

CITY OF SANTA ROSA
PLANNING AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT
STAFF REPORT FOR PLANNING COMMISSION

July 13, 2023

PROJECT TITLE

Fir Ridge Meadows

APPLICANT

Amy Christopherson-Bolten,
Christopherson Builders

ADDRESS/LOCATION

3700 Fir Ridge Drive

PROPERTY OWNER

Fir Ridge Meadows Partners, LLC

ASSESSOR'S PARCEL NUMBER

173-620-030

FILE NUMBERS

PRJ23-001 (HDP23-001 & MAJ23-001)

APPLICATION DATES

January 11, 2023

APPLICATION COMPLETION DATES

May 15, 2023

REQUESTED ENTITLEMENTS

Tentative Parcel Map and Hillside
Development Permit

FURTHER ACTIONS REQUIRED

Final Map, Building Permit

PROJECT SITE ZONING

PD72-001-RC

GENERAL PLAN DESIGNATION

Low Density Residential

PROJECT PLANNER

Kristinae Toomians

RECOMMENDATION

Approval

For Planning Commission Meeting of: July 13, 2023

CITY OF SANTA ROSA

PLANNING COMMISSION

TO: CHAIR AND MEMBERS OF THE PLANNING COMMISSION
FROM: KRISTINAE TOOMIANS, SENIOR PLANNER
PLANNING & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
SUBJECT: FIR RIDGE MEADOWS
AGENDA ACTION: TWO RESOLUTIONS

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended by the Planning and Economic Development Department that the Planning Commission, by two resolutions, approve a Hillside Development Permit and Tentative Parcel Map to allow for the creation of 13 parcels for the construction of 13 single-family detached homes on a 3.82-acres portion of a 6.03-acre parcel (Assessor's Parcel Number [APN] 173-620-030).

BACKGROUND

1. Project Description

The project consists of subdividing a vacant 6.03-acre site into 13 parcels for the development of 13 single-family detached dwellings. The project also includes a Hillside Development Permit because the project site is currently undeveloped with slopes ranging from less than 10 percent along Fir Ridge Drive to more than 25 percent at the eastern end of the project site, where the project site abuts existing residential development. The project would remove 47 trees, 38 of which are dead or fire damaged.

2. Surrounding Land Uses

North: Park and Single-Family Residential.

South: Single-Family Residential.

East: Single-Family Residential and Open Space.

West: Single-Family Residential.

The surrounding area was affected by the 2017 Tubbs Fire and, as a result, the vast majority of surrounding development consists of rebuilt single-family homes.

3. Existing Land Use – Project Site

The project site is currently undeveloped and topographically varied with slopes ranging from less than 10 percent along Fir Ridge Drive to more than 25 percent at the eastern end of the project site, where the project site abuts existing residential development. Vegetation on the project site is typical of the region and consists mostly of nonnative grassland scattered with oak and fir trees and some outcropping of basalt. Per the *Tree Inventory Report*, 122 trees are present on the parcel, of which 77 were heavily damaged by the 2017 Tubbs Fire. Vehicle access to the project site is currently provided by Fir Ridge Drive, which bounds the project site to the west. Fir Ridge Drive extends north and south of the project site from Thomas Lake Harris Drive to Fountaingrove Parkway. Street parking is allowed on the northbound side of Fir Ridge Drive, including along the project frontage, but is prohibited in the southbound direction. Sidewalks are present on both sides of the road.

