



COUNTY OF SONOMA

PERMIT AND RESOURCE MANAGEMENT DEPARTMENT

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To: Sonoma County Design Review Committee

From: David Hardy, Project Planner

Re: Sea Ranch Lodge Expansion
PLP08-0011/ 60 Sea Walk Drive
APN: 122-200-009

Date: April 22, 2009

Introduction

Passport Resorts has filed an application to expand the Sea Ranch Lodge from the existing 20 rooms to a new, expanded Lodge with 60 units, some located where the existing lodge is and the balance located in the meadow north of the Lodge. The permits involved are a coastal permit, a use permit, a variance to exceed the height limits, and design review. The comments in this Preliminary Design Review memorandum are based upon the drawings dated March 24, 2009, prepared by BSA Architects/ Bull Stockwell Allen.

The 52-acre site is located along Highway 1 on coastal terrace with the currently developed area at the southern end of the parcel. The site is currently developed with two buildings: one containing the restaurant, post office, and general store and the other with the 20-room lodging complex. The site is adjacent to the first Sea Ranch condominium project, Condominium One built in 1965, which was designated a national Historic Landmark in 2005 because of its influence on contemporary architecture.

The project is subject to environmental review, which will be completed prior to a noticed public hearing before the Board of Zoning Adjustments on the use permit, coastal permit, and variance. Neither the staff report nor the environmental review documents have been completed. The purpose of this Design Review Committee preliminary review is to focus on consistency of the project with the Local Coastal Plan design guidelines for The Sea Ranch. Staff makes no recommendations at this time, and this memo is intended to lay out some of the issues and policies so the Design Review Committee can make a recommendation to the Board of Zoning Adjustments.

It should be noted that The Sea Ranch Association and its Design Review Committee have not yet formally commented on the project. The Sea Ranch Design Committee has expressed concerns, and those can be seen at the applicant's website for the project located online at <http://www.srlep.com>.

The Project

The proposal is to demolish a portion of the building that houses the restaurant, leaving the original post office and general store, but with more offices for lodge administration in a 8,504 square foot building. The portion with the restaurant, bar, and prior real estate office would be replaced with an open deck courtyard of approximately 300 SF linked by boardwalk to the general store/post office building, enabling site visitors to see the ocean from the parking lot and entry areas. The restaurant would be located on the main floor of a new 3-story, 23,882 SF lodge building, which would also house a spa on the lower floor and three guest rooms/suites on the upper floor. The restaurant consists of three dining rooms totaling 2,865 SF and a bar with 1,024 SF of seating area.

Connected to the lodge in a separate building, located approximately where the 20-lodging units exist, is what the

applicant calls the Fireside Room, which consists of four meeting rooms on three levels with a total of 2,760 SF, and 1,456 SF of lobby space. Total size of the building is 6,034 SF. The largest meeting area combines two rooms for a total of 1,438 SF, which would handle a group of approximately 96 people with tables and chairs, or more in a standing only setting. These three buildings are located within the existing hedgerow area of the current lodge complex and are screened from Highway 1 by Monterey cypress trees.

According to the applicant, the height of the current post office/restaurant building is approximately 32' 4", based upon the County's methodology of an average of the high and low points of natural grade under the building. The existing lodge, to be replaced, is approximately 31' 10". These heights exceed the 24-foot commercial height limit for buildings west of Highway 1. The applicant has requested a variance to allow a taller lodge building of approximately 46' 5" and a Fireside Room of 48' 8".

At the south end of the property, between the post office building and within 80 feet of the bluff, and closest to Condominium One, the applicant proposes to construct 13 more units in a two story building called the South Cluster. In the meadow north of the lodge, the applicant proposes 44 sleeping units in roughly four clusters dubbed the North Cluster (11 units), the Meadow Cluster (13 units), the Pool Cluster (with 9 units, lockers, spa, pool, and laundry), and the Hedgerow Cluster (11 units). The 44 units in the meadow are typical of The Sea Ranch architectural vernacular with shed roofs, and in some cases, sod roofs. These units are accessed by carts on paths. Guest cars are not permitted in the meadow, nor is guest parking provided there. Within the meadow, adjacent to Highway 1, the County of Sonoma Regional Parks Department has a beach access parking lot and restroom, identified in the Coastal Act as one of the five beach access points at The Sea Ranch. As originally configured, the meadow units blocked the view of the ocean; the reconfigured project has created a view corridor so that a person standing in the parking lot of the beach access can see Black Point and the ocean beyond.

