on landscape site plan within the plan set. Plantings on either side of the plaza provide a buffer between the building and the street. California Lilac, Indian Hawthorne, Manzanita and Silver Sheen make up the planting pallet that will accentuate the buildings architecture and materials. A unique feature of the project will be the landscaping underneath the public plaza. Sunlight will come through the “skylights or glass tiles” built into the plaza deck. The subterranean landscaped area will be visible from the first level work areas and conference room. This area will be planted with Braken Ferns and Natal Lilies. The lower level of the north elevation will also be landscaped to provide a buffer from the parking lot and privacy for some of the lower level offices. The design team is still developing landscaping and bio retention plans for the parking lot area with the goal of maximizing permeable areas, improving water quality and reducing run off.

California Environmental Quality Act

The Town has contract with the environmental consulting firm of Circlepoint to complete the required studies to comply with the requirements of California Environmental Quality Act CEQA. The CEQA analysis will include separate studies and reports on several elements such as traffic, cultural resources and air quality. All potential impacts will be identified as required by law and mitigation measures will be proposed, if necessary, that will reduce impacts to a less than significant level. The approval of the final CEQA report will also be the responsibility of the Planning Commission.

Public Comment

The Town did receive three comments from the public via email that are included as Attachment

REQUESTED ACTION

The project team is seeking the input from the Planning Commission regarding the proposed remodel and two-story addition of Corte Madera's Town Hall. The team will present a preliminary project design informed by outreach efforts and community input received over the last several months. The input, questions and feedback from both the Commission and the public will guide the team in its next steps, including application development. The Planning Commission will not make any decisions at this meeting. Planning Commission comments provided to the project team at this meeting are intended to serve as guidance only, based on information available at this time and do not substitute for future public hearings by the Planning Commission that will be required to approve this project.

ATTACHMENTS:

1. Required Findings for Design Review, Variance, and Conditional Use Permit Entitlements
2. Public Comments Received
3. Exhibits/Project Plans

Required Findings for Design Review,
Variance, and Conditional Use Permit Entitlements

Required Design Review Findings.

- The project conforms with the general plan, any applicable specific, area or community plan, master sign program and all provisions of the zoning ordinance.
- The project will not unnecessarily remove trees and natural vegetation, will preserve natural landforms and, whenever possible, avoid development within fifty vertical feet of ridgelines, does not include excessive or unsightly grading of hillsides, and otherwise will not adversely affect the natural beauty of the town.
- The project will not significantly and adversely affect the views, sunlight or privacy of any nearby residences, will provide adequate buffering between residential and nonresidential uses, and otherwise is in the best interest of the public health, safety and general welfare.
- The structure, site plan and landscaping are in scale and harmonious with existing and future development adjacent to the site, and in the vicinity, and with the landforms and vegetation in the vicinity of the site, and landscaping shall be based on water conservation designs.
- Development materials and techniques will result in durable high-quality structures and landscaping.
- The structures, site plan and landscaping create an internal sense of order, provide a visually pleasing setting for occupants, visitors and the general community, are appropriate to the function of the site, and provide safe and convenient access to the property for pedestrians, cyclists and vehicles.
- To the maximum extent feasible, the project includes the maintenance, rehabilitation and improvement of existing sites, structures and landscaping, and will correct any violations of the zoning ordinance, building code or other municipal codes that exist on the site.
- The design and location of signs are consistent with the character and scale of the buildings to which they are attached or which are located on the same site, the signs are visually harmonious with surrounding development, and there are no illegal signs on the site.

Required Variance Findings

- There are special circumstances applicable to the property, including size, shape, topography, location, or surroundings, that do not apply generally to other properties in the vicinity and under identical zone classification.
- Because of these special circumstances, the strict application of the title will result in practical difficulty and unnecessary physical hardship and will deprive the property of privileges enjoyed by other properties in the vicinity and under identical zone classification.

- The variance or adjustment will not constitute a grant of special privileges and is consistent with the limitations upon other properties in the vicinity and under identical zone classification.
- The granting of the variance or adjustment will not be detrimental to the public welfare or materially injurious to other property in the vicinity.
- The variance is consistent with the objectives of this title and with the general plan.