4. Project History

- When the Fir Ridge North at Fountaingrove Subdivision was approved in 1987, a condition of its development was the dedication of an approximately 7-acre site for development of either an elementary school, or low and/or moderate-income housing, pursuant to the Fountaingrove Ranch Planned Community District Policy Statement adopted by the Council in 1981 (Fountaingrove PC Policy). A 6.03-acre site on Fir Ridge Drive was ultimately set aside for the purpose and identified as Parcel “F” on the subdivision Final Map recorded in June 1988 (See Figure No. 1 on the next page). The project site is adjacent to Parcel “E” on the Final Map, which is a neighborhood park site now developed as Fir Ridge Park. Following the dedication of the land to the Santa Rosa City School District, the City and the District entered into an MOU and from 1988 to 2019 there were several amendments to the MOU (see a more detailed discussion in the Zoning section of this report).
- On December 9, 2004, the Planning Commission granted a Conditional Use Permit, Hillside Development Permit, and Tentative Map to allow the Santa Rosa City School District (District) to construct 36 low and/or moderate-income airspace condominium units on the site for Santa Rosa School District employees.

- On October 14, 2019, Council adopted alternatives to the Fir Ridge MOU and extended the term for an additional three years to allow the School District to explore alternatives to construction of affordable housing on the site.
- On August 26, 2022, the City of Santa Rosa and the Santa Rosa City School District recorded an MOU releasing the requirement of workforce housing.
- On September 30, 2022, a Quitclaim Deed was recorded, transferring the property from the School District to the City.
- In October of 2022, Christopherson Builders purchased the parcel.
- On October 26, 2022, the City held a virtual neighborhood meeting for the current project.
- On January 11, 2023, applications were filed for the current project.
- On February 11, 2023, a Notice of Application was mailed to surrounding property owners and occupants (see Summary of Public Comments).

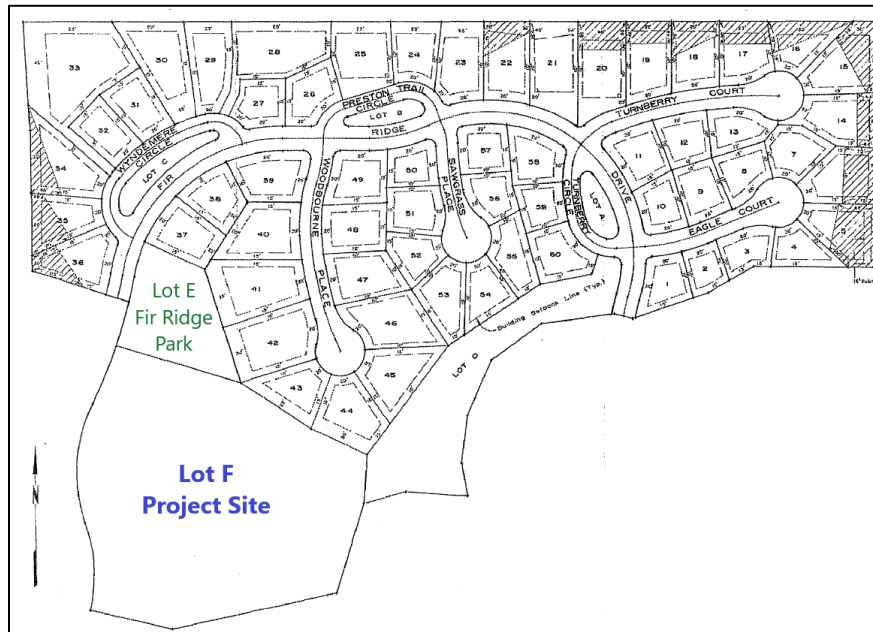


Figure 1: Fir Ridge North at Fountaingrove Final Map

ANALYSIS

1. General Plan

The [General Plan](#) addresses issues related to the physical development and growth of Santa Rosa and guides the City's planning and zoning functions. The project site is designated as Low Density Residential (2 to 8 units per acre) in the General Plan. The Low Density Residential land use category designates areas suitable for residential development at the stated density. The classification is

mainly intended for detached single-family dwellings but attached single-family and multifamily units may be permitted. Single-family homes and related accessory structures (including second units) are also permitted.

The proposed project would subdivide the 6.03-acre project site into 13 lots for the construction of 13 market-rate single-family homes, as well as associated site access improvements, utility infrastructure connections, and landscaping improvements. Implementation of the proposed project would result in the development of the 6.03-acre site with residential uses at a proposed density of 2.15 units per acre, which is consistent with the allowable density established in the Low Density Residential designation. Therefore, the proposed project would be consistent with the site's General Plan designation.