The applicant proposes to rely on native plants for most of the landscaping. In the vicinity of the main lodge complex, the applicant proposes to remove 13 trees and to add 61 trees, to preserve the existing hedgerow.

Site Access

Access to the site is proposed to remain the same, coming in from Sea Walk Drive, which was constructed to serve Condominium One from Highway 1. Residents of Condominium One have requested that the main lodge access from Highway 1 be moved to the north, closer to the Black Point beach access, and the Local Coastal Plan policies suggest moving the lodge entry to the north as well but do not specify where. Location of the driveway is affected by several factors: wetlands delineated on the site plan, possible wetlands to the east side of Highway 1 not shown on the site plan, Caltrans considerations, the relationship to the Black Point access, and the configuration of the septic system relative to the Black Point access, the wetlands, and the hedgerows surrounding the existing lodge complex.

The LCP Access Plan Policy No. 9 (p. 73 of the LCP) states that the current road access is considered "temporary" and that "The new entrance road to the Lodge shall be used for public vehicular access to the pedestrian accessway." Nevertheless, the Black Point access was established with its own driveway to Highway 1. The effect of this particular policy, as with some of the other policies, is somewhat questionable given the passage of time and would require further analysis in light of the fact that the work is largely accomplished, albeit not entirely as the LCP suggests.

Relocating to the north affects site distance considerations because of a curve in Highway 1 at the site. The current speed limit of 45 MPH requires a site distance of approximately 500 feet, which could be reduced if the speed limit were reduced to 35 MPH. This would be up to Caltrans to determine. The site distance could also be enhanced by installing a retaining wall on the east side of Highway 1, on common area of The Sea Ranch Association and not under control of the applicant. This was proposed in a 1998 lodge expansion project that was ultimately withdrawn, sidetracked by wastewater issues. It should be noted that relocation of the Black Point access, as proposed in 1998, would require the consent of the County of Sonoma and the state Coastal Conservancy, which acquired the Black Point access easement and conveyed it to the County.

Parking

For the entire development, the applicant proposes to provide 131 parking spaces with an additional 17 spaces to be provided by valet double-parking for a total of 148.

Applying the standards of the Coastal Zoning Ordinance, staff calculates the hotel's required parking spaces at 159 spaces, and this analysis assumes that use of the spa and health facility will be limited to hotel guests only, and not to the public at large. The calculation goes as follows:

Hotel = 1 space per unit, plus 1 for the manager, or 61 spaces for 60 rooms

Restaurant = 1 space per 60 SF. With 2,865 SF of restaurant floor space, approximately 300 SF of outdoor seating next to the coffee bar, and the indoor bar area of 1,024 SF, the total of 4,189 SF of space would require 70 spaces.

Meeting Rooms = 1 per 100 SF, or 28 spaces for 2,760 SF

If meeting room usage were limited to hotel guests, then the parking would be adequate for the lodging facility. However, staff assumes that in the event of weddings or community events that draw largely on local residents, then parking may not be sufficient. The applicant could use a Transportation Demand Management program to support a reduced parking requirement. Such a program, perhaps including free monthly bus passes for employees, would likely be successful given that there is public transit available along Highway 1.

In addition to the lodging facilities, the project involves the general store and post office, with approximately 1,024 SF of retail floor space and counter area. At 1 space/200 SF for retail establishments, this standard would trigger the need for an additional 5 spaces, or a total of 164 for the project as a whole.

