

CITY OF SANTA ROSA  
PLANNING AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT  
STAFF REPORT FOR PLANNING COMMISSION  
**November 29, 2018**

**PROJECT TITLE**

Residence Inn by Marriott

**APPLICANT**

Ajaib Bhadare

**ADDRESS/LOCATION**

3558 Round Barn Circle

**PROPERTY OWNER**

Fountaingrove Executive Center II, LLC

**ASSESSOR'S PARCEL NUMBER**

173-020-008

**FILE NUMBER**

PRJ17-045

**APPLICATION DATE**

June 9, 2017

**APPLICATION COMPLETION DATE**

February 1, 2018

**REQUESTED ENTITLEMENTS**

Hillside Development Permit  
Conditional Use Permit

**FURTHER ACTIONS REQUIRED**

Design Review

**PROJECT SITE ZONING**

Planned Development – Resilient City  
(PD72-001-RC)

**GENERAL PLAN DESIGNATION**

Retail and Business Services

**PROJECT PLANNER**

Amy Nicholson

**RECOMMENDATION**

Approval

CITY OF SANTA ROSA  
PLANNING COMMISSION

TO: CHAIR EDMONDSON AND MEMBERS OF THE COMMISSION  
FROM: AMY NICHOLSON, CITY PLANNER  
PLANNING AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT  
SUBJECT: RESIDENCE INN BY MARRIOTT  
AGENDA ACTION: RESOLUTION

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RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended by the Planning and Economic Development Department that the Planning Commission (Commission), by resolution, approve the Conditional Use Permit and Hillside Development Permit for the Residence Inn by Marriott.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The project consists of a proposal to construct and operate a four-story, 114-room hotel in the Fountaingrove Resilient City Zone, adjacent to Highway 101 in northeast Santa Rosa. A new 92,100 square foot building would occupy the undeveloped 4.6-acre project parcel. In addition to hotel rooms, the project includes a fitness facility and outdoor amenities, including a lawn area and pool. One hundred sixteen (116) on-site parking spaces are proposed within a planned surface parking lot. Construction of the project is contingent upon approval of a Conditional Use Permit, Hillside Development Permit, Design Review, and subsequent engineering and building permits.

BACKGROUND

1. Project Description

The proposal includes a new hotel development consisting of 114 guest rooms, a 116 space surface parking lot and outdoor improvements including an amenity lawn and pool area. The 92,100 square foot hotel includes shed roofs with a maximum height of 48 feet 8 inches from grade with the height varying significantly based on topography and vantage point. Materials for the building are a mixture of earth tones, and include metal and cement siding, stone veneer, and simulated wood. The hotel's architectural elements are comprised of articulation, variable relief, and balconies and terraces, which break up the large massing and length of the structure. The proposed landscaping incorporates a

variety of native plants including coast live oak and valley oak trees to partially screen the hotel from public vantage points, while providing a natural transition to the existing oak grove on-site. Ornamental plants are utilized to comply with the City's orchard parking requirement and enhance the developed areas. Public improvements are limited to two driveway aprons, as the frontage of the site was previously improved with sidewalk, curb and gutter, as a part of the Fountaingrove Executive Center Subdivision in 1990.

Development of the project requires the approval of a Conditional Use Permit for the proposed hotel use, a Hillside Development Permit for the proposed development on slopes exceeding a 10 percent grade, and Design Review for the new building. Engineering and building permits are also required prior to construction.

2. Surrounding Land Uses

North: Office

South: Currently vacant - commercial and hotel uses prior to the Tubbs Fire

East: Office

West: Vacant site and Old Redwood Highway and Highway 101

The project site was previously surrounded by a variety of commercial and office uses prior to the Tubbs Fire (Fire) of October 2017. The parcels directly south were developed with the Fountaingrove Inn and Hilton Hotel, both of which were destroyed in the Fire. The office buildings to the north and east of the site remain intact.

