Legislation Text

File #: 2026-0544, **Version:** 1

To: Sonoma County Board of Supervisors
Department or Agency Name(s): Permit Sonoma
Staff Name and Phone Number: Scott Orr (707)565-1754, Ken Compton (707) 565-2829
Vote Requirement: Majority
Supervisorial District(s): Second

Title:
1:45 P.M. Use Permit to modify an issued Use Permit (UPE18-0068) to designate the existing garage facility utilized for the Two Rock Volunteer Fire Company (Two Rock VFC, aka "Two Rock Fire Department") as a public safety facility, as defined by Sonoma County Zoning Code, and to allow associated accessory site activities and site facility improvements on property located at 7599 Valley Ford Road, Petaluma. Permit Sonoma File No. UPE23-0046; APN 022-140-017.

Recommended Action:
Hold a public hearing and adopt a Resolution to approve the requested Use Permit modification for the Two Rock Fire Department to designate the existing equipment garage as a public safety facility and allow for associated accessory site activities and facility improvements, and subject to Conditions of Approval. (Second District)

Executive Summary:
This report presents a Use Permit request, File No. UPE23-0046, to modify an issued Use Permit (File No. UPE18-0068) which authorized the construction and use of a 5,400 square foot utility garage for the Two Rock Fire Department for the storage of fire apparatus, as well as associated site improvements including a paved concrete apron for vehicle access along Valley Ford Road, signage for fire vehicles along the Valley Ford Road right-of-way, an 11-stall parking area and associated drainage improvements, a 5000-gallon water storage tank, and landscaping. Accessory infrastructure added after the approval of the initial Use Permit, UPE18-0068, includes a propane tank on permanent concrete footings and an electric generator for backup power, both located proximate to the parking area and water storage tank.

In April 2023, the Two Rock Fire Department was annexed into the Gold Ridge Fire Protection District (Gold Ridge FPD) during a broader reorganization of Volunteer Fire Companies in the County. Following the reorganization, the Department continues to serve the 22.24 square mile Two Rock service area, which is now located within the broader jurisdiction of Gold Ridge FPD. The operating 501(C)(3) company has also reorganized the ownership structure and is now the Two Rock Firefighters Foundation.

The Two Rock Fire Department has an existing community meeting hall ("Social Hall") across the road (7618 Valley Ford Road; APN 022-110-001) that has kitchen and restroom facilities. The Social Hall has served and will continue to serve as a meeting space for various community engagement activities, such as community potlucks 1-2 times per year, and volunteer training, including sit-down educational presentations and seminars that may also include a meal, typically lunch. No changes are proposed to the current operation of the Social

Hall; sit-down training and any activities involving food service will continue to be held there.

The Proposed Project would designate the 5,400 square foot garage as a public safety facility under the Sonoma County Zoning Code Section 26-30-090, which includes fire stations and related accessory uses. The site will support emergency activations and associated accessory uses allowed with public safety facilities, including hands-on practical training activities, vehicle and equipment maintenance, and coordination with other County and State jurisdictions related to emergency response and preparedness. Additionally, the applicant proposes up to six (6) small community gatherings per year with a maximum attendance of 20 individuals. No staff will be permanently assigned to the facility.

Improvements proposed for the site and existing garage facility consist of approximately 100 feet of solid wood fencing along the rear boundary of the gravel parking area, new signage, communication equipment, and an ADA compliant restroom to be located within the existing garage. A 2,000-gallon septic holding tank will be placed underground to support the restroom facility. No staff are proposed to be permanently assigned to the facility. The existing onsite single-family residence is occupied by the Fire Chief.

The Board of Supervisors approved a request from the First District to assume Original Jurisdiction over the project on March 3, 2026.

Discussion:

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Paul Martin on behalf of the Two Rock Fire Department, operating under the umbrella of the Gold Ridge FPD, proposes to designate the Department's existing vehicle and equipment storage garage as a public safety facility on a 0.84-acre, developed parcel located at 7599 Valley Ford Road in the Two Rock area west of Petaluma. The designation would allow for accessory activities aligned with the use of a public safety facility and associated site improvements necessary to the operation. Development on the parcel currently consists of a single-family home (occupied by the Fire Chief), water storage tanks, and a 5,400 square foot metal garage and associated parking area for the Two Rock Fire Department.