Local Coastal Plan Visual Resource and Design Guidelines

The Local Coastal Plan (LCP) is the document that guides development within the Coastal Zone. The County's original LCP was certified by the California Coastal Commission in 1980 but was revised shortly thereafter to reflect the Bane Bill, state legislation to resolve a dispute between The Sea Ranch Association, Oceanic Properties, the County and the Coastal Commission regarding coastal access. The LCP was revised and updated again, most recently in 2001 to reflect changes in the 1989 General Plan. In general terms, the County of Sonoma acts as an agent of the state Coastal Commission when it comes to permitting. This project does not involve a change to the LCP, and therefore, the County Board of Zoning Adjustments would be the decisionmaker for the project, unless it is appealed to the Board of Supervisors and from there to the Coastal Commission.

Consistency of a LCP is measured against the policies of the Coastal Act, codified as the Public Resources Code. The following Coastal Act policies support protection of the scenic qualities of the coast.

30251. The scenic and visual qualities of coastal areas shall be considered and protected as a resource of public importance. Permitted development shall be sited and designed to protect views to and along the ocean and scenic coastal areas, to minimize the alteration of natural landforms, to be visually compatible with the character of surrounding areas, and, where feasible, to restore and enhance visual quality in visually degraded areas. New development in highly scenic areas such as those designated in the California Coastline Preservation and Recreation Plan prepared by the Department of Parks and Recreation and by local government shall be subordinate to the character of its setting.

30253. New development shall:

- (1) Minimize risks to life and property in areas of high geologic, flood, and fire hazard.
- (2) Assure stability and structural integrity, and neither create nor contribute significantly to erosion, geologic instability, or destruction of the site or surrounding area or in any way require the construction of protective devices that would substantially alter natural landforms along bluffs and cliffs.

- (3) Be consistent with requirements imposed by an air pollution control district or the State Air Resources Control Board as to each particular development.
- (4) Minimize energy consumption and vehicle miles traveled.
- (5) Where appropriate, protect special communities and neighborhoods which, because of their unique characteristics, are popular visitor destination points for recreational uses.

Just as an LCP is measured against the Coastal Act, individual projects in the Coastal Zone are measured against the policies of the LCP. The Coastal Plan's Visual Resources section describes Sonoma County's coast as

“beautiful, rugged and varied. A typical coastal cross-section west to east would show ocean with a rocky intertidal zone, steep vertical bluff, coastal terrace, hillside, and ridge. The landscape is divided by the Gualala and Russian Rivers, and by numerous creeks and gullies with riparian vegetation, and by coastal villages and independent subdivisions.

The beauty and accessibility of Sonoma County's coast have made it a heavily used tourist and recreational area. A survey of travelers prepared as part of the Highway 1 Capacity Study revealed that for the majority of travelers, sight-seeing is the primary purpose of the trip to the Sonoma Coast. **The goal of the Visual Resources section is to prevent blockage or degradation of scenic views and to assure that development is compatible with the existing natural and man-made landscape.”**

There are numerous policies in the LCP that apply to the project, and they are listed below. But in general, the standard is that set forth above: prevent blockage of scenic views and assure compatibility of development with the existing natural and man-made landscape. To that end, staff believes that the project as currently configured complies with the policies set forth below. The original submittal did not, and the story poles placed in the fall of last year showed that from the Black Point beach access parking lot, the buildings in the meadow blocked what must be considered a Major View Point. The applicant reconfigured those units, set lower rooflines, and created a view corridor that allows a view of Black Point, the destination of the beach access. On the way, one walking the trail will still be looking at some sod roofs and lodging units.

Applicable text and policies of the LCP follow with their 2001 LCP Part I document page numbers in parentheses. Current staff comments relative to this project are in [brackets]. The entire document is available online at <http://www.sonoma-county.org/prmd/docs/lcp> .

Visual Resources (p. 167)

Scenic Corridors. The primary impression of any area comes from what is seen while driving, cycling, or hiking along a roadway. One of the most effective methods of protecting visual resources is to protect scenic corridors along a system of scenic roads.

Designated scenic corridors in the General Plan are Highway 1....

Major Views. Major views are long views of unique visual interest, focus, or variety. Major views are abundant along Sonoma County's coast and include islands, rock headlands, coves, lagoons, estuaries, riverways, expansive beaches, white water, and historic settings.

