



COUNTY OF HUMBOLDT

For the meeting of: 9/4/2025

File #: 25-1080

To: Planning Commission

From: Planning and Building Department

Agenda Section: Public Hearing

SUBJECT:

Ridgefield Events; Conditional Use Permit
Assessor Parcel Number: 500-011-024
Record Number: PLN-2024-18885-MOD1
Arcata area

A modification to PLN-2024-18885- for the CUP to allow for up to 14 guests to stay overnight in the existing residence and to increase the maximum number of events to 40 events per year and the maximum number of guests to 175 per event. The current CUP allows use of the property as a seasonal venue for special events (primarily weddings) between April and October with a maximum of 30 events per year and a maximum of 120 guests per event. Elopement events are scheduled Monday through Thursday (typically between 2-20 guests max) and weddings on Friday through Sunday (typically between 30-120 guests). Hours of operations are 9:30am to 9:30pm, with guests on site generally from 1pm to 9:30pm. Events are centered in the terrace area in front of the existing residence. Portable toilets are used during events and on-site parking is available. Food for events is provided through off-site catering.

RECOMMENDATION(S):

That the Planning Commission:

1. Adopt the resolution (Attachment 1), which does the following:
 - a. Finds that the proposed project complies with the General Plan and Zoning Ordinance; and
 - b. Finds the project exempt from further environmental review pursuant to Section 15301 *Existing Facilities* of the State CEQA Guidelines, and that there is no substantial evidence that the project will have a significant effect on the environment; and
 - c. Approves the Ridgefield Events Conditional Use Permit Modification subject to the

conditions of approval (Attachment 1A).

DISCUSSION:

Project Location: This project is in the Arcata area, on the northeast side of Fickle Hill Road, approximately 800 feet northeast of the intersection of Wagon Jack Lane and Fickle Hill Road, on the property known as 2242 Fickle Hill Road.

Present Plan Land Use Designations: Residential Estates and Timberland (RE2.5-5, T) Humboldt County General Plan, Density: 2.5 to 5 acres per dwelling unit, Slope: Low/High Instability (1/3).

Present Zoning: Timber Production Zone (TPZ).

California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA): The project is categorically exempt from environmental review pursuant to Sections 15301 *Existing Facilities* and 15304(e) *Minor Alterations to Land* of the CEQA Guidelines.

State Appeal Status: Project is not appealable to the California Coastal Commission.

Major Issues: None.

Executive Summary: The applicant is seeking a Modification to the originally approved Conditional Use Permit PLN-18885-CUP to authorize the use of the onsite residence to allow up to 14 guests to stay at the venue for anywhere from one to three days. The original permit was approved for special events (primarily weddings) between April to October in the Fickle Hill area. The 79-acre parcel is zoned Timberland Production Zone (TPZ) and is developed with a single-family residence. There is an outdoor terrace area in the northwest corner of the Site, which is where all events are centered.

The special events venue currently operates from mid- April to mid-October with events occurring Monday - Sunday, with a maximum of 30 events annually and the modification would allow for up to 40 events annually. The special events, which are primarily weddings, currently include up to 120 guests and the modification would allow for up to 175 guests during any one event. The hours of operation are from 9:30 am to no later than 9:30 pm with guests on site generally between 1:00 pm to no later than 9:30 pm. This modification would allow for up to 14 guests to stay at the venue for 24 hours a day for up to 3 days, only in association with a permitted special event. Up to twelve (12) overnight guests would utilize the Main House and another two (2) guests would utilize the Wild Iris Suite. Parking of the overnight guests would remain in the onsite designated area as previously approved under PLN-2024-18885. Finally, quiet hours would be enforced by onsite management between 9:30pm and 8am. The site receives electrical power from PG&E which will be utilized to power the existing residence onsite, as well as onsite lighting and venue accessories.

The modification to allow for up to 14 guests to stay at the venue for anywhere from one to three

days has the potential to reduce the number of weddings from up to three wedding events on a weekend to only one. According to the applicant this could reduce the amount of traffic and noise from 50%-70% (Attachment 5, permit holder's letter to neighboring property owners dated March 19, 2025). While the allowance for overnight events would allow for a potential reduction in events per weekend, the modification would allow for up to 25% more events to occur per year. This change is primarily to allow the business to have maximum flexibility in how they operate. If every event included overnight stays it is unlikely that the maximum number of events would occur in that year. The modification to allow an additional number of guests, from 120 to 175 would also provide for additional flexibility for the business. Both the Department of Public Works and the Division of Environmental Health have indicated that the change in number of events and maximum number of people raise no additional concerns.

