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14 May 2024

Melanie Jones-Carter, Chair Drew Weigl, Vice-Chair Michael Cook Vic Liptak Adam Sharron Ernest Wuethrich Santa Rosa Design Review Board

#### Via email

Re: Round Barn Hotel (Hilton Hotel)

3555 Round Barn Blvd., Santa Rosa

DR23-043

Chair Jones-Carter and Members of the Santa Rosa Design Review Board:

On Thursday May 16<sup>th</sup> you will be considering a Concept Design Review for the rebuilding of what was the burned out portions of the Hilton Hotel in Fountaingrove.

While there are certainly aspects of this proposed project that I find laudable, including removal of 40,000 square feet of impermeable surfaces, the excellent proposed building materials, and – finally – removal of dead trees from the property, I have underlying concerns, as set forth below.

Having survived the Tubbs fire in 2017, which partially burned this property, as well as completely burning the then Fountaingrove Inn directly west of this proposed project, I have significant issues with portions of this proposed project, including the feasibility and safety of probable future evacuations of the project. As the Project Description/Plan Set admits, this property is in a "high fire hazard severity" area. Given that part of your responsibility is to consider site plan configuration, I believe that consideration of future evacuation of the proposed project is well within your authority, given that the site design of this proposed project, and its effect on surrounding properties, may well negatively affect probable future evacuations.

In fact, I believe that significant actions must be taken by the applicant to ensure the safety of their guests and staff during future evacuations, and given your responsibilities, I believe you should not only comment, but should request the following affirmative actions.

At a minimum, these are the actions which should be required of applicant:

# 1. Ensure that all guests and staff can safely evacuate the proposed project, including ensuring that the alternate emergency evacuation route is adequate

It is well within your authority and responsibility to evaluate and determine whether the safe evacuation of this proposed project can be undertaken, as well as whether this evacuation can be accomplished while also allowing adequate simultaneous fire apparatus access to the property. Optimally, an evacuation evaluation of the project should be performed. If you are not willing to require said evacuation evaluation, you must – at a minimum – consider and reach a determination of whether safe evacuations of this proposed project can be accomplished, while providing access for fire apparatus.

This project has two exits on Round Barn Blvd, which appear to be approximately 20 feet apart and both egress points exit on to one two lane road – Round Barn Blvd. Given the probable path of any future fire, it is reasonable to assume that all evacuations from this hotel using these egress points will involve going south on Round Barn Blvd., west on Fountaingrove Parkway and from there to Mendocino Avenue. This means, frankly, that effectively these "two" exits from this property are only one real exit, and this is the only official evacuation route for guests and staff of this proposed hotel, both for the existing portion and this new proposed addition.

Additionally, there will now be significantly higher vehicle traffic attempting to evacuate on Round Barn Blvd. than existed during the Tubbs fire. At the time of the Tubbs fire, the City Ventures Round Barn townhome project was not in existence<sup>1</sup>. Now, in the event of any necessary evacuation, that project alone will add significant additional traffic attempting to evacuate on Round Barn Blvd – at full buildout, there will be a total of at least 129 units of housing (likely each with two cars) attempting to evacuate.

The total proposed project for this hotel project will include at least 108 existing guest rooms contained within the portion of this project that didn't burn down in the Tubbs fire. The new construction will add 31 1 bedroom rooms, 4 2 bedroom rooms and 4 3 bedroom rooms. Assuming 2 people in each bedroom, this total proposed project will potentially have 310 guests all needing to evacuate in an emergency, along with any other guests using the meeting room, conference room, restaurant, bar and/or ballroom, and all staff on site.

I have serious doubts that evacuation of this proposed project can be accomplished safely in an emergency, particularly under the worst possible circumstances such as we experienced during the Tubbs fire.

This proposed project has a "fire road," which runs on the western edge of the proposed project. This fire road could provide a valuable additional way for fire apparatus to access the property, and provide an additional means for the proposed project guests and staff to evacuate the property.

However, to the best of my knowledge, this fire road is currently an unimproved dirt road, and in fact may not yet actually connect from the proposed project to Mendocino Avenue through the residential

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Unfortunately, the timing of the approval of the neighboring City Ventures Round Barn townhome project meant that there was never any real consideration of safe evacuations of the residents of that property. Even more troubling, because of that approval timing, I do not believe that the City Ventures Round Bar townhome project is even required to comply with current defensible space and home hardening laws.

project being constructed on the site of the burned out Fountaingrove Inn. The plans for the residential project under construction on the Fountaingrove Inn site appear to show that their connection to this fire road will be 20' wide, but do not indicate whether the road will be paved, will be gravel, or will remain a dirt road beyond their project boundaries. This road clearly must first, be fully connected, must second, be improved and maintained in an adequate condition so that it can be used in an emergency, and third, must be wide enough to allow simultaneous passage of fire apparatus and personal vehicles evacuating.

