



COUNTY OF SONOMA
PERMIT AND RESOURCE MANAGEMENT DEPARTMENT

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25 August 2016

Honorable Raima Ballinger
Hall of Justice
600 Administration Drive
Santa Rosa, California 95403

Dear Judge Ballinger:

Thank you for the 2015-2016 Sonoma County Civil Grand Jury Report on the Permit and Resource Management Department. On behalf of our staff, thank you for the opportunity to review and comment on the information.

Please find below our responses to the Grand Jury's recommendations.

FINDINGS

F6. Private sector developers, including individual homeowners with granny unit potential, are often stymied in their efforts to pursue development opportunities due to high unit-based permitting costs, long bureaucratic delays, neighborhood opposition and CEQA compliance.

We partially agree with this finding.

Many policies are already in place to streamline and reduce the cost of developing additional dwelling units, especially regarding delays, neighborhood opposition and CEQA compliance. Granny units are a permitted use on qualifying parcels and are exempt from CEQA review. Housing development of all densities is allowed by-right on appropriately designated sites, removing the potential for neighborhood opposition related to land use. Residential projects that meet their required affordable housing program contribution by providing units on site are fast-tracked through the approval and plan check processes.

Despite the factors cited above, the Department recognizes that high per-unit costs may dissuade developers from building new housing, especially on smaller infill sites. The Board authorizes impact fees based on recommendations from the departments responsible for providing those services. Transportation and Public Works Department recommends impact fees for road maintenance, Regional Parks Department recommends impact fees for parks maintenance, and the Permit and Resource Management Department recommends impact fees for affordable housing. To reduce costs for smaller developments, the affordable housing fee is graduated in ten square foot increments with no cost for the first 1,000 square feet.

F7. Area Specific Plans can accelerate the development approval process and would facilitate private development.

We agree with this finding.

The County is preparing two specific plans for the Airport Investment Area and the Sonoma Springs Area that will accelerate the permit process and, therefore, will facilitate housing development.

Raima Ballinger

Superior Court Judge

Date: 8.31.16

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SUPERIOR COURT OF CALIFORNIA
COUNTY OF SONOMA

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BY *RF*
Deputy Clerk

F9. The impact of vacation rentals have on the overall supply of housing in the County is difficult to quantify.

We agree with this finding.

RECOMMENDATIONS

R1. The Sonoma County Permit and Resource Management Department and the City of Santa Rosa Planning and Economic Development Department reduce impact fees where possible by changing from per unit to per square foot calculation and prioritize working with for-profit developers by continuing to improve permitting turnaround time (F5, F6).

Response: This recommendation may be implemented in the future.

The County enacted its latest housing impact fees on 12 June 2012. The fee schedule places no charge on the first 1,000 square feet of structure and then follows a progressive formula increasing in ten square foot increments to 4,400 square feet/\$33,326.00. Square footage greater than 4,400 receives a charge of \$7.57/square foot. The schedule can be found at http://www.sonoma-county.org/prmd/housing/ahfees_2016.pdf. The Permit and Resource Management Department will re-evaluate the housing impact fee in 2017 and make a recommendation for adjustments to the Board of Supervisors for consideration. Impact fees for parks and roads are approved by the Board based on recommendations from the departments responsible for providing those services. PRMD simply collects fees for these other agencies.

Thank you for taking the time to recommend improvements for Permit and Resource Management Department. I and my staff particularly enjoyed working with the Grand Jury Housing Committee. It is gratifying to know citizens so committed to housing for all in Sonoma County. If you have any questions about our agency or this response, please contact me at Tennis.Wick@sonoma-county.org or 707-565-1925.

Sincerely,



Tennis Wick, AICP
Director

c: Sonoma County Board of Supervisors
Veronica Ferguson, County Administrator
William Rousseau, County Clerk
2016-17 Grand Jury