The most relevant applicable General Plan goals and policies with Staff's analysis are included in the table below.

Urban Design	
UD-A-4: In new developments, minimize overall grading by limiting site grading to the minimum necessary for driveways, parking areas, and understructure areas.	Consistent. A Hillside Development Permit is requested as several parcels have slopes exceeding 10% and portions of the property to the north exceed 25% slope. The proposed tentative map and site plan demonstrate that the proposed dwellings will be sited outside of the areas that exceed 25% slope. The Project Site is not visible from off-site areas or from major roadways. The Project Site is only visible from Fir Ridge Dr. The project is set in a bowl-shaped area. It will be below the surrounding residential areas and not have an impact on views. Eleven dwellings will be clustered near the new cul-de-sac street. Two dwellings will front and have direct access from Fir Ridge Dr. The project will be in character with surrounding neighborhoods. The dwellings are designed to be sympathetic to the slope of each lot by orienting the roof ridges perpendicular to the direction of the slope to
UD-F-2: Protect natural topographic features such as hillsides, ridgelines and mature trees and stands of trees. Minimize grading of natural contours in new development.	
UD-H-1: Minimize the visual prominence of hillside development by taking advantage of existing site features for screening, such as tree clusters, depressions in topography, setback, hillside plateau areas, and other natural features.	
UD-H-3: Prohibit grading of slopes that are greater than 25%. During review of development plans, ensure that necessary grading respects significant natural features and visually blends with adjacent properties	
UD-H-6: Minimize vegetation removal	

in hillside areas, and preserve large trees that partially screen development or help blend new development into views.	minimize visual obtrusiveness.
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2. Zoning

The [Zoning Code](#) implements the goals and policies of the General Plan by classifying and regulating the use of land and structure development within the City. The project site is designated as PD 72-001-RC (Planned Development – Fountaingrove – Resilient City Combining District) on the City of Santa Rosa Zoning Map. The Planned Development District No. 72-001 (also known as Fir Ridge North) was approved by the City in 1989 and included the plans to develop the area with a residential neighborhood. The -RC combining district is intended to facilitate the reconstruction and resilience of areas impacted by the Tubbs and Nuns fires of October 2017 and the Glass Fire of 2020. The project site and surrounding area were affected by the 2017 Tubbs Fire, and a vast majority of the surrounding homes have been rebuilt since then.

As previously described, the proposed project would subdivide the 6.03-acre project site into 13 lots for the construction of 13 market-rate single-family homes, as well as associated site access improvements, utility infrastructure connections, and landscaping improvements. These actions are consistent with the permitted uses as described in the Planned Development District No. 72-001 development agreement and development standards:

PLANNED DEVELOPMENT FIR RIDGE RANCH (PD72-001) DEVELOPMENT STANDARDS	
Zoning District Allowable Land Uses	Single Family Detached permitted with a Hillside Development Permit due to slopes exceeding 10%.
Setbacks	Complies with PD Policy Statement requiring a 20-ft front setback, 15-ft side yard setback for lots exceeding 10% slope, and 15-ft rear setback.
Lot Coverage	Complies with 40% lot coverage limit.
Building Height	Complies with 35-foot height limit.
Minimum Lot Size	Minimum lot size is 8,000 square feet in all other areas. The smallest lot is proposed at 9,057-square-feet.

Lot F – Project Site

When the Fir Ridge North at Fountaingrove Subdivision was recorded in 1988, a condition of its development was the dedication of an approximately 7-acre site for development of either an elementary school, or low and/or moderate-income housing, pursuant to the Fountaingrove Ranch Planned Community District Policy Statement adopted by the Planning Commission in 1989 (see attached PD73-001 Policy Statement). A 6.03-acre site on Fir Ridge Drive was ultimately set aside for the purpose and identified as Parcel “F” on the subdivision the Final Map recorded in June 1988. The Site is adjacent to Parcel “E” on the Final Map (See Figure below), a neighborhood park site now developed as Fir Ridge Park.