The Project includes site improvements to the exterior property, facility upgrades, and accessory activities to align the use of the garage with a public safety facility. External improvements include the installation of approximately 100 feet of solid wood fencing along the rear property boundary (adjacent to existing parking area) that would range in height between 6 to 8 feet above grade. Facility updates include the creation of a new ADA-compliant restroom within the garage, placement of an underground, 2,000-gallon septic holding tank to support the new restroom, installation of a ventilation system for vehicle exhaust and a back-up generator to be used for limited periods (power outage, during maintenance, etc.), the addition of exterior GFCI electrical outlets, and new communication equipment including a satellite TV antenna and base station radio antenna for emergency ham radio. Exterior signage will be replaced in kind with updated signage that reflects the annexation of the Two Rock Fire Department's territory into the Gold Ridge FPD.

Although practical training for volunteers was always contemplated as part of the original use permit, the typical frequency and duration of such training are clarified in this modification. Training activities on fire apparatus vehicles and equipment would be held up to 30 times per year, typically attended by approximately 12 volunteers for up to 2 hours per training. Volunteers are required to be familiar with the location and function of every tool on the engine or truck, which requires regular training and practice with pump

operations and forcible entry tools. Volunteers also conduct regular vehicle and equipment maintenance.

With the addition of the onsite restroom, the Two Rock Fire Department proposes to offer up to 200 stipend shifts annually, where some personnel are stationed at the facility for rotating shifts during Red Flag Warnings (typically 4-hour shifts). Stipend shifts allow volunteers to be paid for the shift, and such shifts significantly reduce response times for the initial response compared to relying entirely on volunteers coming from home after an emergency is activated (although the majority of volunteers will still come in response to an emergency). The garage will also be used as a meeting point to facilitate coordination with other County and State jurisdictions related to emergency response and preparedness, such as CalFire and the Sheriff's office. When staff are stationed at the garage (i.e., stipend shifts or during an emergency), they have access to the kitchen facilities at the Social Hall across the road. During non-emergency periods, the garage will provide support for local patrol agencies, such as the California Highway Patrol and the Sheriff; currently, these agencies use the Social Hall across the road as a rest stop, when needed during rural patrol shifts.

New accessory activities proposed at the garage include up to 6 annual community engagement events to allow the public to see the trucks and equipment and meet and greet the firefighters; each event will last up to four hours and be attended by a maximum of 20 people. Educational school field trips will also be held at the garage, approximately two per year, for up to 20 children with a maximum duration of two hours each. Currently, the volunteers take the trucks to schools to provide education. None of these activities would involve food service.

Public safety facility is defined in County Code Chapter 26, Article 30, Section 26-30-090(A) as, *Facilities operated by public agencies that provide public safety services*. Specific categories of land uses identified under the definition include fire stations and areas for equipment maintenance. In this specific case, the designation of the existing garage and associated infrastructure as a public safety facility is appropriate as the site is operated by the Two Rock Fire Department under the umbrella of the Gold Ridge Fire Protection District as a garage to store and maintain fire apparatus including vehicles and fire response equipment. This Use Permit would formalize the classification of the facility under County Code, which clarifies the allowed, incidental uses of the facility and provides for future opportunities for state and federal funding for the Fire Department. Internal tenant improvements to the garage to add an ADA compliant restroom would serve members of the fire department while performing activities at the site. The proposal does not include additional accommodation requests that would further intensify the proposed use of the site, such as the addition of a formal kitchen or overnight sleeping areas.

PROJECT SITE AND CONTEXT

Procedural Background

The site has historically been utilized for residential and commercial uses. Prior to the current use, the site was home to a metal workshop structure used as a commercial garage under various owners between 1926 and the late-1930s. After the cessation of the use of the site as a garage, the workshop was converted to a small lumber mill for the processing of redwood until the mid-1970s, after which commercial use of the site ceased.