3. Existing Land Use – Project Site

The 4.6-acre parcel is undeveloped and has varying topography which slopes west toward Highway 101. Grades on the property range from less than 10 percent to above 25 percent, with elevation changes from 227 feet near Round Barn Circle to 190 feet on the western portion of the property. A large pad was graded on the southeast portion of the site, in anticipation of a development in 1990. Substantial grading also occurred throughout the site to provide additional stability to Round Barn Circle (see attached approved Improvement Plan).

Vegetation on the site is sparse and consists primarily of native grasses, with the only trees located on the western downslope portion of the site. These trees are primarily coast live oaks, some of which suffered fire damage. Upon evaluation by a biologist, it was not determined if the foliage would regenerate. Thus, the project has been conditioned to provide additional analysis by an arborist or biologist, prior to building permit issuance. Should it be determined that the trees will not regenerate, the applicant's tree planting plan shall be amended to include trees that will result in a comparable screening, subject to approval by Planning staff.

4. Project History

On April 14, 1990, Improvement Plans for the Fountaingrove Executive Center were approved. These plans show the specifications for the private street (Round Barn Circle), underground utilities, frontage improvements, and mass grading on the six created lots. As shown on the Fountaingrove Executive Center improvement plan (see Attachment 13), a building pad was created on the subject site, but no building was constructed.

On September 9, 2016, City staff held a Pre-Application meeting with the applicant team for the proposed hotel.

On October 20, 2016, the proposal went before the Design Review Board for Concept Review.

On February 11, 2017, the proposal returned to the Design Review Board with modifications and additional materials for review.

On June 9, 2017, an application for a Hillside Development Permit and Design Review were submitted to the Planning and Economic Development Department.

PRIOR CITY COUNCIL REVIEW

Not applicable.

ANALYSIS

1. General Plan

The General Plan specifies a Retail and Business Services land use designation for the project area to accommodate retail and service enterprises, offices and restaurants, and therefore, several Economic Vitality and Land Use policies are relevant. As the project is proposed in a hillside area, several Urban Design and Open Space and Conservation policies are also applicable.

**Economic Vitality:**

EV-A-5      Maintain diversity in the types of jobs available in Santa Rosa to lessen the impact of economic cycles.

EV-B      Facilitate the retention and expansion of existing businesses and provide sufficient land for business expansion and attraction of new employers that utilize the area's existing labor pool.

- EV-D-6 Pursue expansion of the number of hotel rooms and conference facilities in order to attract more meetings and conventions to the city. Aggressively promote the city to the visitor and convention markets.

**Land Use and Livability:**

- LUL-I-1 Provide a range of commercial services that are easily accessible and attractive, that satisfies the needs of people who live and work in Santa Rosa and that also attracts a regional clientele.

**Urban Design:**

- UD-A Preserve and enhance Santa Rosa's scenic character, including its natural waterways, hillsides, and distinctive districts.
- UD-H-3 Prohibit grading of slopes that are greater than 25 percent. During review of development plans, ensure that necessary grading respects significant natural features and visually blends with adjacent properties.
- UD-A-4 In new developments, minimize overall grading by limiting site grading to the minimum necessary for driveways, parking areas, and understructure areas.
- UD-A-5 Require superior site and architectural design of new development projects to improve visual quality in the city.
- UD-A-9 Prohibit development on hillsides and ridgelines where structures would interrupt the skyline.
- UD-A-10 Relate landscape design to the natural setting. Require that graded areas within new development be revegetated.
- UD-A-11 Require structures within new developments to step with the slope of the site. Absorb site topography through use of split-level designs.

**Open Space and Conservation:**

- OSC-E Conserve significant vegetation and trees.
- OSC-E-2 Preserve and regenerate native oak trees.

The proposed hotel development would help to replenish the supply of hotel rooms lost during the Fire, while attracting a regional clientele and providing a

diversity of job types. The architecture, site, and landscape plans demonstrate a development respectful of natural features that utilize native plants, limit unnecessary grading, and include a foundation that generally steps to grade. See the “Issues” section of this report for further discussion related to the above-mentioned goals and policies.

