



SUMMARY REPORT

Agenda Date: 9/14/2021

To: Sonoma County Board of Supervisors

Department or Agency Name(s): Permit and Resource Management Department

Staff Name and Phone Number: Eric Gage, Project Planner, 707-565-1391

Vote Requirement: Majority

Supervisorial District(s): First

Title:

Verano Hotel and Housing Project at 135-175 West Verano Avenue, Boyes Springs. File No. PLP19-0044

Recommended Action:

Approve a Resolution to adopt the Mitigated Negative Declaration and approve the requested General Plan Amendment and Use Permit for a hotel; and adopt an Ordinance approving the Zone Change for a high density residential use located at 135, 155, and 175 West Verano Avenue, Boyes Springs, APN 127-071-005, -012, -013.

Executive Summary:

The proposed project consists of a three-story, 120-room hotel on the southern parcel fronting on Verano Avenue and an affordable housing project in the rear of the property. The housing component consists of 71 deed-restricted affordable apartments and a manager's unit. A publicly accessible landscaped parklet is proposed on an adjacent Regional Parks property. The parklet would extend west from the hotel driveway along the project frontage and include passive recreation amenities. The 5.9 acre site currently includes a ball field, foundations of demolished structures, and ornamental trees from a former tourist resort located in the Sonoma Valley.

On July 15, 2021, the Planning Commission voted 4-0 to recommend approval of the project and adoption of the Mitigated Negative Declaration to the Board of Supervisors. The recommendation also included several project changes for the Board of Supervisors to consider: installing a solid noise barrier between the apartments and hotel, add safety upgrades to the pedestrian crossing, explore emergency vehicle access (EVA) opportunities with the neighboring property owner (the Finnish American Home Association (FAHA)) to the west, and delete the hotel rooftop guest space.

Discussion:

Existing Conditions

The ± 5.9-acre project site is located on Verano Avenue, approximately 650 feet west of the intersection of Verano Avenue and Highway 12, and about 1.3 miles northwest of central Sonoma. The site is mostly level with gentle sloping from east to west, and the Agua Caliente Creek bank along the northern boundary of the property. The site contains foundations of demolished structures and landscape trees along the northern and eastern portions of the site. The southern portion of the site contained a baseball field and an unpaved parking area.

Residential

The housing project consists of a 100 percent affordable rental apartment complex of 71 units and a manager's unit, in six 3-story buildings, with community rooms, landscaped courtyards and pedestrian paths. With the exception of the manager's unit, at least 15% of the units will be deed-restricted to very low income renters and 85% to low income renters through an affordability agreement with the County. The proposed residential project has a residential density of 22 units per acre and will utilize the Rental Housing Opportunity Density Bonus Program, to exceed the maximum residential density of the proposed R3 zoning district of 20 units per acre. The Density Bonus Program also confers concessions providing relief from standards including modification of the maximum height limit from 40 feet to 43.5 feet, and reduced parking and landscaping requirements.

Hotel

The 3-story, 120-room hotel on the southern parcel fronting on Verano Avenue features a rooftop observation deck and garden. The hotel also includes a café, bar, and swimming pool amenities for guests. Although most of the hotel roofline meets the 35-foot height limit of the base zoning, tower elements are 53 feet tall at the highest point. The applicant is requesting modification of the height limit for these elements approved by use permit consistent with the requirement for reduced building intensity in Zoning Code Section 26-10-040.K.

General Plan

The existing General Plan Land Use Designations for this site do not conform to the existing property lines. The current designations include Recreation and Visitor-Serving Commercial on the western portion of the property and Urban Residential 8 on the eastern portion. The project proposes General Plan Amendments to change Recreation and Visitor-Serving Commercial to Urban Residential 20, and Urban Residential 8 to Urban Residential 20. The proposed land use designations would conform to the property lines. The Recreation and Visitor-Serving Commercial designation would apply to the hotel site, while the remainder of the property accommodating the residential apartments would be designated Urban Residential 20.