Vista Points. Vista Points are roadside areas suitable for parking with exceptional views. Designated vista points should be developed with safe ingress and egress, parking areas, interpretive signs, and restrooms where appropriate. The view shed from a vista point is even more sensitive than a major view since the viewer is stopped and can take full advantage of the visual experience. [The Black Point beach access is considered a vista point for purposes of this analysis.]

Landforms (p. 168)

Terraces. Terraces are the broad, level areas between coastal hills and bluffs. They are generally covered with grasses and sometimes dotted with trees or divided by windbreaks. Lines are horizontal except where trees create a vertical influence and break up the open landscape. Terraces are particularly visually sensitive. Appropriate terrace uses are agriculture and recreation.

Structural and Community Features (p. 169)

The Sea Ranch. For over 100 years this spectacular ten mile stretch of the Coast was used by sheep ranchers who added to it only the cypress windbreaks on the lower meadows west of Highway 1. Oceanic Properties bought the 5200 acre Del Mar Ranch in 1963, intending to create a low density residential community where development would have a minimum impact on the natural environment and would blend harmoniously with it. To some extent these goals have been achieved under the design guidance of The Sea Ranch Review Committee.

Design review guidelines apply to all development at The Sea Ranch and include the following provisions:

1. Homes are sited to take advantage of natural landforms and vegetation while preserving views from neighboring lots.
2. Buildings are clustered in some areas to achieve screening and greater open space.
3. Landscaping is informal and utilizes indigenous plant materials.
4. Roof slopes are governed by a roof slope direction plan to achieve building to building unity.
5. Sea Ranch homes tend to be simple and dramatic with no roof eaves.
6. Natural wood exteriors and shake roofs or suitably colored asphalt shingles are strongly encouraged.
7. Property line fences are discouraged; fences are used primarily for screening parking areas, service yards and trash areas.

The overall effect is of subdued, modern structures at times very well integrated with the existing landforms and vegetation. The strict design approach will be even more important as The Sea Ranch builds out.

VISUAL RESOURCE POLICIES

View Protections (p. 173)

1. Prevent development (including buildings, structures, fences, paved areas, signs, and landscaping) from obstructing views of the shoreline from coastal roads, vista points, recreation areas, and beaches.
2. Prohibit development which will significantly degrade the scenic qualities of major views and vista points.
3. Except in rural community and urban service areas, require a minimum setback of 100 feet from the right-of-way along scenic corridors and greater where possible. However, permit a 50 foot setback when sufficient screening exists to shield the structure from public view. Where the General Plan policies and standards are more restrictive than the above standards, development shall comply with the General Plan or Coastal Plan policies, whichever are more restrictive, provided that no development shall be approved which does not comply with Coastal Plan policies. [Note: The Sea Ranch Lodge is located within an urban service area.]

Landform Guidelines (p. 174)

6. Minimize the visual impacts of development on terraces by:

Prohibiting development in open fields in rural areas [Note: The lodge property is in an urban service area, and therefore not considered "rural".]

Minimizing the number of structures and clustering them near existing natural or man-made vertical features

Designing structures to be in scale with the rural character of the region

Natural Landscape Compatibility (p. 175)

9. Locate and design development to fit the setting and to be subordinate to the pre-existing character of the site.

Community Compatibility (p. 175)

10. Design structures to be compatible with existing community characteristics.
11. Relate structures in size and scale to adjacent buildings.
12. Locate and design all development to minimize the impacts of noise, light, glare, and odors on adjacent properties and the community at large.

Utilities (p. 175)

13. Require that all new distribution line extensions be placed underground.

Vegetation (p. 175)

14. Discourage the removal of significant trees except through legitimate logging operations.
15. Locate and design new development to minimize tree removal.
16. Prohibit removal of windbreaks unless required because of the disease.
17. Prohibit the planting of vegetation west of Highway 1 which could block coastal views.
18. Encourage the use of appropriate native plants for landscaping. A Native Plant List for the Sonoma County Coast will be made available at Sonoma County PRMD.
21. Require compliance with community design guidelines, when applicable, or the overall Coastal Zone Design Guidelines.
22. Apply Coastal Zone Design Guidelines to all new coastal zone development in areas described in 19. and 20. except Bodega Harbour subdivision and The Sea Ranch. The guidelines apply to Bodega Bay town with the amendments described in 26.