## 2. Zoning

The project site and abutting parcels are within the Fountaingrove Ranch Planned Development Zoning District (PD72-001) and the Resilient City (-RC) combining district. The Fountaingrove Ranch zoning district is intended to support a variety of land uses based on the location, as specified on the map included in the Policy Statement. The project site is within the Highway -Tourist - Office - Commercial land use area, intended to provide for a range of “specialty” commercial uses, including highway and tourist-oriented uses. Although hotels are envisioned for this area, all uses in the Fountaingrove Ranch Planned Development require approval of a Minor Conditional Use Permit. As the Planning Commission is the review authority for Hillside Development Permit, staff has elevated the Minor Use Permit to the Commission. The Resilient City combining district applies to all properties impacted by the Tubbs and Nuns Fires.

### *Hillside Development Ordinance*

As indicated above, approval of the project requires a Hillside Development Permit, based on the development on slopes exceeding 10 percent. Each of the required findings, along with Staff’s response, are listed below:

A. 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 in that the Project proposes a hotel development sited on the least sloped portion of the site, and the building, to the maximum extent possible, is oriented parallel to the contours of the site. In addition, the Project takes advantage of mature tree clusters located on the western portion of the site.

B. Site development minimizes alteration of topography, drainage patterns, and vegetation on land with slopes of 10 percent or more in that the development is located on the flattest portion of the site to require the least amount of grading to accommodate a development of this size, drainage is proposed to retain its pre-construction flow and direction, and the natural vegetation of the site is to remain undisturbed. Additionally, the site has been previously disturbed through grading and filling as a part of the previous subdivision improvements.

C. Site development does not alter slopes of 25% or more, except in compliance with Section 20-32.020.B (Applicability-Limitations on hillside development) in

that Zoning Code Section 20-32.020.B prohibits development proposed on slopes greater than 25 percent identified by a visual analysis as having significant natural landforms or features, and as visually sensitive, but allows alterations determined by the review authority to be minor provided such alterations occur over previously constructed slopes. The slopes that exceed 25 percent on the site were constructed pursuant to the previously approved subdivision improvement plans, and are therefore unnatural. In addition, the visual analysis does not identify any significant natural features impacted by development on slopes in excess of 25 percent.

D. Project grading respects natural features and visually blends with adjacent properties in that the grading for the proposed project has been designed in concert with abutting properties that comprise the area, will present setbacks and streetscapes consistent with the surrounding development, and much of the site will be undisturbed or landscaped consistent with the City's Design Guidelines and Zoning Code requirements.

E. Building pad location, design, and construction avoids large areas of flat pads, and building forms will be stepped to conform to site topography in that the foundation avoids flat pads and visually steps down the hill, and the development is proposed on the flattest portion of the site.

F. The proposed Project complies with the City's Design Guidelines in the use of native landscaping and compatible colors, forms, and materials.

G. The proposed project complies with the requirements of Chapter 20-32 and all other applicable provisions of the Zoning Code.

H. The proposed project is consistent with the General Plan in that the proposed development implements the Retail and Business Services land use designation by providing a commercial regional serving use, and is consistent with the General Plan Policies listed in the General Plan section above.

I. 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 in that the proposed Project has been reviewed and conditioned by City departments and outside agencies and consists of a commercial development in an existing commercially developed area.

J. The proposed project has been reviewed in compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and qualifies for a Class 32 exemption pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15332, as explained below.

*Parking*

Consistent with Table 3-4 of the Zoning Code, one vehicle space for each guest room, plus required spaces for accessory uses such as restaurants and conference space, is required for lodging uses. The prescribed parking supply for the 92,100-square foot building would therefore be 114 off-street spaces, as no accessory uses are proposed. The project proposes 116 on-site parking spaces. The Zoning Code requires 12 bicycle parking spaces, which will be demonstrated prior to building permit issuance.