Additionally, the plans I have for the residential project on the old Fountaingrove Inn property show that there will be a "gate or removable bollards" on their property where it connects to the fire road. Clearly, that gate/those bollards must be able to be opened by a guest needing to use this fire road to evacuate in the event that fire personnel haven't yet arrived to open same. How will you ensure that this will happen?

Finally, I find it extremely hard to believe that it will be possible – even under the best of circumstances – that fire apparatus will be able to use this fire road to access this proposed project, or that guests of this proposed project will be able to evacuate using this fire road (even if it's wide enough for simultaneous use). First, fire apparatus will have to travel through the dense housing project at the Fountaingrove Inn site (198 residential units in Buildings D, E and F), full of residents likely attempting to evacuate at the same time the fire apparatus may be trying to enter. And, second, any guests of the proposed project will be forced to drive into that dense housing project, adding their vehicles to those of the residents of the housing project, all trying to evacuate.

I have attached a map of the Fountaingrove Inn housing project showing how this proposed fire access is theoretically going to work, for your illumination.

With this letter I request that you:

- Require an evacuation analysis of this proposed project (both for the existing portion of the hotel that is being renovated, and for the new construction), including evacuation of all preexisting uses in the area.
- Make a determination that safe evacuations of all guests and staff of the total of this proposed project (existing and future), as well as preexisting uses in the area, can be safely accomplished.
- Require that the fire road be wide enough to allow simultaneous passage of fire apparatus and evacuating personal vehicles.
- Require that the fire road be improved and maintained in a condition so that it can always be used.
- Require that any gate and/or bollards blocking any access to the fire road be able to be opened/removed by a guest and/or staff of the proposed project.

## 2. Require preparation of a complete evacuation plan to ensure safe evacuations of the entire hotel.

Hotels are a particularly difficult problem in the event any evacuation is necessary. First, the guests are likely to be unfamiliar with fire dangers in this location, and will also likely be unfamiliar with either Fountaingrove or the general area of this proposed hotel. Second, some guests will be dropped off by a taxi/Uber/Lyft vehicle, so will have no personal vehicle available for evacuations. Third, guests who do

arrive in their own car, or a rental car, will still likely have no real idea where they are or where they should go in the event of any necessary evacuation.

Clearly the owners of this hotel will have to undertake significant educational and other efforts to ensure that in the event of any necessary evacuation their guests and staff can safely get away.

We all remember what happened at Villa Capri, where the residents didn't have personal vehicles, and where no one knew where the keys were to the vans otherwise available to evacuate the residents in mass, as well as having no employees available to drive those vans out (if they had the keys). It's a miracle that no one died.

While this hotel project has significant differences from that scenario, in that it is fair to assume that most of the guests will be able to evacuate themselves, significant problems remain.

Applicant's Project Description/Plan Set states that all parking for this portion of the new hotel will be valet parking (it appears that guests of the existing unburned portion of this hotel may be able to park their own vehicles, although this is unclear). This proposed project will also have a meeting room, a conference room, a restaurant, a bar and a ballroom (as well as a market, although it's unclear whether the market will be used by the public), as well as supporting staff for all of these uses. Will all parking for the new portion of the hotel be valet parking, including for staff and guests of public facilities? Will guest and/or staff parking for the existing portion of the hotel being reoccupied be valet parking?

This proposed valet parking is an enormous problem in the event an evacuation is necessary. It is unlikely that any guest will have a second set of keys for their vehicle – if they even have a vehicle on site. How will the hotel ensure the guests can get their vehicle keys and can locate and access their cars in the event an evacuation is necessary?

In addition, how will the hotel ensure that guests without a personal vehicle on site are able to evacuate? Running for your life is not an evacuation plan.

With this letter I request that you require preparation of a complete evacuation plan by the hotel for all of their guests and staff, which plan will include all of the following, or some reasonable variation thereof:

#### **EMERGENCY AND DISASTER PLAN**

- 1. Evacuation procedures, including identification of an assembly point or points that shall be included in the hotel sketch, which will be provided to all guests upon check-in. This will include a map showing all evacuation routes, and shall not include evacuation routes that would likely send guests into fire danger.
- 2. If this hotel plans to allow guests to remain on site during an emergency or disaster, when evacuation is not necessary, then the plan shall show how the hotel will be self-reliant for a period of not less than 72 hours immediately following any emergency or disaster, including, but not limited to, during a short-term or long-term lack of electrical power. (The Project Description states that emergency power will be provided by battery storage systems ensure that the proposed battery backup for power will be adequate.) If one or more utilities, including water, sewer, gas, or electricity, is not

available, the hotel shall have a plan and supplies available to provide alternative resources during an outage.

