




Opposition to Use Permit for Villa Vanto Event Center

October 14, 2025 Board of Supervisors Hearing

Summary of Project

- Zoning Permit to allow a 215 square foot farm retail sales facility,
- Zoning Permit to allow a 3,575 square foot small-scale agricultural processing facility to process lavender grown onsite essential oils, and hydrosol, and perfumes
-  Use Permit to allow 12 annual “agricultural promotional” events
 - Size: 50 – 200 attendees
 - Time: 11:00 AM and 10:00 PM
 - Amplified indoor music
 - Prepared meals and appetizers to be served
 - Parking: up to 90 vehicles in a graded and mowed pasture next to D Street Extension

Opposition to Use Permit

- Sets a Dangerous Precedent
- Violates LEA and General Plan Guidelines
- Violates and Compromises the Williamson Act
- Impossible to Monitor Compliance
- Risks to Bicyclists and Impact on D Street
- County-wide opposition

April 1, 2021 "Ag Exempt" Building Permit Submitted

Mario Ghilotti 415-760-1936		4485 D St. Ext.
Property Owner's Name	Contact Phone #	Site Address
4485 D St. Ext.		Petaluma CA 94952
Mailing Address		City/Town
Petaluma	CA 94952	020-130-07
City/Town	State/Zip	Assessor's Parcel Number
4000 SF	80' X 50' X 30'	Permit Exemption Number
Size of Proposed Building	Length / Width / Height	
Cattle Grazing		
Present Use of Land		
Use of Proposed Building	farm machines, Hay + Grain	

In accordance with the provisions of Section 7-7 of the Sonoma County Code, I hereby permit exemption. This application is for a building to be used for housing farm products that are harvested from or utilized on the same parcel of land as the property.

The proposed building complies with the following:

1. The building will be located 60 feet, or more, from all property lines.
2. The building will be located 60 feet, or more, from other non-exempt structures, unless a reduced separation is approved.
3. The building will not contain waste plumbing.
4. A building permit shall be obtained for any electrical work.
5. The parcel on which the building will be located is five (5) acres or greater.
6. The agricultural building, as defined in Section 202 of the CBC will not be used for human habitation or used by the public.
7. The building will be located on appropriately zoned agricultural property.
8. The property on which the building will be located is presently used for agricultural purposes.
9. The proposed exempt building is limited to two (2) stories of wood framed or manufactured engineered buildings. Wood structural members are limited to 25 foot spans unless an engineered plan of the building has been prepared and submitted with the application.
10. Not located in Flood Zone as established by Sonoma County Code chapter 7B.

I agree to comply with all County Ordinance and State Laws regulating building construction. I agree that construction on the proposed building shall not commence until the site evaluation has been completed and I have received written notification of approval from PRMD.

Mario M. Ghilotti
Signature of Property Owner

4
Date

Applicant Representations For Ag Exempt Permit (April 2021)

County of Sonoma

Permit and Resource Management Department

To whom it may concern,

The property at 4485 D St. Ext. Petaluma CA is currently being used to graze commercial cattle. This additional agricultural exempt structure will allow enough storage for hay, grain and farm equipment. This additional building will support all year grazing instead of having to rotate cattle to other properties. This new barn will be a wood framed pole barn, concrete slab on grade, and metal roof, that will increase and support the existing agricultural use.

The property at 4485 D St. Ext. Petaluma CA is currently being used to graze commercial cattle. This additional agricultural exempt structure will allow enough storage for hay, grain and farm equipment. This additional building will support all year grazing instead of having to rotate cattle to other properties. This new barn will be a wood framed pole barn, concrete slab on grade, and metal roof, that will increase and support the existing agricultural use.