Required Conditional Use Permit Findings

- Explain how the proposed location of the conditional use is in accord with the stated objectives of the Town's Zoning Ordinance (Section 18.02.030), and the purpose of the zoning district in which the site is located.
- Explain how the proposed location of the conditional use and the proposed conditions under which the use would be operated or maintained will not be detrimental to the public health, safety or welfare.
- Explain how the proposed conditional use will comply with the General Plan and with each of the applicable provisions in the Town's Zoning Ordinance.

ATTACHMENT 2

Public Comments Received

From: [Adam Wolff](#)
To: [Lisa Meylan](#)
Cc: [R.J. Suokko](#); [Jared Barrilleaux](#); ron@kappearchitects.com; [Phil Boyle](#)
Subject: RE: Prelim Design Drawings for Town Hall
Date: Thursday, March 19, 2020 10:11:34 AM
Attachments: [image001.png](#)

Hi Lisa,

Thanks for getting back to me. Sounds like a smart plan. I will reach out when it's lifted.

Best,
Adam

From: Lisa Meylan <LMeylan@KeeganCoppin.com>
Sent: Thursday, March 19, 2020 10:03 AM
To: Adam Wolff <awolff@tcmmail.org>
Subject: RE: Prelim Design Drawings for Town Hall

Hi Adam:

Joe and I would love to see the preview of the design drawings when this Shelter In Place is lifted.

Thanks and have a great day!

Lisa

Lisa Meylan
Property Manager
Keegan & Coppin Company, Inc.
101 Larkspur Landing Circle, Suite 112
Larkspur, CA 94939-1746
Phone: (415) 461-1010 ext. 121
Fax: (415) 925-2310
lmeylan@KeeganCoppin.com
www.KeeganCoppin.com



From: Adam Wolff <awolff@tcmmail.org>
Sent: Wednesday, March 11, 2020 2:33 PM
To: lmeylan@keegancoppin.com
Subject: Prelim Design Drawings for Town Hall

Hi Lisa,

I Hope you and family are doing okay in these increasingly crazy times it seems. As I believe we briefly discussed at the Jan. 30 Town Hall workshop, I wanted to touch base with you and see if you wanted to get a preview of the design drawings we've been working on to incorporate the comments and feedback we got at the Jan. 30 community workshop. Let me know and I can come by next week and walk you through them or happy to show you them down here. If there's a particular time that works best for you, please let me know.

Best,
Adam

Adam Wolff, AICP
Director, Planning and Building
Town of Corte Madera
(415) 927-5059
www.townofcortemadera.org

From: [Public Comment](#)
To: [Adam Wolff](#); [Phil Boyle](#)
Subject: Fw: Town Hall Project
Date: Tuesday, April 21, 2020 9:12:54 AM

Public Comment for 4/28 PC meeting received through publiccomment@tcmmail.org

Rebecca

From: Patricia Ravasio <patravasio@icloud.com>
Sent: Wednesday, April 15, 2020 2:18 PM
To: Public Comment
Subject: Town Hall Project

For public comment at the 4/28 workshop on the new Town Hall project.

Dear Planning Commissioners and Town Staff,
I join the voices of many other long time residents and leaders in Corte Madera and say that this plan is too big. It was overly ambitious before the the pandemic and seems almost ludicrously so now. I do not think it is realistic or advisable to proceed with this plan.

We simply do not need to triple or even double the size of the existing town hall. I think staff should return to the drawing board and come up with a barebones program of what space is actually needed to provide a functional facility; not what would cobstitute a grand vision for a new town hall.

To be prudent at this time, I think the project budget should be keep to about half of the current amount being contemplated.

I know of many, many other long time residents who are not happy with the current grand plans for Town Hall. It is time to be realistic and conservative in our capital outlays. A huge new town Hall is not needed and should not be prioritized over other important infrastructure projects.

Please let's go back and rethink this, to make sure it's something we can and should actually accomplish.

