



Staff Report

File #: 20-2482, **Version:** 1

Yountville Town Council Staff Report

DATE: May 5, 2020

TO: Mayor and Town Council

FROM: Curtis Sawyer, Assistant Planner
Planning & Building Director

Sandra Liston,

Applicant: Napa Valley Balloons, Inc.

Owner: Roman Catholic Bishop of Santa Rosa

Location: St. Joan of Arc Catholic Church, 6406 Washington Street; APN 036-090-022-000

Land Use Classification: Mixed Residential RM

TITLE

Consider Adoption of Resolution Number 20-3982 Approving a Use Permit for Napa Valley Balloons to conduct hot air balloon launches from an open field within the existing vineyard at 6406 Washington Street.

PROJECT SITE

The project site is located on an approximately 16.89-acre parcel that is currently established as vineyard, although the launch site itself is approximately one-third acre or 13,000 square feet in size, consisting of open field within the vineyard. The property is owned by and immediately adjacent to St. Joan of Arc Catholic Church, which sits on a separate parcel. The center of the launch site is located approximately 270 feet from the nearest wall of the church and approximately 160 feet from the nearest wall of the annex structure to the rear of the church. The power lines on the east side of Washington Street are approximately 200 feet from center of launch site.

Beyond the vineyard to the north are residential and lodging uses. Hopper Creek apartments are located approximately 96 feet and the nearest residence at Bella Vista Park is approximately 190 feet from the northernmost spot of the launch site. Further to the north is Hotel Yountville at approximately 315 feet. Agricultural uses in Napa County are located to the east, past the Town limits.

Since the proposed launch site currently is an unused, open field, it is ready to be used as-is with no modifications. No permanent structures or physical alterations are proposed as a part of this application.

Balloons Above the Valley and Napa Valley Aloft both currently launch from Yountville. One business launches from the south parking lot of the Shops at the Marketplace of Estate Yountville. The other business occasionally launches from the Wine Train but has a preferred location in the County. The Marketplace launch site is located approximately 85 feet to the lodging use at Railway Inn and approximately 125 to the nearest

lodging unit at Hotel Villagio.

DESCRIPTION/BACKGROUND

Napa Valley Balloons has operated in and around Yountville for nearly 40 years. It holds a Use Permit to launch from Vintner's Golf Course and has conducted launches from this location for nine years, but recently lost its ability to launch from this site when the Veterans Home terminated the lease. Prior to launching from Vintners Golf Course, Napa Valley Balloons conducted balloon launches from Washington Square. To the south of Yountville, Napa Valley Balloons has approval from Napa County to conduct launches from a residential parcel on agricultural land in the County. This permit, however, only allows 50 launches per year. The applicant seeks to increase the number of launches per year and return to Yountville.

The applicant has provided a table in the project narrative that provides a breakdown of the proposed number of balloon launches per day per month, the number of days per month launches occur, and the number of days per week flights occur each month. Also included is the meeting time of guests on site and the time inflation begins. Please refer to the project narrative attachment. In general terms, guests arrive on-site between around 5:30 a.m. and 7:00 a.m. with the first launch occurring at sunrise. One to four balloons would be launched depending of time of year and this could take up to two hours, since only one balloon can be inflated at a time. Balloon launches will occur two to five days per week, resulting in approximately 10 to 20 days per month.

The prevailing winds flow from the north-northwest to the south-southeast. Since the launch site is at the southern Town limits it is expected that winds will carry balloons out of the Town limits, generally following the alignment of Highway 29.

On flight days, guests will park at Vintner's Golf Course by agreement and be shuttled to the launch site. Napa Valley Balloons has four balloon chase trucks for equipment and eight balloon chase trucks for guests. One truck and two vans are required per balloon, so when all four balloons are in use, 12 vehicles would be parked in the church parking lot. Vehicles will remain on-site for up to two hours. Once all balloons have launched, chase vehicles will follow the inflight balloons until landing.