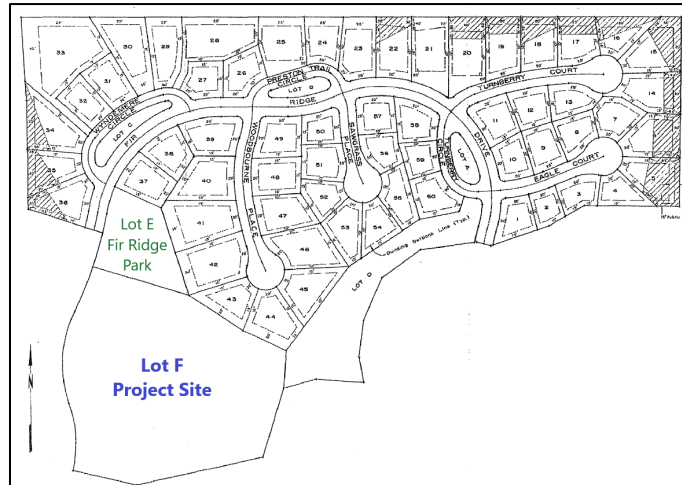


Figure 2: Lot F is the project site.

From 1988 to 2019, there were several amendments to the MOU between the City and the School District. On December 9, 2004, the Planning Commission granted a Conditional Use Permit, Hillside Development Permit, and Tentative Map to allow the Santa Rosa City School District (District) to construct 36 low and/or moderate-income airspace condominium units on the site for Santa Rosa School District employees. After a joint study session of the City Council and School District Board in October 2019, the First Amendment to the MOU was adopted to allow the School District the most flexibility in fulfilling the intent of the original Holding Agreement and to work collaboratively with District staff to revise the conditions and extend the term of the MOU for an additional three years through June 30, 2022, to allow the District sufficient time to fulfill the intent of the Agreement. The terms of the First Amendment are included below:

- 1) notify the City of its intent to develop Lot “F” with housing for District employees; or
- 2) sell Lot “F” and deposit all proceeds received from the sale, less any customary fees or costs required to close the transaction, into a separate account to be used for:
 - a) financing the construction or acquisition of housing for District employees, or
 - b) creating a down payment assistance program for District employees.

On August 26, 2022, the City of Santa Rosa and the Santa Rosa City School

District recorded an MOU releasing the requirement of workforce housing. The MOU stated that development of the reserved school site by the District or City for low and/or moderate-income housing would not yield an efficient result for the following reasons:

- (1) the School Site is not geographically near any significant commercial centers that would be needed by residents, such as post offices, banks, supermarkets, day care facilities or public schools;
- (2) the topography of the School Site creates additional construction costs which, in turn, compromises the affordability of development on the Site; and
- (3) the School Site is not geographically near to public transportation and therefore would not benefit from funding opportunities made available to affordable housing projects proximate to transit.

The MOU provided the School District with three years to either notify the City of its intent to develop the project site for District employees or sell the school site to a third party. The School District chose to sell the site to the applicant and is required to use the proceeds of the sale to either finance the construction of acquisition of housing for District employees or create a revolving fund loan program to provide down payment assistance loan program for District employees. If the District determines that it cannot, or will not, use the proceeds to finance the construction or acquisition of housing for District employees, or to create a loan assistance program, then the District shall provide 100% of the proceeds to the City within 12 months of the District's determination. If that occurs, the City is required to use the proceeds for the sole purpose of financing construction of low and/or moderate-income housing units and shall make reasonable efforts to provide a preference to qualified District employees for at least fifty percent (50%) of any residential units constructed.

Hillside Development Standards

A Hillside Development Permit is required for proposed subdivisions, and all other proposed development on sites with a slope of 10 percent or greater. The Hillside Development Permit provides a review process for the City to consider the appropriateness of proposed development on hillside parcels, to ensure that a proposed project minimizes its visual and environmental impacts.