Design Guidelines (p 178)

25. Coastal Zone Design Guidelines

General. Design and site structures to preserve unobstructed broad views of the ocean from Highway 1 and to minimize visual impacts. Cluster structures to the maximum extent feasible.

Height. Limit residential building height to 16 feet west of Highway 1. However, an increase in height, to a maximum of 24 feet, is permissible if (1) the structure is no higher than 16 feet above the corridor route grade directly across from the building site, and (2) the structure will not affect views to the ocean or be out of character with surrounding structures.

Limit building height to 24 feet east of Highway 1. However, an increase in height to a maximum of 35 feet is permissible if (1) the structure is no higher than 24 feet above the corridor route grade directly across from the building site, and (2) the structure will not affect water views, or be out of character with surrounding structures.

Height for residential structures is measured as the vertical distance from the average level of the highest and lowest point of that portion of the lot covered by the building to the topmost point of the roof. (See Figure VII-11.) Where these requirements conflict with the height, site, and bulk criteria of Appendix B (Bane Bill), for those properties listed, the requirements of Appendix B shall be followed.

Bulk. Keep buildings in scale with their natural and man-made setting.

Siting. Utilize natural landforms and vegetation for screening. Minimize the alteration of natural landforms caused by grading, cutting, or filling. Prescribe building envelopes for lots west of Highway 1 in Timber Cove and other appropriate areas.

Building Materials and Color. Use natural materials and earth colors which blend with the vegetative cover of the site unless the building is a historic reproduction, in which case colors should be in keeping with the historic style. Encourage use of non-reflective exterior surfaces. Encourage composition shingle and shake roofs in harmonizing colors with the building exterior. Dark colors are preferred. Discourage tar and gravel roofs. Discourage metal window frames unless they are bronze anodized aluminum or baked enamel. Encourage dark and non-reflective driveway materials. To maintain natural drainage flows, the use of impervious material should be minimized.

Architectural Form. Encourage traditional architectural styles of the coast in older development areas and contemporary styles in newer subdivisions. Encourage pitched roofs and relate roof slopes to existing nearby buildings. Relate the architectural shape and style of new buildings to existing nearby structures and natural features. Design accessory buildings to be consistent with the main building architectural character, materials, and finishes.

Landscaping. Use indigenous plant materials in areas visible from public roads. Protect existing vegetation where possible. Utilize plant materials to integrate the man-made and natural environments and to screen and soften the visual impact of new development. Use landscaping to screen parking areas from public view. Landscape, grade, and fill areas as soon as possible to minimize soil erosion.

Fences. Discourage property line fences to minimize visual disruption of the natural terrain. Design fences as extensions of the main house. Materials should be the same as, or complimentary to, the building. Six foot fences are intended to be used only for screening of service yards, etc., and for privacy purposes.

Commercial. Design buildings which are compatible with the predominant design of existing buildings in the area and are of wood or shingle siding. Buildings should employ natural or earth colors, and use pitched, non-reflective roofs unless they are historic reproductions. Require that exterior lighting be functional, subtle, and architecturally integrated with the building style, materials, and colors. **Limit maximum height to 24 feet unless the greater height will not have effect on coastal views and there are overriding considerations.** Height for commercial structures is measured as the vertical distance between the average level of the highest and lowest point of that portion of the lot covered by the building to the topmost point of the roof. Screen parking areas from view through use of plantings, design, and siting.

28. **The Sea Ranch.** Continue to enforce The Sea Ranch Design Guidelines, incorporating the specified Height, Site, and Bulk Criteria provided for in Section 30610.6 (d) of the Public Resources Code. If a proposed residence does not meet the Height, Site and Bulk Criteria, the County may issue a variance as allowed in the adopted Height, Site and Bulk Criteria.