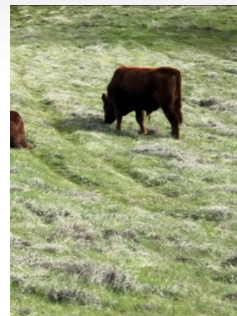
Mario Ghilotti

4485 D St. Ext.

Petaluma CA 94952

415-760-1936

mariog@gbil914.com

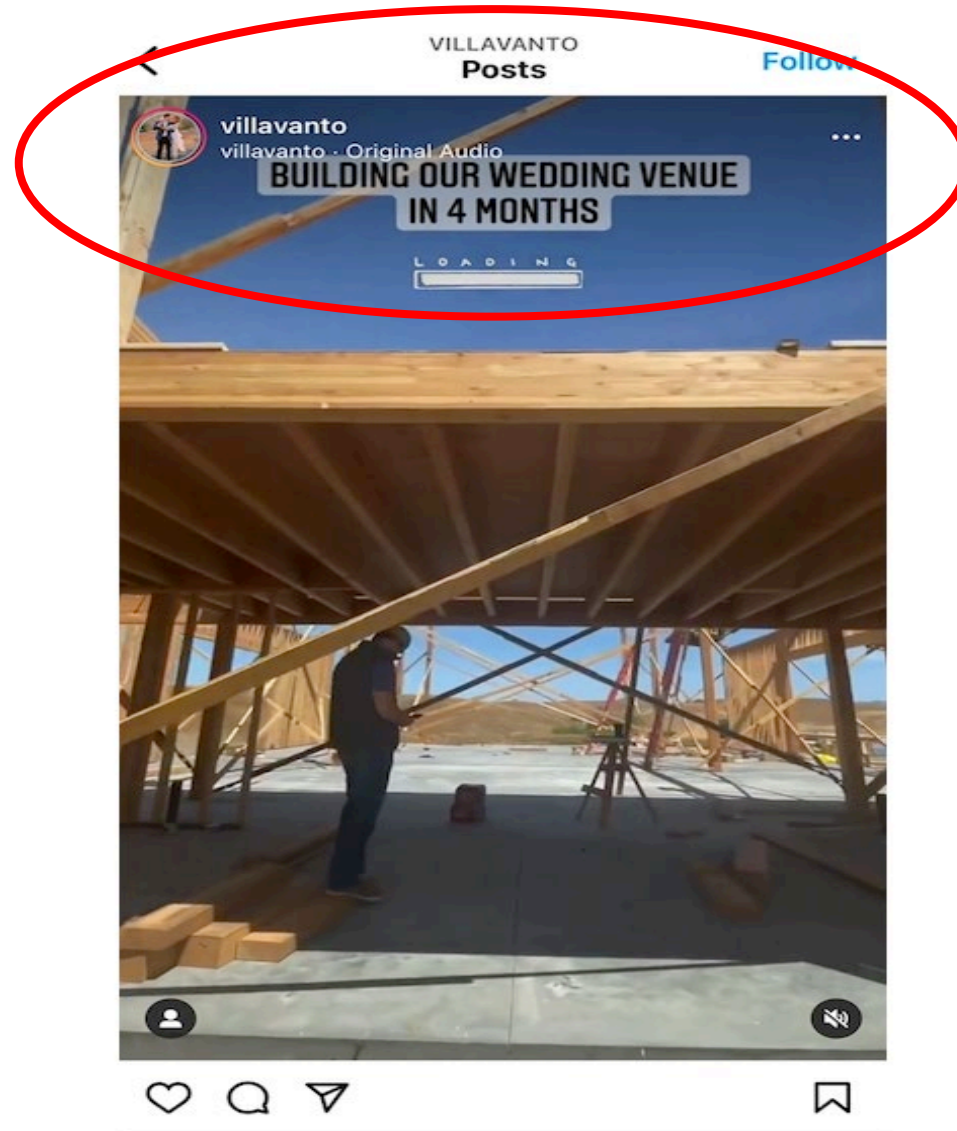


Note: Photos of cows included on a separate page by the applicant. Combined here for brevity.