The Planning Commission may approve or conditionally approve a Hillside Development Permit application only after first finding that:

- 1) Site planning minimizes the visual prominence of hillside development by taking advantage of existing site features for screening, including tree clusters, depressions in topography, setback hillside plateau areas, and other natural features;

Staff Response: The proposed road follows the existing contours of the site, and the proposed dwellings are sited on the flattest portion of each parcel, of which 11 are clustered near the new cul-de-sac and two front onto the existing Fir Ridge Drive. The applicant is making an effort to preserve as many healthy trees as possible, considering that many were damaged during the 2017 Tubbs Fire.

- 2) Site development minimizes alteration of topography, drainage patterns, and vegetation on land with slopes of 10 percent or more;

Staff Response: The proposed dwellings are sited on the flattest portion of each lot, which will require minimal grading.

- 3) Site development does not alter slopes of greater than 25 percent, except in compliance with Section 20-32.020.B (Applicability—Limitations on hillside development);

Staff Response: There are no structures or grading proposed on areas of the site that exceed 25% slope.

- 4) Project grading respects natural features and visually blends with adjacent properties;

Staff Response: The Project Site is not readily visible from off-site areas or from major roadways. The Project Site is primarily visible from Fir Ridge Drive. The project is set in a bowl-shaped area. It will be below the surrounding residential areas and not have an impact on views or be prominently visible along a ridge. The proposed dwellings will be in character with surrounding neighborhood.

- 5) Building pad location, design, and construction avoids large areas of flat pads, and building forms are instead “stepped” to conform to site topography;

Staff Response: The dwellings are designed to be sympathetic to the slope of each lot by building on the flattest area and orienting the roof ridges perpendicular to the direction of the slope to minimize visual obtrusiveness.

- 6) The proposed project complies with the City’s Design Guidelines;

Staff Response: The proposed Tentative Parcel Map and proposed dwellings adhere to the City’s Design Guidelines, and specifically Section 4.5 – Hillside Considerations.

Design Guidelines Goal or Policy

Project Consistency

Hillside Considerations

<p>II.A.1.: Preserve surrounding ridgetops as a back drop to the City. Keep the tops of structures in hillside development below the perceived skyline.</p>	<p>Consistent. The Project Site is not readily visible from off-site areas or from major roadways. The Project Site is primarily visible from Fir Ridge Drive. The project is set in a bowl-shaped area. It will be below the surrounding residential areas and not have an impact on views or be prominently visible along a ridge. The proposed dwellings will be in character with surrounding neighborhoods.</p>
<p>II.B.2.: Avoid grading to create benched or terraced hillside sites. Grading on sloping terrain for the purpose of accommodating houses designed for flat land conditions will not be a basis for an acceptable hillside site plan.</p>	<p>Consistent: The dwellings are designed to be sympathetic to the slope of each lot by building on the flattest area and orienting the roof ridges perpendicular to the direction of the slope to minimize visual obtrusiveness. Each building pad will require minimal grading, clustered near the proposed cul-de-sac which will be constructed on the flatter portion of the project site.</p>
<p>III.A.1: Design buildings to fit the topography.</p>	
<p>III.A.5.: Orient roof ridges perpendicular to the direction of the slope (or parallel to the ridgeline).</p>	
<p>II.C.3.: For lots with slopes in excess of 10 percent, provide a minimum side yard setback of 15 feet to allow for adequate drainage. When adjacent to streets that have gradients of more than 5 percent, provide a minimum side yard setback of 10 feet.</p>	<p>Consistent. The proposed dwellings will have a side yard setback of 15-feet, which is also consistent with the Planned Development PD72-001 Policy Statement.</p>
<p>II.D.5.: Design subdivisions with lotting patterns that locate houses where access from the street will result in minimum grading for driveways and garage pads.</p>	<p>Consistent. Each building pad will require minimal grading, clustered near the proposed cul-de-sac which will be constructed on the flatter portion of the project site.</p>

- 7) The proposed project complies with the requirements of this chapter and all other applicable provisions of this Zoning Code;

Staff Response: As outlined in the Zoning discussion, the proposed map and proposed dwellings are consistent with the permitted uses as described in the Planned Development District No. 72-001 development agreement and development standards. Each dwelling will have adequate parking with attached garages and driveways for guest parking.

