

September 18, 2025

Clerk of the Board of Supervisors  
Humboldt County Courthouse, Room #111  
825 5<sup>th</sup> Street  
Eureka, CA 95501

RE: Appeal of Planning Commission Approval of Modification PLN-2025-18885MOD01

On Monday September 15<sup>th</sup> I filed an appeal of the Planning Commission's recent approval during the September 4, 2025 Planning Commission Meeting of PLN-2025-18885MOD01. While this appeal was filed in my name, I am presently acting as a spokesperson for a group of six concerned neighborhood land owners and residents who met on September 10<sup>th</sup> to discuss whether or not we believed there were grounds for an appeal. These six current members of this neighborhood group are:

1. Kenneth and Margaret Stumpf owners of 2300 and 2340 Fickle Hill Road;
2. Lorien and Tony Sanchez, owners of 2262 Fickle Hill Road;
3. David and Donna White, owners of 2066 Fickle Hill Road;
4. Phylis Geller, owner of 33 Inga Lane;
5. Ethan Heifetz and Lesley Hull, owners of 2450 and 2476 Fickle Hill Road; and
6. John Bergenske, owner of 26 Wagon Jack Lane, 56 Wagon Jack Lane, and 2145 Fickle Hill Road.

As neighbors of Ridgefield Events, which is located to the east, northeast, and north of all of us in this neighborhood by as much as a ¼ mile away, we found the resulting decision by the Planning Commission to approve the proposed modification by a 4-0 vote to be the result of what we observed to be a flawed process.

Some of us, based on past discussions with Scott Davies, initially gave our support to his application for a **temporary** Conditional Use Permit to operate what has become the Ridgefield Events venue. All of us, after not even two full seasons of venue operations, have reversed our positions and no longer support his efforts. He has had his chances to manage the venue so it would not impact and disturb us, but the disturbances continue. Based on his actions, statements, and mismanagement of just the venue's noise we no longer believe that he is committed to this neighborhood, especially in light of the fact that he has moved out of the residence at 2242 Fickle Hill Rd and no longer resides on the property.

Many of us had never attended a public hearing of this nature and were unfamiliar with all the workings of the hearing other than to know that we had a 3-minute time limit during which to provide our input. As a result, we all came with prepared statements designed to fit within the three-minute limit, which was adhered to during our Public Comment period. No one spoke in support of the modification and all who did speak were stopped at the three-minute limit. Not one of us knew what information Scott Davies, the applicant **representing Ridgefield Events**, was going to present and we certainly didn't know how he was going to respond to our concerns

and issues regarding the proposed increase in the number of events (from 30 to 40) and guests (from 125 to 175), as well as the allowance of up to 3-day overnight stays (for up to 14 guests).

After hearing many misstatements, inaccurate responses, deflections, and complete failures to answer some very pertinent questions from the Planning Commission regarding his operations we found that there was not an opportunity to provide any rebuttal, a right that was given to the applicant, but not the concerned neighbors. We also found there was no opportunity to pose questions to the Planning Commission that we believed they should have considered regarding the proposed modification; one such question is “Why are you discussing an increase in number of guests to 175 **guests**, and subsequently reducing it down to an increase of 150 **guests** (which was eventually approved), when the recent large scale septic system noted in the modification was for a maximum of 150 **people (not guests)?**” The applicant had touted during the hearing to having a substantial number of employees present over 2 8-hour shifts for the large events to service parking, traffic, and service of food and alcohol, as well as other management staff and vendors making deliveries. The Planning Commission never recognized the apparent difference between **guests** and **guests plus employees** at the venue using a septic system designed for only 150 people. One Commissioner did ask the applicant how many employees he had, but in response the applicant hemmed and hawed and never did answer the question.

As a result, one of the main reasons for this appeal is that it provides the neighborhood with a chance to rebut what the applicant provided as public testimony and correct the public record, so that a rational common-sense decision is made for this neighborhood instead of a decision that is detrimental to this neighborhood and basically only benefits Ridgefield Events. The neighborhood submitted comments against the adoption of the modification in the amount of 18-1. We believe that an **opportunity to rebut prior testimony by the applicant** that he provided to the Planning Commission that they subsequently did not question and that may have influenced their decision to approve this modification is but one valid reason to appeal the approval of this modification.