Social Media Post on Villa Vanto Account

Ag Exempt Barn
Building Permit
Granted

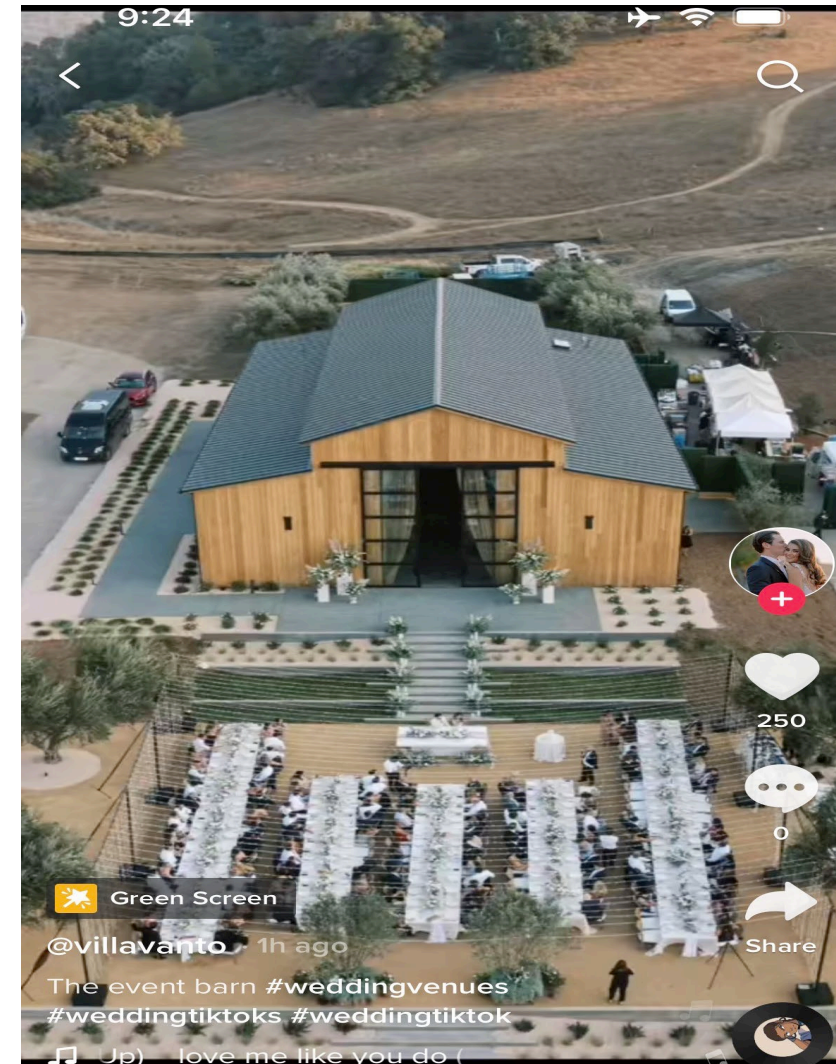
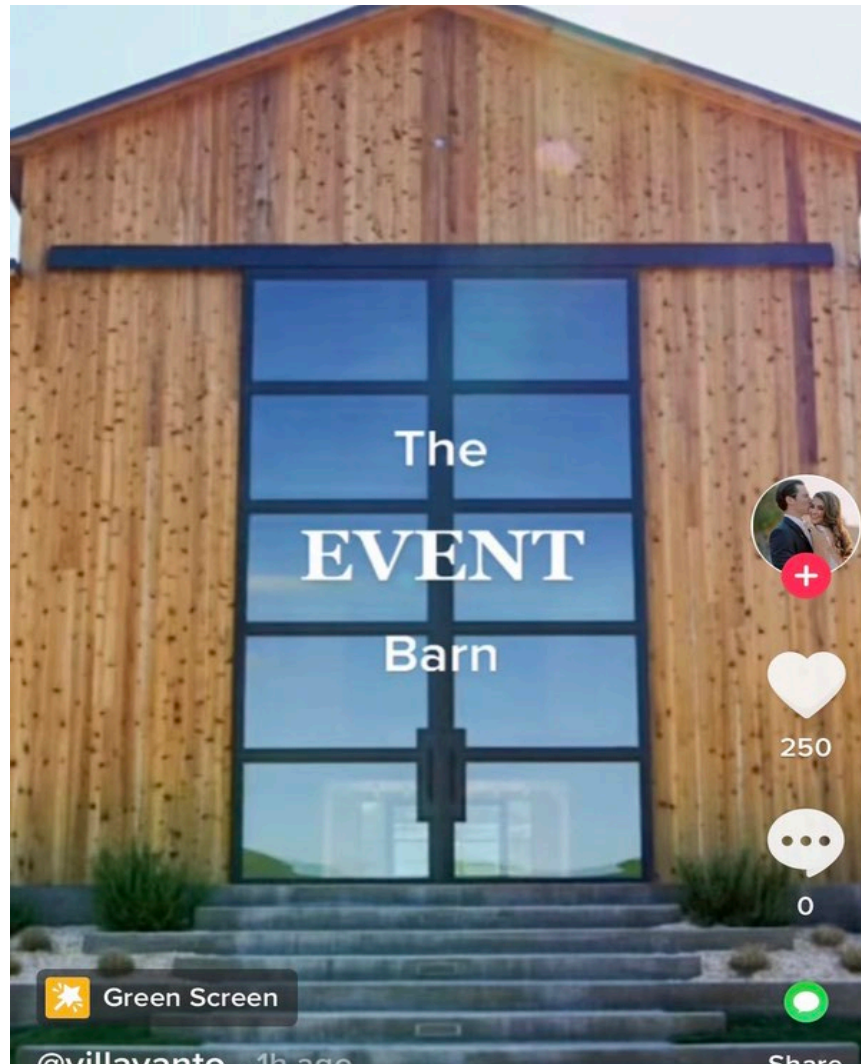
April 27, 2021