On October 13, 2015, the property was deeded to the Two Rock Fire Department and Two Rock Valley Presbyterian Church by the former property owner, Alvin Hansen. The Presbyterian Church subsequently relinquished their interest and deeded the entire property to the Fire Department on September 7, 2017. The existing onsite residence is currently in use by the fire chief for of the Two Rock Volunteer Fire Department.

On September 21, 2018, the Two Rock Fire Department applied for a Use Permit (File No. UPE18-0068) for an essential services garage to support the department by housing fire apparatus and associated equipment. The Use Permit was approved in March 2019 and development permits were subsequently applied for. In April 2020, all pre-operational conditions were verified as met.

On April 5, 2023, at the request of the Gold Ridge Fire Protection District ("Gold Ridge"), the Sonoma County Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO) approved the reorganization of the Gold Ridge District to include the annexation of several areas in southern Sonoma County served by Volunteer Fire Companies including Lakeville, San Antonio, Wilmar, Two Rock, Bloomfield, Valley Ford, Bodega, Camp Meeker, and Fort Ross.

Surrounding Land Use and Zoning

The project parcel is located in southern unincorporated Sonoma County in the community of Two Rock, approximately 6 miles west of the City of Petaluma and 4 miles southeast of the community of Bloomfield. The area is largely rural with gently sloping hills, scattered residential development and agricultural uses.

Surrounding parcels to the subject site are similarly zoned Land Extensive Agriculture, with a low residential density of 100 acres per dwelling unit (LEA-100). Surrounding parcels are relatively larger than the project parcel and range in size between 20 to 200 acres.

The Two Rock Social Hall, which has historically served as a meeting hall for the Two Rock Fire Department, is located approximately 200 feet north of the Project Parcel (opposite along roadway) at 7618 Valley Ford Road (APN 022-110-001).

Site Characteristics

The subject parcel is approximately 0.84 acre in size. Existing residential development on the parcel includes a single-family residence with an associated detached garage and storage shed. Fencing is located around the dwelling, including solid fencing approximately 5 feet in height along the rear property line.

As approved under UPE18-0068, the subject parcel is developed with a 5,400 square foot metal garage currently utilized by the Two Rock Fire Department (see Attachment 5 Site Plan). There are two 5,000-gallon water tanks, one serving as storage for the existing residence and one serving the Two Rock Fire Department garage. The water tank adjacent to the garage has a capacity to store 5,000 gallons of water and is currently equipped for rainwater catchment to store runoff from the garage roof, which contributes approximately 0.1-acre feet/year to onsite water storage. The garage is equipped with a heater, exhaust vent, and an associated propane tank located outside on a concrete pad.

An approximately 6,420 square foot gravel parking area is located on the western side of the subject parcel adjacent to the metal garage The garage and parking area have served as a staging location for personnel and equipment, as well as other agencies including CalFire, Sonoma County Department of Emergency Management, and the Sheriff's Office.

The subject parcel is located within a Class 4 low or variable yield area and is not within a medium or high priority groundwater basin. Water for the site is served by an offsite well located on an adjacent parcel (APN 022-110-020). A shared maintenance and access easement was recorded in January 2014 granting use of the

well for the subject parcel, which was then under common ownership (Recorded Document 2014007424). The water pipeline serving the project parcel extends under APNs 022-110-019 and 022-110-018, and Valley Ford Road before connecting to the subject parcel. No change to the existing water source is proposed under this Use Permit.

STAFF ANALYSIS

Fire services in southern Sonoma County are inherently limited through a combination of geography and dispersed communities. To the west of the community of Two Rock, the nearest fire stations are Ranch Adobe Station 3 and Wilmar Volunteer Fire Station, located approximately 5 and 6 miles away, respectively. To the north and west, the nearest fire station are the Bloomfield Volunteer Fire Department and Marin County Fire Department Tomales Station, located 5 and 6.5 miles away, respectively. A substantial number of stations have historically been staffed by volunteers, including the Two Rock Station.