- 3. During any emergency or disaster where electricity is unavailable, this hotel shall have a plan to provide minimum emergency electricity for such things as emergency lighting to facilitate evacuations. (The Project Description states that emergency power will be provided by battery storage systems ensure that the proposed battery backup for power will be adequate.)
- 4. Transportation needs and evacuation procedures to ensure that the hotel can communicate with emergency response personnel or can access the information necessary in order to check the emergency routes to be used at the time of an evacuation and relocation necessitated by a disaster. All staff will be required to have signed up for all emergency notifications available in Santa Rosa and Sonoma County. The hotel will have one or more vehicles available to evacuate guests with no other means of transportation, and the keys to the vehicle shall be available to all staff on all shifts, who will be trained to drive said vehicles and understand that that is one of their possible responsibilities. The hotel will not assume that public transportation will be available to assist in evacuations, and will instead be responsible to provide evacuation transportation for all guests and staff on site without a personal vehicle.
- 5. The hotel shall compile and maintain contact information lists of the following:
  - a. Emergency response personnel.
  - b. Locations that have agreed to shelter guests of this hotel during any emergency evacuation, and/or probable emergency evacuation center locations.
- 6. The location of utility shut-off valves and instructions for use shall be available to all staff, who shall be trained to shut off the gas in an emergency or disaster.
- 7. Procedures that address, but are not limited to, all of the following:
  - a. Provision of emergency power that could include identification of suppliers of backup generators in the event of compromise or failure of the proposed emergency backup battery storage. In the event any portable generators are required for provisions of emergency power, staff will be trained in their use and the manufacturer's operating instructions shall be followed.
  - b. Notifying guests of an emergency or disaster, including by calling them on the hotel phone, on the guests' cell phones, and by going door to door to notify the guests. Staff shall be trained in how to ensure that all guests are notified during an emergency or disaster, and how to ensure that all guests are accounted for during an evacuation.
  - c. Return to all guests the keys of all valet parked vehicles, with a map showing the location of said vehicle, as soon as a red flag warning has been declared.
  - d. While honoring and protecting the privacy of their guests, the hotel shall compile and maintain a list of the number of guests at the hotel, and shall ask each guest upon check-in if there are any special physical or mental needs of any guests that the hotel should be aware of during an emergency. Staff shall be trained specifically to assist all guests requiring extra assistance to evacuate.

- e. No new guests shall be checked in during any declared red flag warning, and all existing guests shall be notified when a red flag warning has been declared.
- f. All hotel owned electric site vehicles are required to be fully charged at all times.
- 8. The hotel shall provide training on the plan to each staff member upon hire and annually thereafter. The training shall include staff responsibilities during an emergency or disaster. At least one staff member on each shift shall be designated as the staff person who is to coordinate the response to the emergency or disaster. Written documentary evidence of said training for each staff member shall be maintained in perpetuity and shall be made available to Santa Rosa city personnel upon request.
- 9. The hotel shall conduct a drill at least quarterly for each shift. The type of emergency covered in a drill shall vary from quarter to quarter, taking into account different emergency scenarios. An actual evacuation of guests is not required during a drill. While the hotel may provide an opportunity for guests to participate in a drill, it shall not require any guest participation. Documentation of the drills shall include the date, the type of emergency covered by the drill, and the names of staff participating in the drill. Said documentation shall be in writing, shall be maintained in perpetuity, and shall be made available to Santa Rosa city personnel upon request.
- 10. The hotel shall review the plan annually and make updates as necessary, including changes in floor plans, lessons learned during drills conducted and new information on best practices to respond to an emergency or disaster as it becomes available.
- 11. The hotel shall have all of the following information readily available to hotel staff during an emergency:
  - a. A list of the number of guests in each room, including whether any guests have any special mental or physical needs, to the extent the guests are willing to reveal this information.
  - b. Contact information for the responsible guest in each room.
  - c. Whether the guest(s) have a vehicle on site, and, if so, the location of said vehicle and the location of the keys to that vehicle.
  - d. A list of all guests without a vehicle on site.
- 12. The hotel shall have the following in place:
  - a. A set of keys available to all staff on each shift for use during an emergency or evacuation that provides access to all of the following:
    - (1) All occupied guest rooms.
    - (2) All hotel vehicles.
    - (3) All hotel exit doors.
    - (4) All hotel cabinets and cupboards or files that contain elements of the emergency and disaster plan, including, but not limited to, food supplies and protective shelter supplies.
  - b. The keys to all hotel vehicles to be used for guest evacuations shall be available to all staff on each shift.