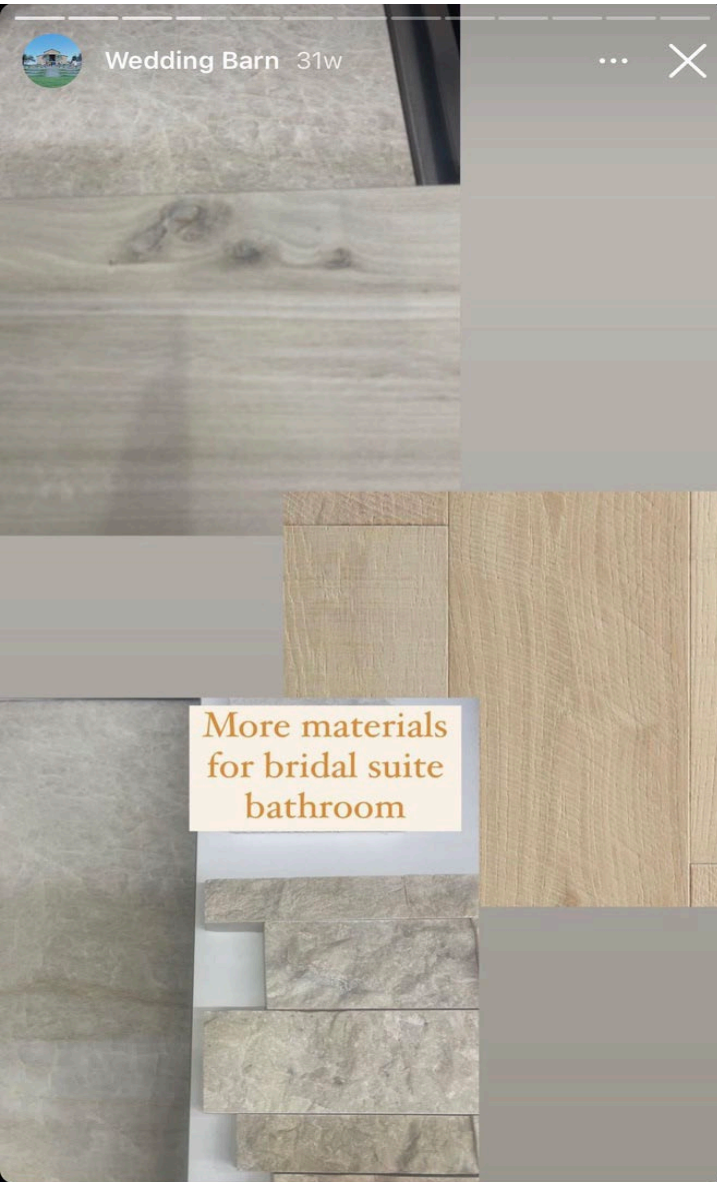
Ghilotti Wedding

August 28, 2021

More Social Media Posts: Venue Completed by Wedding Deadline – August 28, 2021



Event Center Interiors



Violation of LEA Zoning

- Project must meet the following criteria – **IT DOES NOT**
 - “Periodic Special Event”* – described as a parade, concert, festival, race or gathering...” Generally a one- time event.
 - Restricted Non- Agricultural Use: “Temporary Event”

Events are integral to the Applicant’s business plan. The Applicant states that without events the business would not be viable.

* Section 26-06- 030 – Allowed Land Uses, 26-22-120 –Periodic Special Events.

Violation of General Plan Guidelines

- **General Plan – Agricultural Resources Element**
- **Objective AR-6.1:**
 - Give the highest priority in all agricultural land use categories to agricultural production activities. Visitor serving uses shall promote agriculture and enhance marketing of Sonoma County agricultural products, but shall be secondary and incidental to agricultural production.

Facility rental income exceeds the sale of agricultural products.
Impact of events on land substantially greater than agricultural production.

There Is No Ag On This Property



Photo taken in October 2025

Violation of Williamson Act

- Permanent Structures Dedicated to Events are Prohibited.

This is a Permanent Event Barn

- Permit Sonoma issued a violation for **“Advertising and operating an event center on a parcel included under the Williamson Act.” ***
- Custom built as an event center and featured in Applicant’s promotional materials as “The Event Barn”
- Business plan revolves around using the venue for events
- Events take place inside the barn with amplified music until 10:00pm.
- Permanent changes to the character of the land are prohibited.