As discussed above, the Sonoma County LAFCO unanimously approved the annexation of areas serviced by volunteer fire departments, including Two Rock Volunteer Fire Department, under North Bay Fire, Inc. into the Gold Ridge FPD in April 2023. The Gold Ridge District now encompasses a service area spanning between Bodega to the west, Occidental and Graton to the north, and extending south along the Marin/Sonoma County Line to San Pablo Bay. The Gold Ridge reorganization was initiated with joint intent by the Gold Ridge District and the Board of Supervisors, as affirmed by Resolution No. 22-0031 on January 25, 2022 (see Attachment 7 Board of Supervisors and Board of Directors of the Gold Ridge Fire Protection District Concurrent Resolution No. 22-0031 and 21/22-02 and LAFCO Adopted Meeting Minutes for April 5, 2023). This reorganization was primarily intended to provide for sustainability while additionally creating the potential for improvements to service levels. The Proposed Project supports both the primary and secondary goals through the formal classification of the use of the site under Sonoma County Zoning Code as a public safety facility (fire station).

General Plan Consistency

The General Plan Land Use designation on the parcel is Land Extensive Agriculture (LEA) with a 100-acre density. The Project is substantially consistent with the goals, objectives, and policies of the Sonoma County General Plan, including the Agricultural Resources and Public Safety Elements.

The Land Extensive Agriculture (LEA) Land Use designation is primarily intended to support agricultural operation and associated support services (GP Policy AR-4a). To support agricultural land uses, lands designated as LEA in the Sonoma County General Plan typically are sited and sized in a manner to support said uses both existing and future (GP Policy AR-2a). While the proposed project is not an agricultural use, the Project is not in direct conflict with the Agricultural Resources General Plan Element because: 1) The project parcel, while generally surrounded by larger parcels suitable for ranching or other agricultural uses, is less than 1 acre in size (0.84 acre), too small to support agricultural operations. The existing size and configuration of the subject parcel has been consistently depicted in recorded maps and deeds held by the Assessor's office dating back to 1920; 2) The property has not historically supported agricultural uses. Former uses on the site included a commercial garage and lumber mill within a former workshop which has since been replaced by the existing service garage for the Two Rock Fire Department. The Proposed Project would result in the continued use of the site as a service garage while improving infrastructure to support a public safety facility (fire station), which is consistent with historic, non-agricultural uses on the site; and 3) The modification to the existing use would not inherently result in the further removal of land from potential agricultural production.

The Proposed Project would also not result in new subdivisions or directly increase residential density such that the surrounding area would no longer be agricultural in use or character.

The proposed designation and improvements are essential to provide effective fire suppression and emergency services for existing and future Sonoma County residents and businesses in southern Sonoma County (GP Goals PF-2; Policy PF-2a). Regional population data provided by the Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG) and the California Department of Finance show relatively consistent growth in the County between 1990 and 2020 (approx. 27% population growth) (Sonoma County Housing Element Adopted 8-22-2023, Appx. B, Table 4.1 <https://permitsonoma.org/Microsites/Permit%20Sonoma/Documents/Long%20Range%20Plans/Housing%20Element/Sonoma-County-Certified-Housing-Element-Appendix-A-C-Adopted-2023-08-22.pdf>). ABAG's Plan Bay Area 2050 provided projected population growth between 2015 and 2050 for the study area of South Sonoma County, including the cities of Cotati, Rohnert Park, Sonoma, Petaluma, and the surrounding areas and projected a 30% population growth, 19% higher than Central Sonoma County and 21% higher than North Sonoma County (ABAG Plan Bay Area 2050 Growth Pattern <https://planbayarea.org/sites/default/files/FinalBlueprintRelease_December2020_GrowthPattern_Jan2021Update.pdf>). The need for improved facilities, agency coordination, and training and equipment management is essential to maintain the emergency response network in the County. Additionally, the proposed community engagement events and school educational activities at the site support regional efforts toward public education and awareness, especially in isolated regions of the County (GP Goals PF-2; Objective PF-2.5).

The proposed modification would align the use of the existing garage as a public safety facility (fire station) which supports countywide emergency response in an area that otherwise lacks such facilities, which directly supports the objectives and policies of the Public Facilities and Services Element. Currently, because there is no onsite restroom, fire personnel are limited to two (2) hours or less of onsite activity. Proposed improvements would allow for better use of the facility and allow for longer timeframes for coordination meetings between volunteers and fire officials, equipment maintenance and staging, as well as training exercises for equipment and procedures.

