

December 12, 2017
County of Mendocino
Department of Planning and Building Services
860 North Bush Street
Ukiah, California 95482

Re: Case# U_2017_0009
Applicant: Collective Hotels and Retreats Inc.

Honorable Commissioners,

I respectfully submit to you my opposition to the proposed Major Use Permit for the Rangeland on Pine Mountain Road. My concerns and interests are in preserving the serene, natural habitat that makes up the Schafer farm and surrounding areas; and in preventing unnecessary fire and safety hazards from being manifested on this quiet mountainside community.

“Many men go fishing all of their lives without knowing that it is not fish they are after.”
Henry David Thoreau

I am sitting here, having toiled for hours over what to write, for I fear the words that I have in my limited vocabulary cannot begin to do justice in capturing the beauty and calm, peaceful serenity that is now the Schafer Farm. I have watched the sunrise and felt my spirit lifted as the birds began to stir and life all across the fields that surround the idyllic pond woke with me; you don't get that where I live in DC and more and more it is disappearing across California and other western States (one need only look at the once sacred nature preserves of Alaska to the Utah Bear's Ears National Parks to see development trumping nature). I have likewise enjoyed gazing at the starry night sky and listening to nothing but nature; a setting I fear will be ransacked by the proximity to the staff trailer and kitchen, as well as by the comings and goings of cars in the nearby parking lot or the light and noise pollution of the proposed nearby campsites.

I have often remarked to friends and even family that this place is one of the most peaceful places I have ever been in my life, if not the most in the continental United States, for me. I cannot identify one single factor nor can my words do justice the feeling I get when I am out there. All I know is that the unobstructed and pure vistas overlooking the beautiful California countryside and the quiet rhythms of nature resonating on the ears should remain unmolested by the noise and light pollution of people and corporate enterprise. The birds, both local and from all across the continent, should be entitled to have this small haven preserved and not the casualty of yet another destructive and aesthetically despicable parking lot.

"Thank God men cannot fly, and lay waste the sky as well as the earth."
Henry David Thoreau

I am also concerned by the risk of fires from campers. As an urban man myself, I can attest to being both ignorant to proper fire safety precautions for high risk zones and, a frequent traveler to campsites across Colorado and California, a witness to the lack of education that is typically provided by commercial enterprises. Without commenting on the education or precautions that will or will not be had at the proposed business, I think even allowing such a risk to be born now, particularly in a moment of crisis in California, from L.A. to your own backyard in Sonoma, would be particularly egregious and careless. There is simply too much at stake.

There is increased risk that will come with every beer and glass of wine sold or imbibed at a wedding and I am thinking here of inebriated guests tossing cigarettes haphazardly into the dry, California soil or wind, innocently but without mercy, catching an ember from a fire of campers. Consider the camper that improperly disposes of the logs from their wood stove, the burning bark of the fuel being whipped into fiery little embers by the strong, and not unfrequent, mountain winds. That risk to nearby vineyards, olive trees, both my friend's and other's is just not necessary or advisable.

Finally, one last worry I have with the proposal is that the road leading up to the proposed site is long and winding, and can be both scary and dangerous for the first time visitor or the inebriated wedding guest returning down the mountain. This threat for drivers leaving weddings or guests leaving celebrations is not a liability this commission should accept.

Thank you for your time and effort on this issue.

John D. McCleskey, Jr.

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