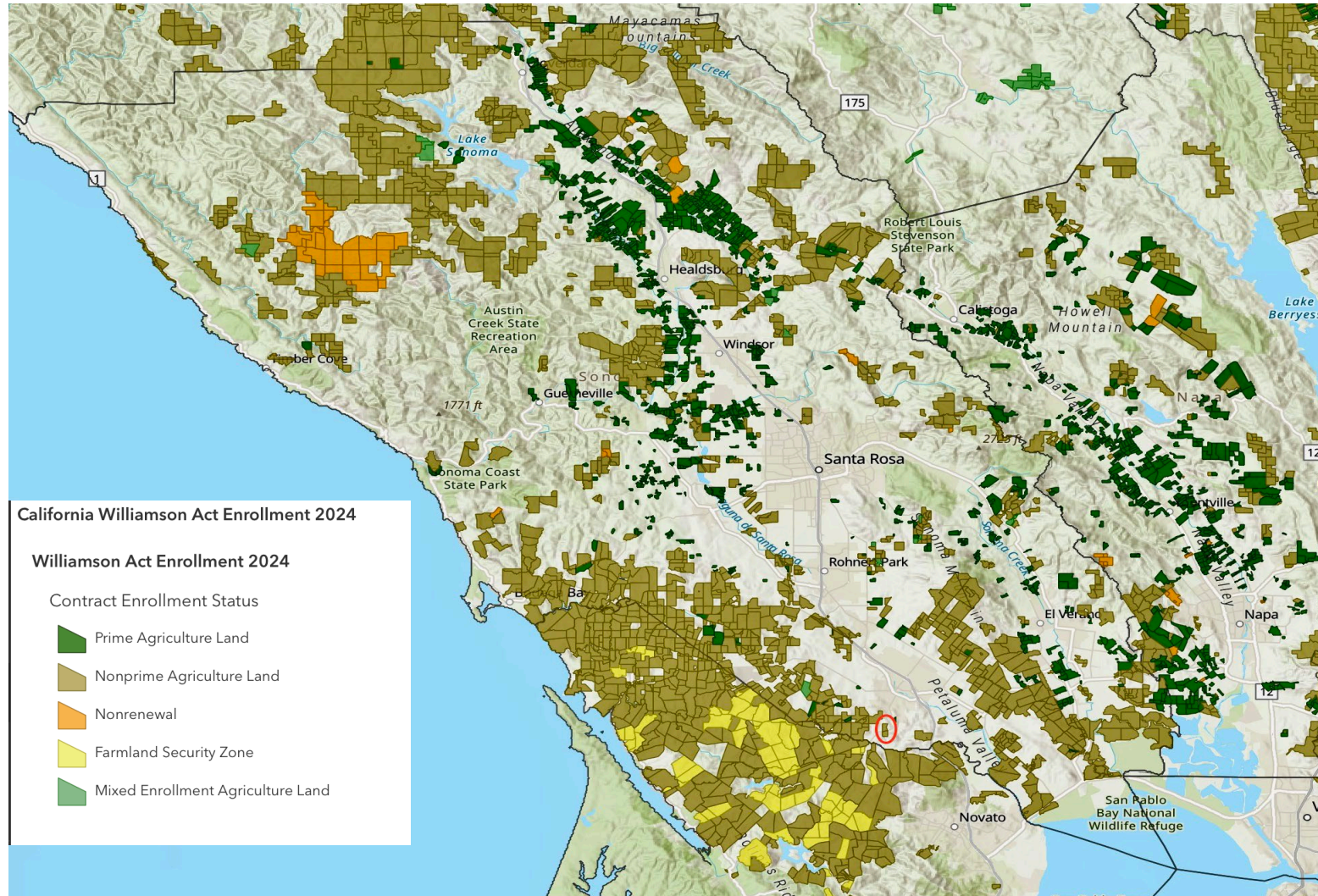
Landscaped event center with astroturf lawns, graded areas for ceremonies and receptions, parking for up to 90 cars during events.

* 4/8/2022 (VPL22-0111)

Failure to Enforce the Williamson Act

- Results in Sonoma County taxpayers subsidizing a luxury Event Center with generous property tax benefits
- Encourages commercial development of other Williamson Act parcels, something the Act was passed to prevent
- Motivates existing landowners to enter into Williamson Act contracts, knowing that the restrictions will not be enforced
- Inflates the value of Williamson Act land, making it prohibitive for farmers to acquire

Sonoma Co. Williamson Act Parcels - 2024



Total # of Parcels – 2,418
Total Acres 267,000*

Every parcel is at risk of non-agricultural development without enforcement of the Williamson Act.

