

**CITY OF SONOMA
PLANNING COMMISSION
REGULAR MEETING
February 25, 2016**

Community Meeting Room, 177 First Street West, Sonoma, CA

MINUTES

Chair Felder called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m.

Roll Call:

Present: Chair Felder, Comms. Coleman, Cribb, Heneveld, McDonald, Wellander, Willers

Absent: Comm. Roberson

Others Present: Planning Director Goodison,

Chair Felder stated that no new items would be heard after 10:30 p.m. unless the Planning Commission so decides. Any decisions made by the Planning Commission can be appealed within 15 days to the City Council. He reminded everyone to turn off cell phones and pagers. Comm. Heneveld led the Pledge of Allegiance.

COMMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC: None

APPROVAL OF MINUTES: None

CHANGES TO AGENDA ORDER: None

CORRESPONDENCE: Late mail was received on item 1.

Item #1 – Public Hearing – Hearing on a draft Environmental Impact Report (EIR) addressing a proposal to redevelop four parcels on West Napa Street with a 62-room hotel/spa, an 80-seat restaurant, and associated parking and site improvements.

Applicant/Property Owner: Kenwood Investments, LLC

Planning Director Goodison introduced the EIR consultants and presented staff's report. Ricky Caperton of PlaceWorks, Dalene Whitlock of W-Trans, and Frederick Knapp of Knapp Consulting gave brief presentations on the EIR process and the findings related to traffic issues, and cultural resource issues.

Chair Felder opened the item to public comment.

Anna Gomez, Sonoma Valley resident, asked about sewer treatment issues, stating that she was concerned that according to the EIR the project would result in surcharging of the collection system on Broadway. She stated that two years ago, when the hotel project was first under consideration, she made a complaint to the Water Board asserting that the Sanitation

District is in violation of its discharge permit because the collection leaks due to its age. This complaint led to a cease-and-desist order which resulting in a settlement that occurred about six months ago. She stated that no additional connections to the sewer system should be made because the collection system is so damaged that the Water Board has given the District 22 years to repair the system. She also stated that the District is in violation of the District's own Sanitation Code. This project is a behemoth and it is just too big. I told the City Attorney that if the permit is issued and it is in violation of the permit and the Code, I will file another complaint with the Water Board. The project will also cause traffic problems due to the concentration of hotel rooms in one place.

Larry Barnett, Fifth Street East, made reference to the letter that he has submitted. In his view, it was a mistake to exclude an analysis of potential impacts in the area of hazards and hazardous materials in the scope of the EIR as defined in the initial study and approved by the Planning Commission. There are no public documents that provide information on soils testing that may have occurred in conjunction with the former printing plan use on the site. In his experience, chemicals used in the printing industry during the period of the printing use on the site were often highly toxic, many of which were ultimately banned. In particular, he is concerned about the potential use of trichloroethylene, which was used in the industry for the clean-up of printing presses. This is now a banned substance. Even if the operators were scrupulous in their use of this material, if there was a crack in the drainage system, there could be soils contamination. Therefore, I ask that this topic be addressed through soils testing, including for lead and heavy metals, as well as vapor intrusions inside the building. Any soils testing that has been done should be made public.

Karla Noyes, 15549 Brookview Drive, Sonoma, referred to the letter submitted by David Eicher, who could not attend tonight's meeting. This letter raises questions about the lack of a housing component as called for in the Commercial zone and suggests that the EIR should include an alternative with a housing component in order to be considered complete. The letter asserts that the 62-room hotel building is not consistent with other buildings in the historic overlay zone, contrary to the design guidelines set forth in the Development Code. She questioned how the EIR could conclude that impacts related to greenhouse gas emissions would be less-than-significant when 90 percent of workers in Sonoma commute from outside of city limits. This impacts traffic as well as GHG emissions. Assuming that hotel guests will not use their cars after they check in is a fallacy. The traffic study fails to take into account that a major reason for traffic back-ups in the Plaza area is caused by vehicles waiting for pedestrians to cross the street. The EIR states that the project would add pedestrians to an intersection that has been identified as deficient. The traffic study should be conducted during the peak tourism season in order to identify the true impacts of the project. The intersection operation of First West/West Napa and First East/East Napa should be included in the traffic study.