#### *Development Standards*

The Fountaingrove Ranch Policy Statement (Policy Statement) does not provide standards for building setbacks. It instead relies on the Conditional Use Permit to set these standards. However, as the Hillside Development Ordinance requires more restrictive setbacks for development on slopes exceeding 10 percent than would typically be applied to a commercial area, the Hillside Development setback standards have been applied to this proposal. The hotel exceeds the required 15-foot side, 20-foot front, and 15-foot rear setback. The project is also consistent with the maximum lot coverage of 50 percent, by proposing a building footprint area of approximately 14.1%. The Policy Statement allows building heights exceeding 35 feet from grade based on design excellence and preservation of natural features. Consistent with the Policy Statement, the proposed 48-foot 6-inch maximum height will be reviewed and acted upon during the future Design Review meeting.

#### *Resilient City Combining District*

The project site is within the -RC (Resilient City) combining district which was established on October 24, 2017, by the City Council through Urgency Ordinance (Ordinance) No. 2017-018, to facilitate the reconstruction and resilience of areas impacted by the Tubbs and Nuns fires. The -RC district does not include any zoning provisions that are applicable to the Commission's action on the project. However, the City Council's recent approval of the Resilient City Development Measure Ordinance delegates Preliminary and Final Design Review approval of this hotel to the Zoning Administrator, after a required Concept Design Review meeting with the Design Review Board. This reduced review authority would be applicable to this project because it is a hotel proposed within the Mendocino Avenue Priority Development Area. However, based on the level of interest in the hotel, and because the project went to the Design Review Board (DRB) for Concept Review prior to approval of the Ordinance, Staff has determined that approval by the DRB is required.

### 3. Design Guidelines

The following is a summary of the most appropriate City of Santa Rosa Design Goals and Guidelines which apply to the proposed project:



*Hillside Considerations*

- 4.5 II.B.3 Limit grading for house construction in hillsides to driveways, garage pads and understructure areas. House foundations should step with the terrain to minimize grading and to protect trees in the vicinity of the house.
- 4.5 II. C.1. Establish building setback lines to protect existing vegetation, major rock outcroppings and drainage flows. Avoid steep slopes and unstable areas.
- 4.5 II. C.2. Place buildings to take advantage of existing vegetation in the foreground and in the background.
- 4.5 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.
- 4.5 II. E.1. Utilize landscaping to screen structures from the downhill direction. This is particularly important when tall pony walls occur on the downhill side.
- 4.5 III. A.2. To minimize grading on hillsides step floor levels to follow the hillside.
- 4.5 III. A.7. Use roofing and siding colors that blend in with the natural color palette of the surrounding site.

The project, as designed, is consistent with the City's Design Guidelines for projects in hillside areas. The project proposes a four-story building with a variety of natural materials and earth toned colors. Balconies, terraces and articulation along each elevation provide interest, while the foundation of the building steps with the hillside. Preservation of natural features is achieved through the siting of the hotel on the flattest portion of the site with no tree removals required.

In addition to a Hillside Development Permit acted on by the Planning Commission, the project will be subject to a public hearing before the Design Review Board.

4. Neighborhood Comments

Several comments received related to this proposal have been focused on the height of the proposed hotel, and the impact of this height on the views for the patients of the cancer treatment center located across Round Barn Circle.

Additional comments regarding the impacts to street parking available on the private drive and the adequacy of the existing road were also submitted.

5. Public Improvements/On-Site Improvements

As an in-fill project, improvements to the surrounding streets will be minimal, and consist of two driveway aprons to access the site. Curb, gutter, and sidewalk were installed as a part of the Fountaingrove Executive Center Subdivision in 1990.

FISCAL IMPACT

Approval or denial of the Conditional Use Permit and Hillside Development Permit applications will not have a direct fiscal impact on the General Fund. However, the new hotel rooms that this project would create would result in an increase to income generated through the City's Transient Occupancy Tax in addition to job creation and rebuilding of the burned area; stimulating economic growth.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

The proposed project has been reviewed in compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and qualifies for a Class 32 exemption pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15332. The project meets the criteria for the Class 32 (In-fill) exemption in that it is consistent with the applicable General Plan designation and all applicable General Plan polices as well as with applicable zoning designation and regulations, in that the General Plan envisioned commercial development of the site, and the development is consistent with development standards required.