*As reported to CA Dept. of Conservation by Sonoma County.
Parcels adjacent to Ghilotti Property are in Agriculture Preserves

Applicants are Developers – Vero West

- Investment Strategy

Commercial
Development
NOT agriculture



Complex entitlements,
ground-up construction,
value add lease-ups &
environmentally challenging
land



Residential, Mixed-Use,
Industrial, Self Storage &
IOS



Marin, Sonoma, Napa, San
Francisco & Solano Counties



Investment Size: \$10M to
75M



Hold Period: 5 - 10 years



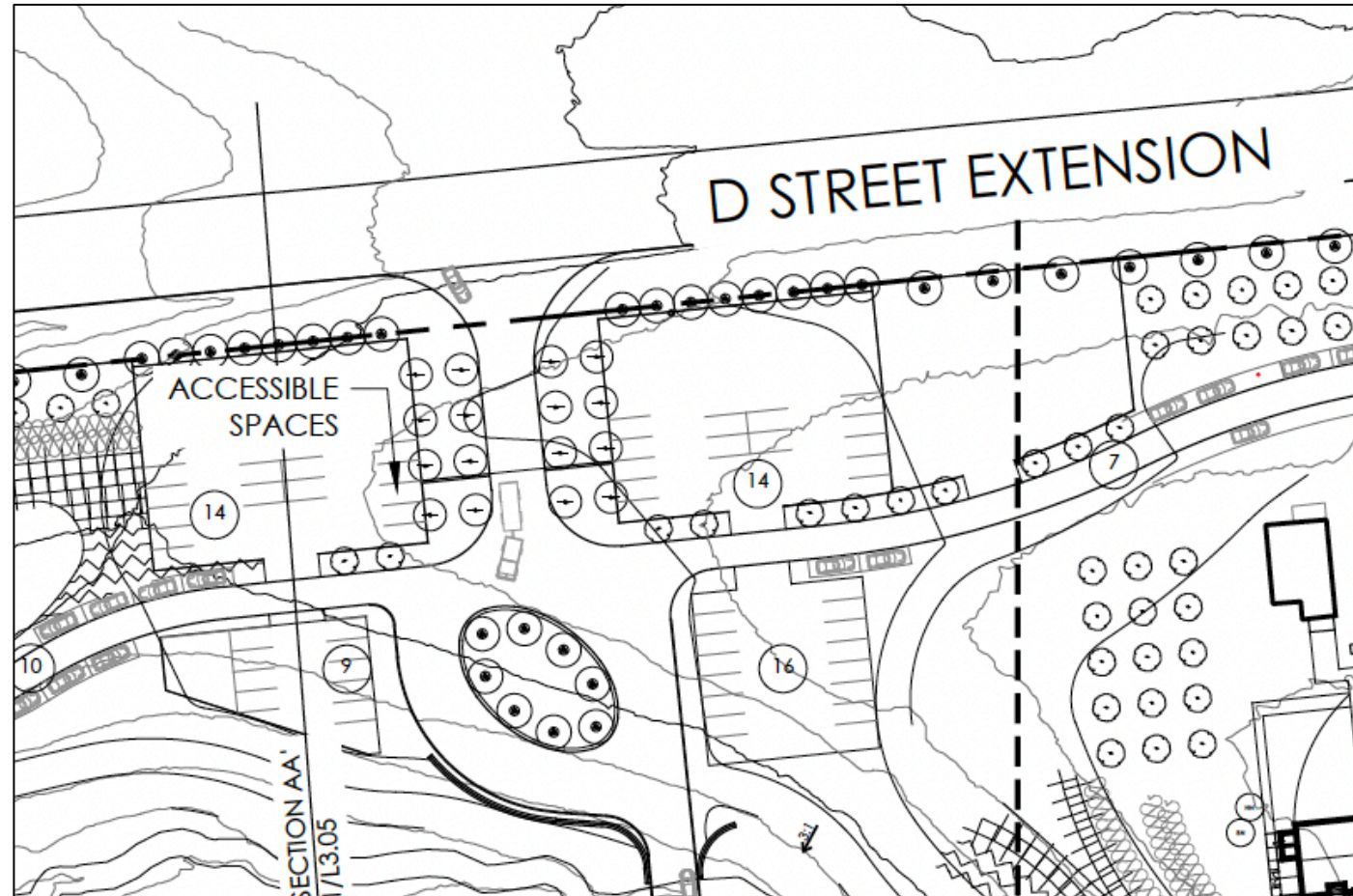
Risks to Bicyclists and D Street Impact

- 1,600 + attendees annually adds to traffic on weekends.
- Attendees who have been drinking, driving down D Street on weekends when kids are riding bikes, pedestrians are walking dogs, residents are pulling out of driveways creates dangerous situations.
- D Street is a popular route for cyclists on weekends. Cars must cross the bike lane to enter and exit the venue, with limited visibility of bicyclists and cars driving west to east.