Zoning

Similar to the application of the land use designations described above, the zoning designations also do not conform to the existing parcel boundaries. The western portion of the site is zoned Recreation and Visitor-Serving Commercial (K) and the eastern portion of the site is zoned Medium Density Residential (R2 8). The Riparian Corridor (RC) and Floodplain (F2) apply along Agua Caliente Creek on the northern property boundary. The project proposes to rezone the residential site to High Density Residential (R3) while retaining the RC and F2 Combining Districts.

Prior Board Actions:

N/A

PRIOR REVIEW AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The project received unanimous support from the Sonoma Valley Citizens Advisory Committee and the Sonoma County Planning Commission. The table below summarizes prior review and recommendations made on the project.

Date	Review Authority	Action
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July 17, 2019	Design Review Committee	Conceptual Review, no action
Feb. 26, 2020	Sonoma Valley Citizens Advisory Committee	Unanimous Approval (9-0)
June 3, 2020	Design Review Committee	Preliminary Approval (3-0)
July 15, 2021	Planning Commission	Unanimous Recommendation for Approval (4-0)

On July 15, 2021 the Planning Commission reviewed the project and unanimously approved a resolution recommending that the Board of Supervisors approve the project. Although the Planning Commission's approval was not based on any modifications to the project or the conditions of approval, the Planning Commission nevertheless included in its discussion a recommendation that the Board of Supervisor consider the following potential project changes: installing a solid noise barrier between the apartments and hotel, add safety upgrades to the pedestrian crossing, explore EVA opportunities with land owner FAHA to the west, and delete the hotel rooftop guest space. A brief summary of the Commission's discussion points and responses from staff are included below:

Planning Commission Discussion

1. Hotel Rooftop Elements. Commissioners expressed concern about neighborhood compatibility of the hotel with surrounding residential uses. The parapet roof and overall scale of the hotel was considered too tall. In addition to concerns about overall height, commissioners also expressed concern about noise from guests on the parapet roof. The architect offered a solid barrier on the rooftop to further attenuate any sound created by guests. Staff also pointed out that standard noise conditions are applied to the project and any nuisance noise impacts would violate the conditions of approval.
2. Solid Barrier between Hotel and Housing. To further address concerns about noise from the hotel use, commissioners recommended the Board consider requiring that the proposed wrought iron fence between the hotel and apartments be changed to a solid wall high enough to attenuate noise from the ground floor.
3. Emergency Vehicle Access. Commissioners expressed concern regarding egress points for emergency evacuation of the residential apartments. The project architect identified an emergency vehicle access gate through the hotel parking lot, providing emergency egress through the hotel parking lot. Commissioners recommended that the applicant explore the feasibility of additional emergency access through the adjacent FAHA residential site to the west. The applicant noted that parking spaces would be lost, and that additional access would be contingent on permission from the owner of the adjacent residential development.
4. Pedestrian Safety Improvement. In the interest of increasing overall pedestrian safety at the crossing of Verano Avenue from the hotel to Maxwell Farms Regional Park, Commissioners recommended the Board of Supervisor's consider requiring the applicant to provide enhancements to the crosswalk such as crosswalk flashers or other safety upgrades.

Public Comments

All letters received in response to public notices for this project, including the Board of Supervisors and

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Planning Commission hearings, and Notice of Intent for the Mitigated Negative Declaration are included in Attachment 8. A majority of the comments provided in writing and at prior hearings have been supportive of the project. These comments speak to support for the provision of affordable housing. Some commenters shared concerns about traffic and pedestrian safety, wildfire safety and drought.

FISCAL SUMMARY

Narrative Explanation of Fiscal Impacts:

N/A

Narrative Explanation of Staffing Impacts (If Required):

N/A

Attachments:

Attachment 1: Draft Board of Supervisors Resolution

Attachment 2: Conditions of Approval

Attachment 3: Draft Ordinance

Attachment 4: Planning Commission Staff Report

Attachment 5: Planning Commission Resolution

Attachment 6: Architectural Plans

Attachment 7: Mitigated Negative Declaration

Attachment 8: Public Comments

Related Items “On File” with the Clerk of the Board:

N/A