Furthermore, after some discussion, we agreed that we should also appeal the approval of the modification based on some of the **procedural issues** we observed regarding the actual hearing and the **lack of due diligence** on the part of the Planning Commission to adequately consider, review, and question materials submitted by both the applicant Scott Davies and the many members of this neighborhood who participated in the public hearing and/or submitted written responses to the proposed modification by the deadline of 12 pm on September 4, 2025.

One procedural issue regards the request (emailed on August 29<sup>th</sup> and contained in the Public record) to delay the hearing until California Highway Patrol (CHP) information requested in late August under the California Public Records Act regarding under-the-influence accidents, incidents, and arrests on Fickle Hill Rd over the last 10 years could be received, summarized, and analyzed to determine if there had been an increase in under-the-influence problems since the start of the venue. A delay was not granted and we were told by email on August 29<sup>th</sup> “I know you want to provide CHP data, but that may not present any relevant data. Your experience as a neighbor is relevant.” I’m sorry, but since when is under-the-influence data that may be related to an entertainment venue serving alcohol and potentially releasing many

possibly “buzzed” or under-the-influence drivers late at night on a hazardous road they are likely unfamiliar with not a relevant issue? Such data would either confirm that there is or is not a potential problem with increasing the number of guests and number of events at the venue. It is relevant either way. The email further suggested that we rely on the Planning Commission to recognize this request for a delay and they would grant a delay or an extension based on this prior request if they thought under-the-influence driving was a significant issue in this matter. The Planning Commission never even considered the potential increases in under-the-influence drivers as an issue, as it was neither addressed nor questioned during the Planning Commission’s discussion of this modification. I contacted both the CHP and the Humboldt County Sheriff’s Office and they do believe that under-the-influence driving is a serious and relevant issue in Humboldt County. However, it apparently is not viewed as an issue or concern when considering a modification to a Conditional Use Permit that in all likelihood can only increase the potential for such problems. As for the statement “Your experience as a neighbor is relevant” I beg to disagree. 18 neighbors were complainants versus one old letter of support from back in March before all the problems this summer. An 18-1 difference in the type of written comments as well as every single oral presentation by neighbors seems to have had absolutely no bearing or relevancy to how the Planning Commission decided this proposed modification.

Please note that we are now also requesting from the City of Arcata Police department under-the-influence accident, incident, and arrest information for at least the past 5 years to determine under-the-influence events further down Fickle Hill Road after it enters the City of Arcata.

Another example of a procedural issue during the hearing is that during the Public Comment period no one was allowed more than 3 minutes. I personally asked for more time; “Could I use my wife’s 3 minutes? She’s here” I asked. I had six questions I wanted to ask based on Scott Davies’ presentation and desperately wanted to rebut points he had made during his presentation, but was told “No” so that ended my presentation. However, during Scott Davies’ 3-minute rebuttal he went over the 3 minutes; the clock kept ticking, and no one on the Planning Commission cut him off. The clock ticked past 4 minutes and continued and still he was not cut off. The clock was then shut off at approximately 4:19 and he continued to talk. I have not had a chance to review the video, but I’d estimate he may have talked 5-6 minutes, whereas we were all cut off at 3 minutes. We view this as an inappropriate procedural issue of the Planning Commission. It certainly appeared as though they were granting the applicant special privileges, especially when you consider we had no chance to rebut the misstatements he made during his presentation and rebuttal.

An additional procedural issue we noted was that only two Commissioners appeared to be prepared for the meeting as it was delayed for at least 30 minutes until two other Commissioners were called and asked to attend, one who was apparently sick and the other who stated he’d been out fighting fire. The addition of both these Commissioners created the minimum quorum of 4 Commissioners. Given their state when they arrived, one sick who may not have planned on attending and one who admitted he was out fighting fire, we must question whether or not they had adequately prepared for the meeting, as it appeared neither planned to attend. One of these Commissioners even stated earlier in the meeting something to the effect that he wished he hadn’t come and that he had stayed home with his wife instead (I’ll provide

the statement verbatim after I can review the video). It did not appear to us that these Commissioners were adequately prepared for this Public Hearing. We believe matters, such as these, are also grounds for an appeal.