Applicant's Parking Plan – Along Scenic Corridor

**90 parking
spaces**

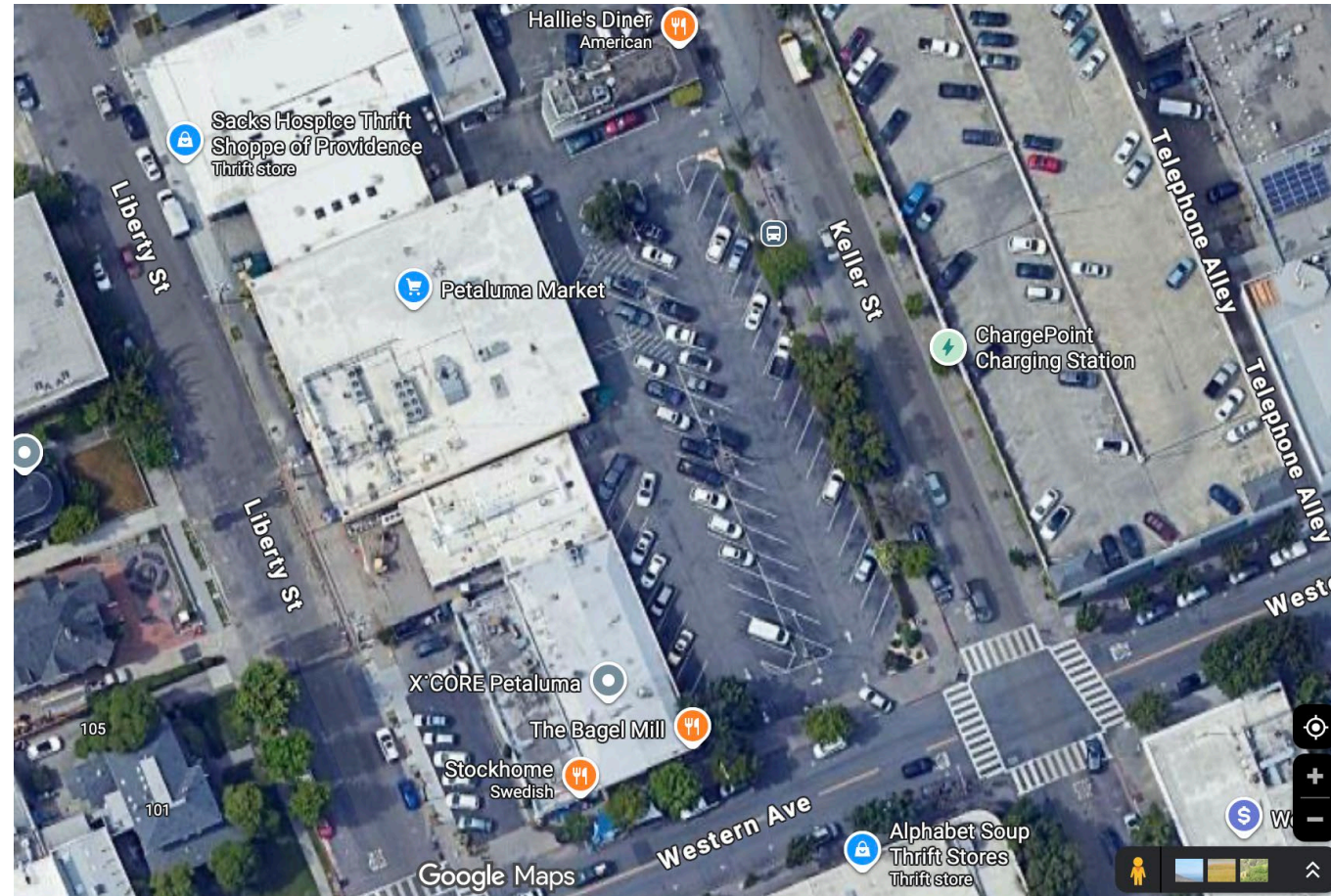
- Next to Scenic Corridor
- On mowed pastureland



Petaluma Market Parking Lot - Downtown

61 parking spaces

- In downtown commercial area



Countywide Opposition

**PRESERVE RURAL
SONOMA COUNTY**



8 March 2025

RE: Villa Vanta Farm's proposed wedding venue on Sonoma County
Agriculturally zoned and designated Ag land near Petaluma

Dear Planning Commissioners, Board of Zoning Adjustments,
Board of Supervisors and Permit Sonoma,

West County Rural Alliance respectfully requests all Sonoma County
entities deny the use permit request for the wedding/event center
located on Ag zoned lands near Petaluma.

