

County Planning staff and Planning Commissioners,

I am writing to provide additional overview of my business plan and to address concerns raised by a few of my neighbors regarding my application for a Conditional Use Permit for Ridgefield Events.

I have owned my property and made it my home for the last 20 years. I have raised my 4 children here and nursed my wife as she succumbed to cancer here. Her ashes are spread here, and I hold this property very close in my heart. As a result, I made the decision a few years ago to gift the City of Arcata (with no compensation) a conservation easement over my 75 acres of timber land to honor her memory, to protect it from development, and to expand the habitat of the Arcata Community Forest which borders my property. I finalized this gift to the city last November and am excited to have ensured that this property will remain protected from development in perpetuity.

The gift of the conservation easement to the city of Arcata and the operation of Ridgefield as an events venue are two halves of a sustainable business strategy. The conservation easement protects this land from development and augments the habitat of the Arcata Community Forest, while Ridgefield builds on that protection by inviting people to celebrate the redwood forest with zero waste events and very low environmental impact. Unlike the traditional development model (housing construction) that I elected to forego, this is a sustainable business model and will bring much needed tourism dollars to our region. Given the changes in State Housing Law, I could have pursued property development on my 78 acres that would mean an additional 12 homes and ADU's on my property. With the conservation easement, that will never happen, but I think it's important to see concerns about noise from occasional events against the backdrop of the alternative development model and its noise and traffic impacts. I have thought carefully about how to minimize any impacts to the environment and my neighbors.

I appreciate the support of neighbors who are in favor of my project and am also grateful for the concerns that were raised by other neighbors, and the opportunity to address their concerns. I would like to point out that there are approximately 40 households within the noticed area. Of those 40 households, only 2 were opposed, 2 expressed concerns, and 4 were in favor of the proposal. Additionally, because of the size of my parcel, the noticing requirements (450 feet from property boundary) included neighbors up to ¼ mile (1,320 feet) from my event area. Both of the neighbors who are opposed to my application are more than 1,000 feet from my event area, and there are more than 20 neighbors who actually live *closer* to my event space and were either unconcerned (didn't write in) or wrote to support my project. One neighbor, Dave White, stated that his residence was "approximately 400' west of the proposed venue" and that our nearest neighbor was "200' away". With all due respect to Mr. White and his concerns, these figures are not even remotely accurate. Our nearest neighbor (who wrote to support our project), is more than 400' away and Mr. White's residence is more than 1000' west of our venue. These distances are easy for anyone to see on google earth.

Here are my responses to the concerns that were raised:

***“What about fire danger?”*** Two years ago, in preparation for gifting the conservation easement to Arcata, I worked with the City’s foresters (BBW Foresters) to conduct a fire hazard fuel reduction operation which was overseen by Calfire. The purpose of this operation was to reduce fuel loads in the forest, improve forest health, and make our forested lands less susceptible to fire. The work included thinning the forest and mulching the forest floor to reduce fuel loads in areas around structures on our property. Then, last summer, we conducted a habitat restoration logging operation across the rest of our forest lands which improved forest health, restored habitat, and further reduced fire risks in our forests. This work, in conjunction with the many acres of meadow that I keep carefully mowed, means that my property actually serves as a fire break for my entire neighborhood. Additionally, if there were to be a fire, I have 20,000 gallons of water stored on my property. This water was utilized just this past year to extinguish a fire further up Fickle Hill by the Arcata Fire Department, with whom we have a water sharing agreement. Instead of being a fire risk, my property is a net benefit to local fire safety.

***“What about water usage and septic?”*** By design, events at Ridgefield will have almost no measurable impact on my onsite water capacity or septic system. First, we have rental agreements with two local companies (*Queen of Thrones* and *6 Rivers Portable Toilets*) that deliver trailered restrooms to our events. These 4-stall trailers come self-contained with their own water and power supply and require no additional water from Ridgefield for flushing or hand washing. Additionally, the trailers are then removed after events and all septic waste is disposed of offsite. As such, there is no impact on our water or septic system for restroom needs associated with our events.

Catering is done offsite, along with whatever water needs are associated with the cooking and food preparation. Our rental partners (*Party Place* and *North Coast Events and Rentals*) deliver plates, cups, and silverware to our events and then remove them afterwards for offsite washing. As such, food preparation and dish cleaning are both accomplished offsite with no impact to our onsite water supply.

Lastly, the Crestview Water Company is located on our property and serves 8 households on Fickle Hill. The members of the Crestview Water Company all support my project because they recognize the increase both to their property values and the quality of their water supply since I donated my property (including the water system) into the conservation easement. Put another way, the neighbors with the most to lose are all in support of my project.

***“What about website information?”*** I appreciate the careful reading of my website by my neighbors that discovered the discrepancies between my website and my operations plan. The website information has been corrected to reflect our operations plan. Specifically, we have a hard-stop for our events at 9:30pm (earlier than the noise ordinance in Arcata which is 10pm) and while we have the parking capacity for larger events, we are not targeting them. We are focusing on smaller events as they are easier for us to manage and have less impact on our venue and our neighbors.

***“What about impacts on property values?”*** The fact that we have protected our property from development, have invested in making it as fire safe as possible, have both a commercial water system and a private well with ample water storage and an access agreement with the Arcata Fire protection district are all factors that bolster and support property values, not diminish them.

***“What about noise and road impacts?”*** Ridgefield exists in a neighborhood that already hosts significant industrial activity, namely logging, throughout the same season that Ridgefield would operate. The noise and road impacts from logging operations (Arcata community forest, Green Diamond, and McAdam timber properties), dwarf any such impacts from our small venue. The noise impacts from logging begin at 5am and run for 12-14 hours daily when logging operations are being conducted, 6 days a week. The road impacts from hundreds of logging trucks are also very significant. All of us as neighbors are accustomed to this activity, and the impacts it has on our noise and driving experiences. I am not suggesting that Ridgefield will have no road or sound impacts, rather, I am pointing out that these impacts are small and will occur in an existing noise-scape that dwarfs Ridgefield’s impact.

Our contract clearly states that all loud music will be turned off by 9:30pm at latest. Many events end earlier or will not have music at all. In response to neighbor’s concerns, I am investigating upgrades to our sound system with directional sound baffling that will further minimize noise impacts, and I will make sure that amplified music is projected away from neighbor’s homes.

I have addressed road concerns by utilizing the shuttle services available from local hotels, cab companies, and private shuttle services. These 20 person vans safely deliver guests to our venue. Additionally, I always encourage guests to leave their vehicles at Ridgefield if they need to catch a safe ride and return to collect their vehicles the next day. Because most of our events are smaller in size, the traffic impacts will be negligible.

Our track record speaks for itself – in the past 17 years of holding weddings and gatherings for friends and family, we have not had a single noise complaint or traffic issue. Ridgefield will continue to be an unobtrusive neighbor, and a positive business in our community.

In conclusion, many neighbors, along with Arcata City manager Karen Diemer, Arcata Chamber Director & Mayor Meredith Mathews, all support our project. We have hosted events privately for almost 2 decades without any problems and are committed to continuing to be a quality event venue, focused on zero waste and sustainability, that is also a good neighbor in our community.

Thank you for your consideration and time,

Scott Davies