The site is located within city limits on a project site of no more than five acres, substantially surrounded by urban uses. Prior to the Fire, the 4.6-acre site was bounded by a variety of commercial developments to the north, east, and south, with Old Redwood Highway to the west. Further, the site is immediately adjacent to parcels that are developed with qualified urban uses pursuant to Public Resource Code Sections 21072 and 21061.3.

Further, although the site has potential habitat for nesting birds and bats, it has not been identified as habitat for endangered, rare or threatened species, based on the Biological Assessment by Ms. Lucy Macmillian, M.S., dated February 2018. Consistent with the recommendations of the Biological Assessment, the project has been conditioned to perform surveys and any provide necessary exclusion zones, prior to the commencement of construction activities.

In addition, approval of the project would not result in any significant effects relating to traffic, in that impacts to traffic were reviewed in the W-Trans prepared Traffic Study, dated August 8, 2018, which determined no significant impact impacts to the existing intersections upon construction of the project under present or future conditions. Although the current level of service for the Mendocino Avenue/Fountaingrove Parkway

intersection is unacceptable, and the future with the project would create a delay of more than by 5 seconds, the vehicle volume to capacity ratio does not increase by more than 2 percent, which is the City's standard for assessing an impact to an already unacceptable intersection.

The project is anticipated, and required, to operate within acceptable levels of sound as listed in the General Plan and the City's Noise Ordinance. Impacts to air quality and water quality are expected to be less than significant based on the project's consistency with the City's Climate Action Plan. Further, based on the City Engineering Development division's review of the project plans and Stormwater Plan prepared by Adobe Engineering, dated June 6, 2017, impacts related to stormwater and drainage will be less than significant.

The City has further determined that 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.) This determination is based on the previous grading of the proposed site, and the development primarily being located on the flat portion of the site and substantially surrounded by development.

Additionally, pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15183, the project is consistent with the City's General Plan and Zoning, which envisioned the commercial development of the Retail and Business Services area. Therefore, no further environmental review is required.

#### BOARD/COMMISSION/COMMITTEE REVIEW AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The proposed hotel was before the Design Review Board (Board) for Concept Design Review on October 16, 2016, when the Board requested additional information regarding views from Highway 101, retaining walls, orchard parking, materials, conceptual grading, sections and visuals, and a concept landscape plan. The Board suggested a strong sense of entry, more or taller glazing, shade at the pool area, plantings at the retaining wall, suggested lowering the structure height and breaking up the massing, and the use of natural stone veneer or other natural materials. The Board recommended returning for another Concept Design Review before going to the Planning Commission.

When the proposal returned to the Board in February of 2017, the Board focused on the building height exceeding 35 feet based on the language of the Policy Statement requiring design excellence and preservation of natural features. The Board recommended a number of changes including a varied roofline, larger shrubs at the retaining walls, richer colors and materials variety, and to break up the building mass, soften the corners, and increase fenestration. The Board also wanted special attention paid to the west elevation, as viewed from Highway 101 and Old Redwood Highway, and suggested planting more oak trees of varied sizes to tie into the existing oak grove.

The revised plans submitted for the Hillside Development Permit and Design Review

show a greater variety of natural materials, revised color scheme, and enhanced architectural features on the western elevation including balconies, terraces, and additional glazing on corners. Dark paint and materials applied to the upper level of the building are used to reduce the appearance of the overall height. The landscape plans have been modified to include additional oak trees adjacent to the existing grove.

## 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, 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.

## ISSUES

### *Impacts to Private Views*

As previously indicated, impacts to the existing views enjoyed by private properties have been cited as a concern. Based on the currently undeveloped nature of the site, the proposed development would alter the views enjoyed by the existing development directly across the project site on Round Barn Circle. Obstruction of private views is not considered a significant environmental impact. (*Ocean View Estates v. Montecito Water District*; *Mira Mar Mobile Community v. City of Oceanside*).