Lastly, given the complete lack of questions, comments, or discussion regarding any concerns mentioned by complainants, other than regarding noise, during the Planning Commission's Discussion of this modification, we question whether they even considered the other potential impacts associated with increasing the number of events, number of guests, and allowance of overnight stays.

The potential detrimental impacts that were NEVER questioned or discussed that relate to our concerns and issues involve:

1. The potential impacts of increased traffic on a hazardous poorly maintained county road like Fickle Hill Rd;
2. The potential increase in the number of potentially under-the-influence drivers that depart from the venue late at night and then drive approximately 2.3 miles (1.6 miles on County Road) on a narrow, winding, hazardous, 2-lane road until they are back on more normal city streets in Arcata.
3. The potential detrimental impacts on the local water table due to the increased consumption of water associated with more guests, more events, and overnight stays;
4. The potential detrimental impacts on the local water quality due to the increased human waste/effluent that is no longer collected in B&Bs and removed from the property but is instead now processed on site with a massive new septic system that may potentially impact the local water table and nearby springs used as water sources in the neighborhood;
5. The potential detrimental effects due to increased risk of igniting a catastrophic forest fire initiated by a careless guest or employee of the venue;
6. The potential detrimental impacts of loss of property value due to having to list "Noise Pollution" as a known defect on any future California Real Estate documents or contracts related to the sale of our property (see the Public Record Comment by Mark Burtchett of Benchmark Realty).

We believe that the Planning Commission's **failure to address even one of these issues** indicates a potential failure to perform due diligence while performing their responsibilities as Planning Commissioners. We believe this is another valid reason to protest the approval of this modification.

We have one other concern regarding due diligence. The Planning Commission never realized that the applicant had apparently circumvented their Commission when he switched his sanitation system under the Conditional Use Permit from temporary B&B type toilets to a

permanent 150-person massive and customized septic system. The implementation of this new system is of a permanent and likely costly nature that we believe should have been reviewed by the Planning Commission. We are concerned that this costly new septic system will be used in the future to justify continuance of this 5-year **temporary** Conditional Use Permit. It doesn't appear that the applicant is thinking this is a temporary venture, but is instead planning to make it a permanent recreational event venue. Can the applicant do the same with adding ADUs to the parcel and only needing administrative approval through the Building Department rather than being subject to a review, public hearing, and approval by the Planning Commission? It is of great concern to this neighborhood that the applicant is using his knowledge of the "ins-and-outs" of the different County departments and the planning and development processes to build piece by piece a large recreational resort that completely degrades our neighborhood and that we will have no way to prevent this from happening.

For all these reasons we ask that the approval of PLN-2025-18885-HUM be overturned by the Board of Supervisors. We also ask that either the Planning Commission or the Board of Supervisors either add conditions to the present Conditional Use Permit or enter into a stipulated agreement with Scott Davies and Ridgefield Events to cease all further improvements of a permanent nature on the property and that any heretofore improvements since the original Conditional Use Permit was issued shall not be deemed as a justification to renew or continue the current Conditional Use Permit in the future.

In closing, we as a neighborhood group have decided to take a proactive approach to protect our neighborhood. Of particular note is that we have started our own traffic study on Fickle Hill Road centered on the location of the Ridgefield Events venue and will be seeking grant funding for this study with the State Office of Traffic Safety, hopefully with the support of the Public Works Department. We are also all getting our potable water tested to develop a baseline level of water quality that can be compared with future samples. As previously noted, we are also requesting from the City of Arcata Police department under-the-influence accident, incident, and arrest information for at least the past 5 years to determine under-the-influence events further down Fickle Hill Road after it enters the City of Arcata. In the future we want to provide relevant data to the Planning Commission rather than deal solely with potential impacts that have apparently not been considered so far in the Planning Commission's decisions.

Sincerely,

Kenneth A. Stumpf  
Current Spokesperson for a Group of Concerned Fickle Hill Neighbors  
2300 Fickle Hill Road  
Arcata, CA 95521  
(707) 822-7737