Fred Allebach, 19550 Eighth Street East, referred to the written comments that he has previously submitted. In his view, with regard to the cumulative net increase in pollutants and GHG emissions generated by the project, this estimate should include estimates of air travel by hotel guests, not just employee traffic. The scope of the current analysis is too narrow. Do we not have a global problem? We cannot just keep adding more. In his view, the County's Climate Action Plan suffers from a similar deficiency. He asked what the window is to challenge a CEQA determination. In terms of hydrology and water, with respect to water obtained from the Sonoma County Water Agency (SCWA), the EIR finds that the project will use approximately 5.7 million gallons per year, which he calculates as amounting to 16-17 acre feet. He asked why, if we have adequate water, residents and business owners are being asked to conserve during this drought? In his view this, a significant environmental issue to the public, but it is not characterized in that way in the EIR.

With regard to traffic, he noted that the EIR concludes that intersections in the vicinity of the project will continue to operate at an acceptable level of service as defined by the thresholds adopted by the City. He stated that it was his understanding that in the update of the Circulation Element, many Plaza intersections will be exempted from level of service standards in order to preserve the historic character of the Plaza. In his view, that does not follow. Why analyze them if they are going to be exempt from the standards. These concerns also relate to the topic of "conflict with an adopted congestion management plan." He asked how thresholds or significance are defined, as the term "significance" often seems to lack meaning. For example, the people he talks to view traffic congestion in the Plaza as significantly bad while the EIR apparently does not. In terms of the topic of "conflicts that would decrease the performance of intersections", he is glad to see that with respect to pedestrian uses the potential cumulative impact at the intersection of First West/West Napa Street is regarded as potentially significant. However, he does not see how bike lanes will address this issue. In his view, some form of pedestrian traffic control should be provided.

Bonnie Brown, Sonoma Valley resident, questioned the finding that the Chateau Sonoma building is not historically significant. This appears to be based on the Page and Turnbull report that was prepared several years ago. In her view, the report is woefully inadequate as it does not describe when the building was built, what businesses occupied it, or what people owned it. The Index-Tribune building was once considered to be not historically significant but its stature has changed. Now, it is considered to be historically-significant, based on its association with the Lynch family. As wonderful as that family may be, in her view it is elitist to value them over the businesses that took place in the Chateau Sonoma building. In her view, the possibility exists that the status of the Chateau Sonoma building could also change based on further study, She has gone to the League for Historic Preservation to look into the history of the building, but nothing was found. In her view, there should be a thorough historical report on the Chateau Sonoma building addressing when it was built, who owned it, and what businesses were there. The historical analysis should be prepared by a local resident. With regard to the underground parking structure, the EIR states that dewater would be needed but the volume of water would be low and would occur at a shallow strata of the aquifer. In other words we are taking water from an aquifer—that is asking for trouble. If a project to be built in Sonoma requires underground parking that is a clue that it is too big. The EIR states that the City has sufficient water to accommodate projected growth through the year 2035. That's 19 years from now. Where we will get our water after that? This project will use 5.7 million gallons per year, yet we are called upon to reduce out water use. That does not seem right. In her view, parking should be considered a significant environmental impact. With regard to impacts on intersections, the EIR states that the project generate about 310 daily trips. Does this include employee traffic? There should be a thorough traffic analysis. The EIR states that the average delay in making a turn into the project from West Napa Street would be 11 seconds. When there are tourists and commuters on West Napa, turning left will be difficult. In her view, the estimated delay is not realistic and the project will cause back-ups onto Broadway. This should be looked at again. With respect to pedestrians, we don't know what the mitigation will be. There is a point where you can mitigate in manner that violates you values. When that happens, tourists will stop coming and locals will no longer enjoy the community. With regard to sewage, there is a major problem that needs to be addressed. Also, I would like to ask about the two redwood trees on First Street West-- are they proposed for removal? She agreed with a previous speaker that the alternatives analysis should include a project with a housing component.

Carol Campbell, 307 West Spain Street, as always I am concerned about traffic and water, but it has also occurred to me that if the convention center has been removed from the project plan, then it seems likely to me that the General's Daughter and Ramekins will be used as wedding

venues, so has the traffic on West Spain Street that would occur as a result of this been considered? When I leave home and go through the square, pedestrians are often an issue and this project will contribute to that problem.

Marilyn Goode, Sonoma Valley resident, stated that she had not been able to submit comments on the project because she is in the middle of selling a family property in San Francisco that was next to a printing press and phase 1 and phase 2 environmental study addressing hazardous materials had been necessary as a result of that. The Chateau Sonoma building is charming and there should be old records on its history. She stated that she did not know if anyone was working in the printing press building or whether there were any underground storage tanks on the site, but in her view this should be addressed in the EIR.