Planning staff has assessed the impacts to public views, in particular, those from major public vantage points, including Highway 101, as required by Chapter 20-32 of the Zoning Code, and as discussed in the City's Design Guidelines. In addition, compatibility of the proposed development with the existing area has been considered. The development height is consistent with the existing buildings when viewed from across Round Barn Circle. In addition, based on the topography of the site, the hotel is four stories only as viewed from the Old Redwood Highway/Highway 101 vantage point. With the exception of the shed roofs, the hotel development fronting Round Barn Circle, is consistent with the 35-foot requirement in the Policy Statement.

### *Parking and Site Access*

A neighboring medical group has specified concerns regarding the number of parking spaces for the hotel. The project proposes a total of 116 parking spaces, where 114 rooms are proposed, slightly exceeding the 1 space per room requirement for lodging under Zoning Code Section 20-36. The parking requirements in the Zoning Code consider the parking demand necessary to support the entire use, including employees, and any other supportive uses. The width of the existing private road was also cited as an issue for medical patients to navigate with added traffic, and for safety personnel to access. The City's Fire Department has reviewed and approved the plans, finding that the existing road is adequate.

*Development on Slopes Exceeding 25 Percent*

General Plan Policy UD-H-3 prohibits grading of slopes that are greater than 25 percent. The policy further directs that during the review of development plans, staff should ensure that necessary grading respects significant natural features and visually blends with adjacent properties. The proposed development is consistent with the General Plan in that the City's interpretation of this policy is to protect natural slopes that exceed a 25 percent grade, which contain natural features. Based on previous grading of the site, and the lack of natural features on the site, Planning staff have determined the intent of the aforementioned policy has been met.

Zoning Code Section 20-32.020(B) prohibits development proposed on slopes greater than 25 percent identified by a visual analysis as having significant natural landforms or features, and as visually sensitive. However, alterations determined by the review authority, in this case, the Planning Commission, to be minor may be approved over previously constructed slopes. The slopes that exceed 25 percent on the site were constructed pursuant to the subdivision Improvement Plans, in preparation of site development (note the building had shown on the Attachment 13 – Improvement Plan for Lot 6) or were modified due to grading performed to stabilize Round Barn Circle. Based on the aforementioned grading, the slopes exceeding 25 percent are unnatural.

Staff has determined the proposed development on the portions of the site greater than 25 percent to be minor in that the hotel is located on the flattest portion of the subject lot, avoiding as much of the 25 percent slope as possible. The visual analysis confirms that while slopes exceeding 25 percent are not hidden, they do not contain significant natural features. Finally, Staff finds the proposed development blends with the existing topography and adjacent development.

There are no unresolved staff issues related to this project.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1 - Disclosure Form

Attachment 2 – Location and Neighborhood Context Map

Attachment 3 – Site Plan

Attachment 4 – Elevations, Floor Plans and Sections

Attachment 5 – Renderings

Attachment 6 – Landscape Plan

Attachment 7 – Grading Plan

Attachment 8 – Project Narrative and Visual Analysis

Attachment 9 – Slope Analysis

Attachment 10 – Traffic Study, prepared by W-Trans, dated August 9, 2018

Attachment 11 – Biological Resources Assessment, prepared by Ms. Lucy Macmillan, M.S., Environmental Scientist, dated February 2018

Attachment 12 – Climate Action Plan Appendix E: CAP New Development Checklist

## RESIDENCE INN BY MARRIOTT

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Attachment 13 – Improvement Plan for Lot 6 of Fountaingrove Executive Center

Attachment 14 – February 2017 Concept DR Plans and Minutes

Attachment 15 – October 2016 Concept DR Plans and Minutes

Attachment 16 – Policy Statement for PD 72-001

Attachment 17 – Public Correspondence

Resolution 1/Exhibit A

Resolution 2

## CONTACT

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