Area Plan Consistency

The site is within the boundary of the Petaluma Dairy Belt Area Plan. The Project is consistent with the goals, objectives, and policies of the Petaluma Dairy Belt Area Plan. The primary goals of the Petaluma Dairy Belt Area Plan are to preserve and enhance agricultural resources and industry, preserve scenic beauty, accommodate a variety of rural lifestyles, and encourage the development of a transportation network to support proposed development and travel needs in the area. The Petaluma Dairy Belt Area Plan Section I "The General Goal on Future Planning and Development," primarily focuses on policies related to balancing future growth, with Policy 7 outlining that growth should be proportional to the ability of public agencies to provide public services for said growth. Additionally, Section IV "The General Goal on Natural Resources," Subsection D "Fire Hazards," establishes the goal to protect the public and property from dangers caused by fire through Policy 2 which supports coordination and cooperation among all firefighting agencies (including districts and volunteers). The Project directly aligns with these stated goals and policies through the formalization of the public safety facility and improvements to the facility to enhance year-round and emergency training and coordination efforts.

Zoning Consistency

Zoning for the parcel is given as Land Extensive Agriculture (LEA), with a residential density of one dwelling per

100 acres. Public safety facilities are allowed in the LEA Zoning District with a Use Permit.

The Project is consistent with the development criteria for the LEA Zoning District with respect to setbacks, and residential density. The existing garage is 35 feet from the front property line boundary and 70 feet from the centerline of Valley Ford Road, which meets and exceeds both setbacks in the LEA District. The property is developed with an existing residence, which is not included in the scope of the project and density on the site would not be altered by the Proposed Project. In the LEA District, lot coverage is limited to 20% of the total parcel, which in the case of the subject parcel is 7,318 square feet. Development on the parcel, inclusive of the existing garage, currently exceeds allowed lot coverage (total of approximately 9,000 square feet). Under the Proposed Project, lot coverage would not be further increased on the parcel.

The project parcel is located along Valley Ford Road, a designated Scenic Corridor, which restricts new development within the corridor to 30% of the depth of the lot, up to a maximum of 200 feet (Sec. 26-64-030 (a)). In the case of the subject parcel, this restriction extends to a depth of approximately 33 feet into the parcel (30% of depth). The existing garage exceeds this with a setback of approximately 40 feet from the depth of the parcel (approximately 70 feet from the centerline of Valley Ford Road).

The existing garage is served by an existing gravel parking area which accommodates at least 10 standard parking stalls and includes one ADA compliant stall on a concrete pad. Parking requirements for discretionary uses are governed in Chapter 26, Article 86; however, there are no prescribed parking ratios for public safety facilities, fire stations, or similar uses. Existing parking for the Fire Station was attributed to the average number of onsite fire personnel during non-emergency operations, based on the typical number of volunteers expected to attend practical training sessions. Other non-emergency operations, such as building, vehicle, and equipment maintenance, occur more frequently than training activities but are conducted by fewer personnel. The proposed modification would not increase the need for expanded onsite parking. Existing landscaping has been placed along the rear portion of the parking area in accordance with design review requirements.

General Use Permit Findings

The establishment, maintenance or operation of the use for which application is made will not, under the circumstances of this particular case, be detrimental to the health, safety, peace, comfort and general welfare of persons residing or working in the neighborhood of such use, nor be detrimental or injurious to property and improvements in the neighborhood or the general welfare of the area.