A key requirement in assessing hospitality operations on ag land on this
property is a determination that such uses are secondary and incidental
to the on-site ag production and processing. We understand the
landowner submitted an application in April 2021. In
an article titled: "Lavender Farm A Cover For Events?" the
wife, the project applicants, were quoted as saying the
events at Villa Vanta because they, "believe the event
two-thirds of the farm's retail sales." Such a statement
the agricultural activities are very likely secondary to

From: Greg Carr <greg99pole@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, April 21, 2025 10:21 AM
To: Cecily Condon <Cecily.Condon@sonoma-county.org>
Subject: PLP 24-0012, Ghilotti

EXTERNAL

Please forward the following to the
April 24 hearing.

The applicant's response to the
that it offers the possibility to the
should be based upon a judgment of
anticipated production.

Unfortunately, to my knowledge, the County does not have experience with this
type of agriculture to rely upon the projected production with any confidence.
Secondly, the applicant does not have the experience or track record in this field that
would establish the reality of their production capability.

For these reasons it seems to me that the applicant should establish a track record of
production on this site before the County approves events for this project. Upon
return to the County, the applicant's actual production could be compared to the
projection. The approval of the two zoning permits would allow them to establish that
record before returning to the County for the desired events.

Having said that, it seems to me that allowing educational tours for the production,
processing, and sales operation under the two zoning permits would provide much
needed support for those activities. These educational tours should be limited to 10

per year with a maximum attendance of 40 to assure that the tours are in keeping
with the small scale of the operation.

Thank you for your consideration

Greg Carr



SONOMA GROUP OF THE
REDWOOD CHAPTER
P.O. Box 466
Santa Rosa, CA 95402

sierraclub.org/redwood/sonoma

September 3, 2024

Supervisor David Rabbitt
Director Tennis Wick, Permit Sonoma
575 Administration Drive
Santa Rosa, CA

VIA EMAIL

RE: Oppose Change of Use Permit, Ghilotti Project in San Antonio Valley, APN 020-130-037 Perm
Application UPE21-0064, Permit Sonoma File # PLP24-0012



April 22, 2025

To: Sonoma County Planning Commission; Josh Miranda, Planner, Permit S
Martin, Planner, Permit Sonoma
Cc: Tennis Wick, Director, Permit Sonoma
Re: PLP24-0012 (4485 D St., Petaluma)

Dear Planning Commission Members:

The Sonoma County Chapter of Community Alliance with Family Farmers (CAFF) submitted
comments in January of this year endorsing the letter submitted by the Neighborhood Coalition
detailing the many substantial reasons why this application should be denied. We also
endorsed the letter submitted on Feb. 12, 2025 by Preserve Rural Sonoma County urging
denial of this application. This project has a history of blatant abuse of agricultural zoning,
building requirements, and Williamson Act requirements. These previous violations have yet to
be rectified, yet the applicant is now requesting permits for agricultural processing and
"promotional events" – even though there are no crops in the ground! **There must be
verification of actual production that could support a processing operation, and any
visitor serving uses must abide by the County General Plan.**

February 13, 2025

County of Sonoma
Permit and Resource Management Departments
2550 Ventura Avenue
Santa Rosa CA 95403

Attn: Joshua Miranda

Re: Ghilotti Project at APN 020-130-037 4485 D Street, Petaluma; Use Permit Application
UPE21-0064, File: PLP24-0012

Dear Planning Commissioners/ Board of Zoning Adjustments, Supervisor Rabbitt, and Permit
Sonoma,

PRSC urges the BZA to deny the use permit request for the wedding/event center located on Ag
zoned lands.

This project clearly represents an end run around the County's zoning laws that prohibits such
wedding/events centers on ag land. The proposed project attempts to exploit the General Plan's
limited allowance for visitor serving uses in ag zones to support on-site agricultural production and
processing operations.

To approve this project would make a mockery of the County's general plan and zoning regulations.

Groups in Opposition (partial list)

- Sierra Club of Sonoma County
- Community Alliance For Family Farms
- Bennett Valley Residents for Safe Development
- Concerned Citizens of Bloomfield
- Friends of Franz Valley
- Neighborhood Coalition, Sonoma County
- Neighbors of West County
- Preserve Rural Sonoma County
- West County Rural Alliance
- Protect San Antonio Valley

Conclusion

- We have special laws and regulations intended to help real ag operations:
 - Lowered property taxes on Williamson Act land
 - Expedited permitting processes for simple ag structures
- Applicant manipulated and misused these laws and regulations to construct a luxury event center with no connection to agriculture
- Now Applicant seeks a Use Permit to operate a commercial event business subsidized by the taxpayers of Sonoma County
- This would set a harmful precedent – and a lot of people and organizations are opposed to it
- Role of BOS is to decide if this project crosses the line, or not – we believe it does