- 8) The proposed project is consistent with the General Plan and any applicable specific plan; and

Staff Response: As stated previously, the proposed project would subdivide the 6.03-acre project site into 13 lots for the construction of 13 market-rate single-family homes, as well as associated site access improvements, utility infrastructure connections, and landscaping improvements. Implementation of the proposed project would result in the development of the 6.03-acre site with residential uses at a proposed density of 2.15 units per acre, which is consistent with the allowable density established in the Low Density Residential (2 to 8 units per acre). Therefore, the proposed project would be consistent with the site's General Plan designation.

- 9) The establishment, maintenance, or operation of the use will not, under the circumstances of the particular case, be detrimental to the public health, safety, or general welfare.

Staff Response: The proposed project is consistent with the existing development pattern in the area and is adequately served by City services, including water, sewer, Fire, and Police.

SB330

The project developer submitted a request to process the proposed project under [Senate Bill 330](#). To increase transparency and certainty in the development review process, Senate Bill 330 (SB-330), the Housing Crisis Act of 2019, allows a housing developer seeking vesting rights to submit a "preliminary application" for a housing development project. Upon submittal of the application a housing developer is allowed to "freeze" the applicable fees and development standards that apply to their project while they assemble the rest of the material necessary for a full application submittal.

3. Tentative Map

Per Zoning Code Section "[19-24.080](#) Findings for approval," the Planning Commission is required to make the following findings prior to approval of the tentative map:

- (A) That the proposed map is consistent with the general plan and any applicable specific plans as specified in Government Code Sections 65451 and 66474.5;

Staff Response: The proposed project would subdivide the 6.03-acre project site into 13 lots for the construction of 13 market-rate single-family homes, as well as associated site access improvements, utility infrastructure connections, and landscaping improvements. Implementation of the proposed project would result in the development of the 6.03-acre site with residential uses at a proposed density of 2.15 units per acre, which is consistent with the allowable density established in the Low Density Residential (2 to 8 units per acre). Therefore, the proposed project would be consistent with the site's General Plan designation.

- (B) That the proposed subdivision meets the housing needs of the City and that the public service needs of the subdivision's residents are within the available fiscal and environmental resources of the City;

Staff Response: The developer will be required to improve the project street frontage along Fir Ridge Drive, as well as the new cul-de-sac. The developer will construct any necessary infrastructure for the project (i.e., sewer, water, roads, etc). The City agreed to serve the project site with City water and sewer treatment.

- (C) That the design of the proposed subdivision has, to the extent feasible, provided for future passive or natural heating or cooling opportunities in the subdivision; and

Staff Response: The developer will be required to meet current State construction requirements for new residential projects, including solar panels.

- (D) That the proposed subdivision would not discharge waste into the City's sewer system that would result in violation of the requirements prescribed by the California Regional Water Quality Control Board. (Ord. 3396 § 1, 1998; Ord. 2622 § 1, 1987)

Staff Response: The Project is designed and conditioned to treat all stormwater onsite and to prevent any discharge of waste into the City's sewer system.

4. Summary of Public Comments

A Neighborhood Pre-Application Meeting was held on October 26, 2022. Concerns were expressed regarding tree removal, traffic, emergency evacuation, and the development of existing open space.

Per the Tree Inventory Report, the project would remove 47 trees, 38 of which

are dead or fire-damaged from the 2017 Tubbs Fire. If necessary, due to evidence of bird or bat nesting, pre-construction surveys would be performed prior to construction.