Chair Felder closed the item to public comment.

Comm. Willers thanked those who made comments. In his review of the EIR, he had the following areas of concern. First, with regard to aesthetics, in his view the analysis in the EIR is lacking. A project of this size, located in a historically-significant part of town, requires a more thorough review. His primary concern is with regard to the western elevation as viewed from West Napa Street and from Second Street West. It represents a large wall that will not likely have much in the way screening, which affect how the historic structures in the area are perceived. A second area of concern is traffic. In his view, the analysis does not adequately address potential traffic on First Street West, as that could receive the majority of traffic exiting the site and will certainly be the main route from commercial drop-offs. The intersections of First Street West south of West Napa Street to Andrieux Street should be analyzed. Delivery vehicle routing needs to be defined and mitigated. Currently, the Post Office receives deliveries from Petaluma and in many cases the preferred route is down West MacArthur Street and from there to First Street West. The issues of water and sanitation are important. The statements made in tonight's public hearing needs to be investigated to ensure that this project will not affect the sanitation system in a negative way.

Comm. Heneveld stated that his primary concern was with the availability of water. Although there is a significant amount of water stored in local dams, it is provided via Dry Creek and the flows are regulated to protect fish. Gallons per day per capita is a figure used by the State but it does not address commercial use, so the analysis in the EIR should be more expansive in this area. He noted that the reason we are being asked to conserve water is in light of the State-wide drought not necessarily as a result of local conditions. He added that the comments about the sewer system were of concern to him and he would like to see a response.

Comm. Wellander stated that he wished to address three areas that were of concern to him. First, he is concerned about traffic and the estimate of 23-27 additional peak period trips seems low to him and he would like to make sure that the estimates encompass employee and restaurant traffic. In addition, it is his view that hotel guests will make day trips in their vehicles, which needs to be factored in. The concern expressed in the public hearing regarding soil contamination should be addressed given the historic uses of the building. Lastly, with regard to water, the discussion of the conservation plan (13.10), it refers to the purpose of conserving the water supply for the greatest public benefit. He would like to make sure that this is happening. With regard to cumulative impacts, he noted that in Section 4.11.1.4, the EIR makes reference to the 2020 General Plan, which was adopted in 2006, the 2010 Urban Water Management Plan. He would like to make sure that the most up-to-date information is used in evaluating cumulative impacts on water supply, especially in light of the drought conditions that have been experienced.

Comm. Cribb thanked the public for their comments. He wants to address the three issues of most concern to him. First, while he recalls that the Planning Commission discussed the issue of the housing component and whether it could be waived, to get clarity on the question, it should be addressed in the EIR. With regard to traffic, he has a somewhat different perspective. The assumption seems to be that because a 62-room hotel is proposed to be built, it will attract guests who otherwise would never have come to Sonoma. That seems unrealistic to him as it seems likely that many guests would have come to Sonoma anyway. To assume that they are all entirely new trips that would otherwise never have happened exaggerates the potential impact in his view. He noted that there was a printing plant on the site for many years. That use generated considerable truck traffic on a daily basis, far more than will be generated by the hotel. That has all gone away, so there is less truck traffic now. He noted that Ran's Restaurant on East Napa Street closed a few years ago, which has also reduced trips in the Plaza. In addition, he pointed out that services such as Uber tend to reduce traffic volumes. On the issue of potential soil contamination, while soils testing may be warranted, he read the article provided by Mr. Barnett, and it states that TCE was largely replaced in the 1950s, so it may not have been much in use on the site.

Comm. McDonald thanked the public for their comments. He agreed that the visual analysis and the cultural resources analysis needs to be strengthened and he would like to see it include accurate 3-D perspectives as that would make it much easier to understand how the project fits into its surroundings in the context of its surroundings, including the historically significant Plaza. He agrees that the western elevation, in particular, needs to be evaluated in terms of views from West Napa Street and Second Street West. With regard to traffic analysis and the GHG/air quality analysis, in his view, it needs to be verified that the traffic projects include buses, shuttles, taxis, limousines, and other ancillary vehicles. He noted that at the Sonoma Lodge, there are often large tour buses that frequent the site and are often idling for long periods of time. Based on the number of hotel rooms that are proposed, he is concerned that tour buses will serve the site, which would cause disruption to traffic and parking. On a related matter, he expressed concern that since the owner of the project also owns nearby event venues, there may be shuttles and other car trips to wedding parties and other types of events at these locations that might be packaged with a stay at the hotel. This possibility should be addressed in the traffic and air quality analysis. In terms of pedestrian safety and circulation, the ability to get vehicles in and out of the hotel at peak times is of concern and would seem to be a potentially cumulative impact. While noting this concept is perhaps outside of the scope of the project, he suggested that perhaps the City could consider stationing a police officer at Broadway/West Napa during peak periods.