The subject parcel is served by a small water system, groundwater well and an On-site Wastewater Treatment System (OWTS). The applicant recently had a new commercial septic system installed that can accommodate the guests at the property, as well as ADA restrooms. The property will not be available to be rented by the general public and will only include overnight stays that are directly related to a hosted special event.

This special events venue was approved by the Humboldt County Planning Commission on April 4, 2024. Concerns at the time related primarily to noise and traffic. The venue site is surrounded on three sides by timberland. The closest residence to the west is 300 feet away and there are three other residences to the west that are between 565 and 800 feet from the venue location. The conditions of approval included restrictions on event-related noise requiring that speakers be directed inward and away from the nearest property lines. Since approval of the permit, the county has received no complaints related to noise. Access to the subject parcel is from Fickle Hill Road, which is a paved, County-maintained Road without pedestrian facilities. Conditions of approval of the permit required the applicant to improve the driveway apron at Fickle Hill to commercial standards, ensure visibility at the driveway meets County standards, obtain an encroachment permit for this work, apply for and obtain an annual permit from the Public Works Land Use office and to provide temporary traffic control during each event as well as to provide additional insurance to the County. Since approval of the permit the county has received no complaints related to traffic. Given that there have been no complaints received relating to traffic or noise and these were the primary concerns during consideration of the permit in 2024, it indicates that the events are well managed to avoid nuisance impacts.

In April of 2025 the County found that the website was advertising the event facility as offering overnight lodging and special events with a capacity for up to 300 people, both of which were not consistent with the approved permit. Upon contacting the operator, it was explained that the website was based on an out-of-date business plan which had not been updated to reflect what had been approved in 2024.

On March 19, 2025, the permit holder sent a Good Neighbor Letter to the surrounding residences regarding the intention of modifying the current permit (Attachment 5). On August 7, 2025, Public Notice was sent parcels in the surrounding 300-foot radius of the subject parcel. Since that date, the Planning Department has received several comments from local residents.

Public Comments: The purpose of the Public Notice was to inform the neighborhood of the pending modification to the Conditional Use Permit and provide an opportunity for the public to comment on the application prior to the hearing. As of August 29, 2025, approximately eight comment letters (or emails) were received. seven of the letters *opposed* the approval of the modification while one letter *approved* of the change to the Conditional Use Permit (Attachment 6).

Several comments of opposition referenced the loud music and noise produced by the events. Other concerns centered around use of water, traffic, fire risk, wastewater, and alcohol use. Many of the concerns described were identified during staff analysis of the originally approved project. These concerns were to be mitigated by the Conditions of Approval for the original project, but commenters stated that these conditions did not alleviate their concerns. The one letter of support which was provided by the applicant which he received regarding the “Good Neighbor Letter” expressed the noise was not at loud volume from their property and event traffic had not impacted them (included in Attachment 6).

OTHER AGENCY INVOLVEMENT:

The project was referred to responsible agencies and all responding agencies have either responded with no comment or recommended approval or conditional approval. (Attachment 4).

ALTERNATIVES TO STAFF RECOMMENDATIONS:

The Planning Commission could elect to add conditions of approval. The Planning Commission could elect not to approve the project, or to require the applicant to submit further evidence, or modify the project. These alternatives could be implemented if the Planning Commission is unable to make all of the required findings.

ATTACHMENTS:

1. Draft Resolution
 - A. Conditions of Approval
 - B. Operations Plan
 - C. Additional Revised Operations Plan
 - D. Site Plan
2. Applicant’s Evidence in Support of the Required Findings
3. Department of Environmental Health approved OWTs

4. Referral Agency Comments and Recommendations
5. Dear Ridgefield Neighbor Letter
6. Public Comments

Applicant

Ridgefield Events
Attn: Scott Davies
2242 Fickle Hill Road
Arcata, CA 95521

Owners

Robert Davies and Christina Marie Stenborg Living Trust
Attn: Jonathan Westleigh Stenborg-Davies
445 ½ Tanglewood Road
Arcata, CA 95521

Agent

Same as Applicant.

Please contact Michael Kein, Associate Planner, at 707-268-3739-5054 or by email at MKein2@co.humboldt.ca.us, if you have any questions about the scheduled item.