The facts supporting the general use permit findings include the following:

1) The Proposed Project would involve the classification of the use of the garage by the Two Rock Fire Department as a public safety facility to align activities associated with the operation of the facility and, additionally, would result in negligible changes to the exterior site;
2) Development on the site is existing and proposed accessory activities would occur primarily within the existing garage;
3) The proposed improvements to the site and existing garage will be done in accordance with applicable requirements related to building code, septic standards, and grading standards. In each case, applicable permits will be pursued and issued prior to initiating proposed activities;
4) The Use Permit modification, as proposed, would not result in new adverse impacts to biologic resources, aesthetics, noise, or traffic. The overall appearance of the structure and site will remain unchanged. Personnel conducting regular operations at the site will be able to be onsite for longer

timeframes (i.e., greater than 2 hours), but will continue to be present only periodically for training, maintenance, and during emergencies (i.e., no permanently assigned or overnight staff). Community engagement and school educational activities will be infrequent (i.e., up to 6 community events and up to 2 school field trips), of short duration (2 to 4 hours), limited to 20 attendees, and held during daytime hours. These activities would not substantially alter traffic patterns in the surrounding area. A noise study was prepared for the project by Illingworth & Rodkin on November 21, 2023, which identified that noise associated with non-emergency operations would be below County noise standards listed in Table NR-2 for offsite sensitive receptors;

5) The establishment of the proposed Use Permit modification would serve countywide efforts to consolidate and improve organized emergency response to ensure adequate and timely action in the event of a fire or other emergency event.

ENVIRONMENTAL DETERMINATION

The proposed project has been analyzed under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and the CEQA Guidelines, California Code of Regulations. Staff have determined that the project is categorically exempt from CEQA pursuant to Section 15301, Existing Facilities, as a project involving the alignment of the existing use of the garage with a formal classification as a public safety facility fire station and internal tenant improvements to said existing garage to support the use, as well as Section 15303, New Construction or Conversion of Small Structures, as a project involving minor site improvements accessory to the existing garage, including a new sewage holding tank and fencing. During pre-emergency activation Red Flag Warnings, some personnel will be stationed onsite in rotating shifts (typically 4 hours); however, the majority of volunteers will continue to respond when an emergency is activated, as they are currently. During emergencies, public safety personnel may be onsite 24-hours, as they currently are. Non-emergency activities, such as periodic volunteer trainings and regular building, vehicle, and equipment maintenance, will continue onsite substantially as they have been. No permanent (i.e., overnight) staffing of the facility will occur. A limited number of small community engagement events (up to four, 20-person events annually) are consistent with typical fire department operations and are not considered a significant increase over current operations. School educational activities are currently conducted off-site when volunteers take the trucks to a school. The proposed change to allow school field trips (up to two, 20-child events annually) to come to the garage instead is consistent with typical fire department operations and not considered a significant increase over current operations. No exceptions under Section 15300.2 apply.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends the Board of Supervisors adopt the proposed resolution approving the Use Permit modification requested by the Two Rock Fire Department, operating under the umbrella of the Gold Ridge Fire Department, subject to the attached Conditions of Approval.

Strategic Plan:
N/A
Racial Equity:

Was this item identified as an opportunity to apply the Racial Equity Toolkit?
No

Prior Board Actions:
March 3, 2026: The Board exercised original jurisdiction over Permit Sonoma File No. UPE23-0046 Two Rock

Fire Department <https://sonoma-county.legistar.com/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=7927249&GUID=1E22EFB9-0266-43A1-9ACD-BB2C6A6AAE3E>

FISCAL SUMMARY

Narrative Explanation of Fiscal Impacts:
This is an At-Cost Project application for which the applicant pays for the costs of processing the application. There will be no new fiscal impacts as a result of this action.

Narrative Explanation of Staffing Impacts (If Required):
N/A

Attachments:
Attachment 1: Board of Supervisors Resolution
Attachment 2: Draft Conditions of Approval
Attachment 3: Assessor, Vicinity, Aerial, Land Use, and Zoning Maps
Attachment 4: Proposal Statement
Attachment 5: Site Plan
Attachment 6: Board Summary Requesting Original Jurisdiction <https://sonoma-county.legistar.com/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=7927249&GUID=1E22EFB9-0266-43A1-9ACD-BB2C6A6AAE3E>
Attachment 7: Board of Supervisors and Board of Directors of the Gold Ridge Fire Protection District Concurrent Resolution No. 22-0031 and 21/22-02 and LAFCO Adopted Meeting Minutes for April 5, 2023
Attachment 8: Staff Presentation

Related Items "On File" with the Clerk of the Board:
N/A