Comm. Coleman thanked those who commented on the DEIR. With regard to air quality, he expressed concern that there could be as many as 12 cars idling in the drop-off area, where the air-flow is restricted by adjoining buildings, which could increase air quality concerns, especially if vehicles are delayed from entering West Napa Street due to peak hour traffic. He asked whether the hotel lobby and restaurant would have a positive air-pressure system. He noted that the intersection of Broadway and West Napa Street is wide and not controlled by a signal. He shares the concern expressed by Comm. Willers that delivery traffic on First Street West is an issue that should be looked at. He expressed concern that no funding had been allocated from improvements at any of the intersections under discussion. He asked whether there was any provision for composting organic waste from restaurants. He stated that it will be interesting to see whether the excavation for the underground parking area reveals any buried cultural resources. He asked whether the hotel would provide a light or other safety indicator to alert pedestrians on sidewalks near the driveways as to when a car is exiting the hotel. He asked if the hotel will direct cars to exit on First Street West when traffic is backed up on West Napa

Street and what affect that might have on First Street West. He asked whether the West Napa Street access had been designed to accommodate fire trucks.

Chair Felder thanked the EIR preparers and those who commented on the DEIR. He stated that in his view the draft was flawed in many respects, as he felt that in too many areas the EIR finding was that the impact is less-than-significant, which does not meet the common sense standard. In order for mitigation to occur, an impact has to found to be significant, so when too many things are categorized as insignificant, there isn't adequate mitigation. He stated that he was concerned about the issues raised regarding the sewer system and there has to be a response to this. He also agrees that soils contamination has to be considered. He is concerned that cumulative impacts are too often dismissed in the EIR. With regard to traffic, he is concerned that the draft EIR underestimates the traffic generation of a project this size. A proposal this size implies it is too large for the site and only adds to the traffic impact. In his experience, there are many times during the day when there is traffic congestion in both directions. To add a 62-room hotel and an 80-seat restaurant and say that there will not be significant traffic created is not credible. It should not be assumed that guests of the hotel will not take day trips using their automobiles. That and the additional pedestrian usage will increase congestion around the Plaza. Also, while he understands that parking will not be addressed in the EIR, when there is a proposal that has a deficiency of 51 spaces, that will only add to the traffic impact. If the project goes forward, the City should recognize that the project will have significant impacts and require the project to mitigate those impacts. With regard to water, the State has experienced a drought for the last several years and the City is under mandatory conservation water restrictions. The EIR estimates that the hotel will use 5.7 million gallons of water per year, following voluntary water conservation methods. That number equates to seven single-family homes, which seems low. But whatever the number is, that is water that is gone, so there needs to be a meaningful way to conserve water or develop new water resources, but the City does not have funding to do that. The City does not have guarantees that the Water Agency will give us the water it needs. The State could step in say that Water Agency cannot deliver any more water to the City, in which case we would have to rely on our wells. To my mind, this means that the City should require a development impact fee that addresses water demand, which could be used for programs such as recharging the aquifer. How can it be said that there is a less-than-significant impact in terms of water demand, when residents are being required to conserve? The EIR should be more realistic in identifying impacts that require mitigation, including development impact fees.

Comm. Willers made a motion to accept the comments that have been made and to direct the preparation of a Final EIR, following the close of the comment period. Comm. McDonald seconded. The motion was unanimously adopted.

Comments from the Audience: None

Chair Felder thanked Comm. Heneveld for his years of service on the Planning Commission, and was joined in that by his fellow Commissioners. Comm. Heneveld made a motion to adjourn. Comm. Cribb seconded. The motion was unanimously adopted.

Adjournment: The meeting adjourned at 9:36 p.m. to the next regular meeting scheduled for 6:30 p.m. on Thursday, March 10, 2016.

I HEREBY CERTIFY that the foregoing minutes were duly and regularly adopted at a regular meeting of the Sonoma Planning Commission on the 14th day of April, 2016.

Approved:

Cristina Morris, Administrative Assistant