- 13. The hotel shall make the plan available upon request to any guest.
- 14. The hotel will have its emergency and disaster plan reviewed annually by local emergency authorities.

The above is an actual Emergency/Disaster Response plan, and I would request that you require a plan similar to the above as part of your review of this project.

#### 3. "Grass" landscaping.

This proposed project states that at least some of their landscaping will be "meadow with waves of grass..."

Grass is flammable, particularly when dry, and generally grass is not evergreen. I do not have specific knowledge about whether the grasses proposed for this property will be evergreen, whether they are particularly flammable, and/or whether they are appropriate in a high fire danger hazard severity zone, but with this letter I request that you specifically evaluate the wisdom of providing a meadow with waves of grass on this property. Further, how will these grasses be handled given Santa Rosa's weed abatement ordinance?

Additionally, having spent years removing Pampas grass from our neighborhood, the photos of "Foerester's Feather Reed Grass," which apparently can be as tall as 6', give me pause. Is this an appropriate plant for this high fire danger area?

I also have concerns about the installation of artificial turf around the events spaces – artificial turf is plastic, and it degrades into the environment. Is this appropriate?

#### 4. Wood chips.

Although there is no indication that the project applicant is proposing to use wood chips on this property, with this letter I request that you explicitly prohibit the use of wood chips on this project property.

Not only are wood chips flammable<sup>2</sup>, they couldn't be better designed to be ember cast. As we have all experienced, ember cast will start fires up to a mile (or more) away from the original fire location. Not only is the use of wood chips and other wood mulches a fire danger for the property they are on, they are also a significant danger to all properties within the ember cast zone.

Last week, Senator Mike McGuire held a Town Hall about wildfire preparedness. His guest, Cal Fire Chief Joe Tyler, when asked whether he would prefer green shrubs near a building, or wood chips, responded emphatically that he would prefer green shrubs.

Please prohibit the use of all wood chips on this property.

<sup>2</sup> The 2011 Report available on Santa Rosa's Fire Department's website, entitled The Combustibility of Landscape Mulches, is a joke. First, it is very old. Second, when the tests were done, the simulated wind speeds were no more than 10-15 mph, which is not a realistic or useful test of the flammability of wood chips and other wood mulches. Finally, the report in no way acknowledges that wood chips and other wood mulches are perfect ember cast.

Thank you in advance for your consideration of this letter and my concerns. I would be more than happy to answer any questions you might have, or provide additional information upon your request.