The proposed project would be expected to generate an average of 123 trips per day, including nine during the morning peak hour and 12 during the evening peak hour. The sight distances at the proposed new street location are adequate. Neither a stop-light nor a left-turn lane would be warranted on Fir Ridge Drive at the proposed new street.

The City Fire Department did not express concerns with the proposed project or its future ability or impact on emergency evacuations in the surrounding area.

5. Public Improvements

The project will include curb ramps and tactile domes on the northeast and northwest corners of the project street connection to Fir Ridge Drive and connect the proposed sidewalks to the existing sidewalks. The project site will be served with City water and sewer. For a comprehensive list of on- and off-site improvements, refer to the attached DAC Report.

6. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

Every discretionary action by the City requires environmental review pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). However, the CEQA Guidelines include a list of certain categories of projects that have been determined to not have a significant effect on the environment, also known as Categorical Exemptions. If a project falls within one of these classes, it is exempt from the provisions of CEQA, and no further environmental review is required unless one of the exceptions to the exemptions applies.

15332. IN-FILL DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS

This project is Categorically Exempt pursuant to Class 32. The Class 32 "Infill" Categorical Exemption (CEQA Guideline Section 15332), hereafter referred to as the "Class 32 Exemption," exempts infill development within urbanized areas if it meets certain criteria. The class consists of infill projects that are consistent with the General Plan and zoning requirements. This class is not intended for projects that would result in any significant traffic, noise, air quality, or water quality impacts (for a more in-depth analysis, see the attached *Fir Ridge Meadows Project Categorical Exemption*, prepared by LSA in May 2023).

15300.2. EXCEPTIONS

No exceptions to the exemptions apply and there is no reasonable possibility that the activity will have a significant effect on the environment due to unusual circumstances (CEQA Guidelines Section 15300.2). Section 15300.2 of the State

CEQA Guidelines provides exceptions to the Class 32 Exemption depending on the nature and location of the project. For a detailed analysis, see the attached *Fir Ridge Meadows Project Categorical Exemption*.

PUBLIC NOTIFICATION

The project was noticed as a public hearing per the requirements of Chapter 20-66 of the City Code. Notification of this public hearing was provided by posting an on-site sign, publishing notice in a newspaper of general circulation, mailed notice to surrounding property owners and occupants, electronic notice to parties that had expressed interest in projects taking place in this geographic area of Santa Rosa, and bulletin board postings at City Hall and on the City website. Pursuant to Government Code Section 65091, where necessary, the City has incorporated notice procedures to the blind, aged, and disabled communities. These procedures include audio amplifier/assistive listening device support at public meetings, closed captioning, and optical character recognition conversion of electronic notices.

ISSUES

There are no outstanding issues regarding the proposed project.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1 - Disclosure Form

Attachment 2 - Location Map

Attachment 3 – Fir Ridge Meadows Project Categorical Exemption, prepare by LSA on May 2023

Attachment 4 – Fir Ridge CEQA Compliance Letter, 12/05/2022

Attachment 5 – Tentative Parcel Map

Attachment 6 – Architectural Plans

Attachment 7 – Materials Board & Exterior Lighting Plan

Attachment 8 – Slope Analysis

Attachment 9 – Traffic Study

Attachment 10 - Biological Assessment

Attachment 11 – Arborist Report

Attachment 12 – Cultural Resource Evaluation

Attachment 13 – Phase I Environmental Site Assessment

Attachment 14 – Preliminary SWILD Report

Attachment 15 – PD73-001 Policy Statement

Attachment 16 – Fir Ridge North at Fountaingrove Final Map

Attachment 17 – Design Guidelines 4.5 Hillside Considerations

Attachment 18 – SB330 Application (with project narrative)

Attachment 19 – Fir Ridge MOU between the City and School District, 08/26/2022

Attachment 20 – Fir Ridge Quit Claim Deed, 09/30/2022

Attachment 21 – Public Correspondence

Resolution 1/Exhibit A (e.g., Agreement)

Resolution 2/Exhibit A

CONTACT

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