Thank you,
Pat Ravasio
427 Oakdale Avenue

From: [Barbara](#)
To: [Phil Boyle](#)
Subject: Town Hall remodel
Date: Thursday, April 16, 2020 1:53:32 PM

My husband and I moved to Corte Madera over 30 years ago. While I recognize the need to maintain and update community buildings, I am relieved that construction is being put off. The financial aspect (\$10 million for less than 4000 sq.ft.) should definitely be reviewed - by an independent accounting firm with no skin in the game.

First, the Town Manager noted the Town won't need a loan because one of the three major income streams/taxes for the project is the anticipated Amy's restaurant. Definitely **counting your chickens before they are hatched**. Even without the present virus situation, no one knows how successful Amy's will be, especially in the short term - and by short term I mean 2-4 years, not the very year construction begins.

Second, I personally spoke to architect Ron Kappe and offered to arrange a tour for him and any staff he choose at Congregation Kol Shofar, in Tiburon. In or about 2009 the congregation completed a MAJOR, stunning, award-winning, green remodel of **50,000 sq. ft. (or more), including grounds, a new wing, an outbuilding and opening a massive dome which had been hidden**. For just over \$17 million. That remodel took one year, during which time the congregation met at a friendly church and rented offices elsewhere.

Note that Ron Kappe agreed to a tour, took my information but never got back to me and did **not** respond to numerous phone calls. (By the way he mentioned he attended another synagogue on occasion, so religious unease shouldn't be the reason. Did he just "blow me off")?

To summarize my concerns, \$10 million for less than 4000 sq. ft. seems excessive. Many locals complete remodels of 2000-3000 sq. ft. for far less. So I cannot help but think we will end up with a parcel tax to fund \$10 million or more. (Amy's notwithstanding). Thank you, Barbara Reiner McEntyre

In reviewing the latest schematic plans for the Town Hall expansion I have a fundamental concern and the following observations:

I must again say how well presented the revised plans by Kappe Architects are. I think the organizing principal of using a central plaza accessible to Tamalpais Avenue is the best approach to link old and new. I also believe bringing the Council Chambers down to the plaza level is the right idea to promote public openness, connectivity of indoor/ outdoor spaces, and simplified exiting.

My main concern remains one of basic programming and site planning. As Ron Kappe's building elevations show (for example the "South Elevation), the highly articulated new building leaves the existing corner structure an undignified box for decades to come; and this at the most prominent, historically significant location. An overwhelming portion of the design budget is devoted to a highly articulated new structure that is unnecessarily complicated. Questions include:

- Why is the lower floor plan of the new building, with stepped retaining walls, unrelated to the footprint of the Council Chambers above it?
- What is the justification for the expensive, glass-walled lobbies at the back of the plaza?
- Why is the existing building purposely left more "boxlike" than it is now and uncomfortably close to the corner; even though the proposed office plan requires it to be mostly rebuilt?

It's my belief the Town has moved forward architecturally too quickly without looking at the validity of the site design concept and the best allocation of funds. To reiterate, the best location for the Council Chambers, the focus of our civic identity, is where the existing building is. Here's what I propose:

Retain the lower level of the old firehouse, as now planned, for back office and storage functions. The lower footprint is more comfortably set back from the corner and could comprise a podium of the right size for a new, inspirational Council Chambers structure above. Even with a soaring, distinctive roof; the new corner building would be no taller than a 2 story house. This new structure would directly open to the plaza on the east and connect at the rear with an attractive but simpler 2 story office building over needed parking. Set behind the redwoods and back from Tamalpais, this rectangular building would be much less expensive to build than what is now proposed and better suited to office space planning. The height would not exceed the 30 foot residential height limit as seen from Tamalpais.

The bottom line, at this time of economic stress, is that the new office building (with a first class public counter) could be constructed now to serve the Town's most glaring needs, while the old corner building remains until sufficient budget allows an excellent architectural solution, where it will have the most symbolic value to the Town.

It is unfortunate that the Town has proceeded this far with a concept I believe to be flawed; without taking time to really study other site design solutions, and without sufficient cost analysis of those alternatives.

Respectfully submitted for the Planning Commission, Town Council and Design Team's consideration
Michael Harlock A.I.A. A.I.C.P.

ATTACHMENT 3

Exhibits/Project Plans