Very truly yours,

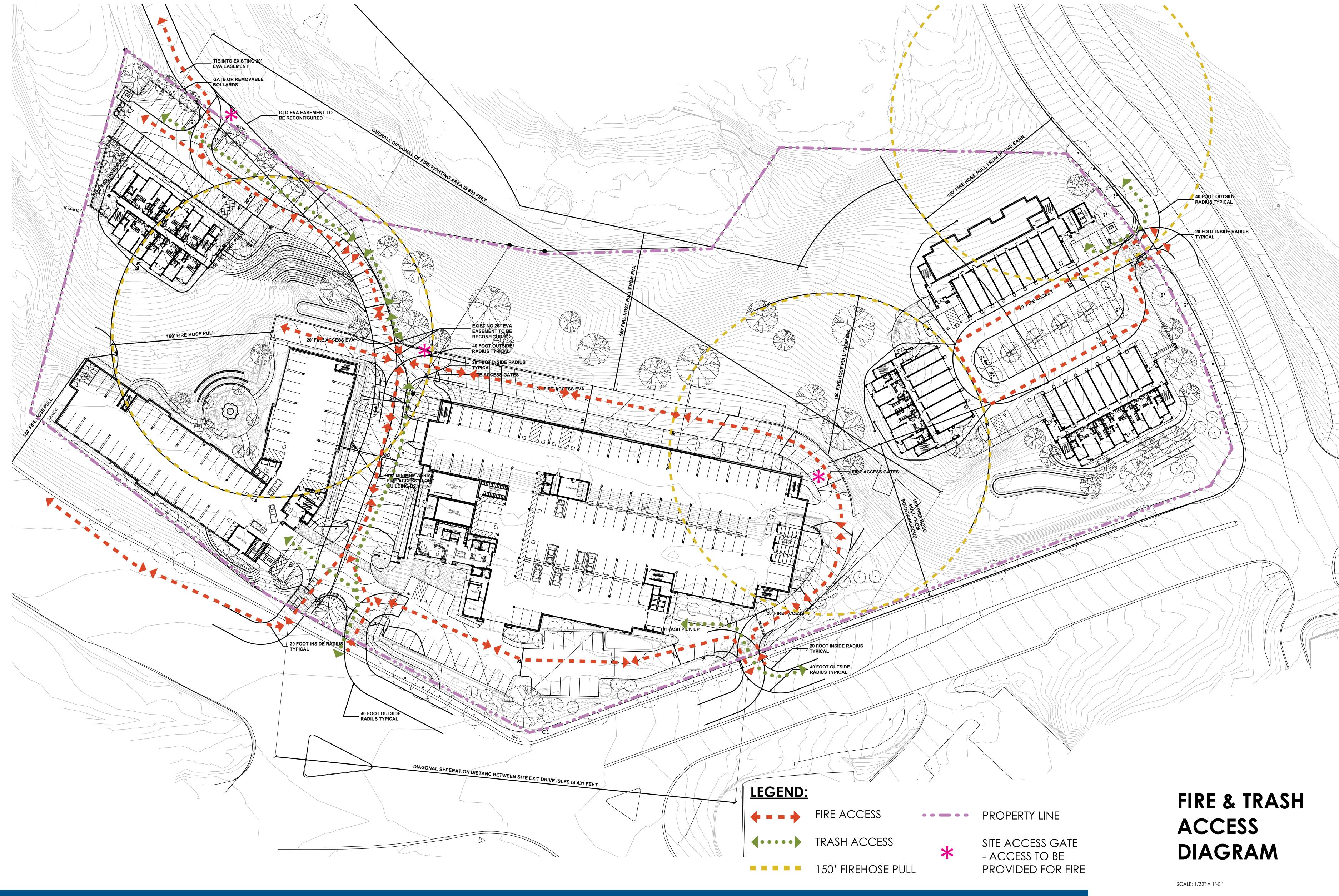
Sonia E. Taylor

### Attachment

Cc: Gabe Osburn

Jimmy Bliss

Suzanne Hartman



FOUNTAINGROVE | SANTA ROSA, CA

FOUNTAINGROVE INN

**JOB NO.** 1537.001 DATE

11.06.2020 5865 Owens Drive Pleasanton, CA 94588 925-251-7200

# Camp, Krystal

**From:** Ari Thomas <ariellamthomas@gmail.com>

Sent:Sunday, May 12, 2024 11:45 AMTo:DRB - Design Review BoardSubject:[EXTERNAL] Public comment 5/12

Hello Design Review Board! Please pass these comments on to the Spring Lake Village and Round Barn Hotel teams as well.

I really like the Round Barn Hotel plan, and look forward to seeing its progress. The sustainability considerations they are making are a great example of things I would like to see throughout all new development in the city. I am very happy to see passive solar design, the increase of permeable surfaces, the use of green roofs and native plants, onsite food production and composting, solar microgrids, and greywater systems. These shouldn't be limited to luxury hotels!!

Please keep these and other climate adaptations at the forefront of your mind for every type of development and keep pushing for them in all designs you review. I feel strongly that we have no time to waste, and must take every opportunity with new buildings to multi-solve the problems that will increase with the intensifying climate. I want to see every building as a multi-contributing part of our local network because I do not believe we can count on larger supply chains indefinitely. Even if The Massive Crisis never comes, we will never regret building things that provide for us.

With that in mind, I think more can be done with Spring Lake Village! I appreciate the inclusion of multiple rain gardens and the pedestrian/bike improvements. Looking at the renderings, I would love to see the walkways more filled out with taller plants that will provide shade for seniors (who are especially at risk from heat) and other pedestrians. Please replace (and add to) the fruit and nut trees that would provide food for humans and non-human neighbors, and prioritize a ton of plants that attract pollinators. Instead of a diesel generator, please incorporate solar battery storage. Solar panels also provide an opportunity for shade. Again, across all types of development, we do not have any time to waste in pursuing less ecologically friendly options, and I strongly disagree with any inclusion of new fossil fuel infrastructure. In keeping with the rain-harvesting design of the gardens, please consider permeable pavement wherever possible.

Also, I really like the picture of Dymondia that the Round Barn Hotel included.

Thank you all :-)
Ari Thomas