LAND USE

The Sea Ranch Issues

Traffic Constraints (p. 189) The Coastal Act required that coastal development not reduce the capacity of Highway 1 so that recreational travel is impaired. The Coastal Plan traffic study identifies future highway capacity deficiencies at The Sea Ranch and it recommends intersection improvements along Highway 1 to increase highway capacity. This solution is acceptable to both The Association and Oceanic. The Bane Bill parallels these Coastal Plan provisions. [Note: The 1979-80 Coastal Plan Traffic Study projected an average daily trips (ADT) of The Sea Ranch at build-out at 5,103 to 6,318 ADT if it were predominately a retirement community and 7,400 to 9,160 ADT if it were predominately a resort community. Current ADT per Caltrans website for the peak month in summer range from 4,300 to 5,200.]

Policies

5. Designate as within urban service boundaries those lands shown inside the urban service boundaries on the General Plan Land Use Maps for Bodega Bay and The Sea Ranch. (p. 195)

The Sea Ranch (p. 195)

16. Enforce the Height, Site, and Bulk Guidelines adopted pursuant to Public Resources Code Section 30610.6 (e) (see Appendix B). Incorporate these Guidelines into The Sea Ranch Design Review process.
17. Allow Oceanic Properties, Inc. 300 additional residential units and up to 100 lodge units on the conditions that:
 - Fifteen percent of the total 300 are constructed affordable housing units.
 - Intersection improvements at Highway 1 and Halcyon, Deer Trail and the Lodge entrance are constructed as recommended in the Transportation section.
 - Two accessways in Units 34-A and 36 are improved as recommended in the Access section.
 - Sites which would accommodate 100 units for the purpose of transfer programs are designated.

POLICIES FROM TRANSPORTATION SECTION

Highway 1 Safety, Capacity and Access Improvements (p. 164)

8. Provide turn lanes at the following Sea Ranch intersections:

Priority I (short range 0-5 years): The Stables and North Recreation Center entrance, Annapolis Road, Longmeadow Road, Moonraker and Whalebone Reach.

Priority II (Oceanic implementation if and when additional units are constructed in potential development areas and at the Lodge, when Lodge Road is relocated. Some of these roads are not yet constructed): Lodge entrance, Deer Trail and Halcyon:

Priority III (longer range 5-20 years): Leeward Spur, Deerfield Road, Breaker Reach, Vantage Road, Pine Meadow, Whitebluff Road, Headlands Reach, Navigators Reach, and Lodge Entrance and Halcyon if developer does not improve.

ACCESS PLAN DESCRIPTION AND POLICIES (p. 73)

9. Black Point Beach - Proposed

Discussion: The public is allowed to park at The Sea Ranch Lodge and walk to the Black Point blufftop across land owned by Oceanic Properties. Access includes a vehicular accessway from Highway 1 to a parking area for 10 cars, a 15-foot pedestrian easement from the parking area to Black Point Beach. The Black Point Beach access could be relocated within the "Lodge parcel" at the landowners option and expense. Use of the existing staircase is recommended. The current road access to the Lodge is considered temporary and a new entrance to the north is planned.

Recommendations:

County Parks shall negotiate to accept the offer of dedication or otherwise secure the designated accessway. If, within one year from the date of the offer, County Parks has not so acted, the offer shall be available to another appropriate public agency.

The new entrance road to the Lodge shall be used for public vehicular access to the pedestrian accessway. Until the new road is constructed, the public shall continue to be allowed to park at the Lodge and use the Oceanic pathway. Such continued public use of present Oceanic facilities and public use of designated future public access facilities shall be a condition of any additional development by Oceanic, including but not limited to the development identified in Policy VII-17. [See above, p. 195]

A staircase to Black Point Beach shall be constructed.

Attachments:

1. Full-size color drawings by Bull Stockwell Allen dated March 24, 2009
2. Letter from John Kelly regarding Highway 1 access
3. Letter from Sonoma County Regional Parks Department regarding meadow development