DISCUSSION/ANALYSIS

This is the first application for a launch site on the east side of Washington Street, which brings it into close proximity to residential uses. No other approved launch sites are adjacent to residences. Rather, the other approved launch sites in Town are near lodging uses, other commercial uses, and open space.

Noise: Yountville Municipal Code Section 8.04.040.F.6 provides an exemption for hot air balloon launches and low-level operations that have obtained entitlement approval. However, the section also states that "chronic and continued nuisance noise produced by such uses will be cause for conciliation with Town staff to discuss modification of operations to mitigate and abate the nuisance."

In this case, the launches would occur immediately adjacent to residential uses, with the nearest residence being less than 100 feet from the edge of the launch site. According to the applicant's project narrative, it utilizes inflation fans powered by gas motors to fill the balloons with cold air. These fans produce noise in the range of a lawnmower, which are identified in the Town's Noise Ordinance as falling in the 85-90 dB range. Once the balloons reach a certain level of fullness, the balloon burners are turned on to raise the balloon off the ground. The burners produce a swooshing sound. Each balloon can take up to 30 minutes to fill and when all four balloons are in use, an intermittent level of noise can occur for up to two hours, during the early morning hours.

The Noise Ordinance includes a table that defines the maximum nighttime noise standard, which applies until 8:00 a.m., and generally prohibits noise at or over 80 dB. The question is whether objectionable noise can be

heard at the adjoining residences. The launches that occur at Estate Yountville are located approximately 85 feet to Railway Inn (measured from side of balloon, lying down) and 125 feet to Hotel Villagio (measured from top of balloon, lying down). Town staff has not received any complaints about launches from this location; however, it is noted that a guest may have a stay of a few days, while residents live year-round.

To address the concern about noise, the applicant has shared that it launches four balloons simultaneously at a location in Napa County, with the nearest house being 190 feet away on the west side and 290 feet on the east side. The narrative states, that “the property owner feared she would be awakened by inflating balloons. Noise has not been an issue for the property owner and no sleep loss has occurred. Additionally, neighbors due west of the launch site have not had issues regarding the balloons launching either.”

Staff has referred to the Napa County regulations on hot air balloon launches to better understand this issue. Napa County requires that the approving agency make the following finding: “The proposed launch site is located more than 500 feet from any off-site residence or if the launch site is proposed within five hundred feet of any off-site residence, the permittee has submitted written consent to the planning department from the owners or residents of any off-site residence within 500 feet stating that they have no objection to the proposed launch site.” The Town’s Ordinance does not specifically address required setbacks.

Staff is concerned that there may be a level of nuisance noise given the proximity of the launch location to dozens of residential units. Possible solutions include approving the hot air balloon launches subject to a 90-day or six-month review period and if complaints are made and noise demonstrated, the permit could be subject to revocation by the Town Council. Alternately, the Council could require the applicant to submit a certified study of noise generated at certain intervals from the fans and burners to determine actual dB level. Or, the Council could require the applicant obtain the written consent of all residents within a certain distance of the launch site.

While the applicant indicates that noise has not been an issue in the past and the Town itself has not received any noise complaints concerning the in-town launch locations, staff is hesitant to conclude noise will not be an issue of concern to residents.

Parking: Peek parking will consist of 12 vehicles parked at in the north parking lot at the St. Joan of Arc church. The parking lot contains approximately 40 striped parking spaces, with additional parking provided in unstriped tandem locations. Each vehicle will be parked on-site for no more than two hours. Furthermore, the parking would occur during the early morning hours, prior to church services, so no conflicts are anticipated and no concerns are noted.

Letter of Support: Whitney Diver McEvoy, President and CEO of the Yountville Chamber of Commerce, submitted an email supporting the application. It can be found as an attachment to this staff report.

Conclusion: Staff is not concerned with conflicts with the church since the launch activity would occur in the early morning hours and prior to church services and other scheduled events. Parking is not an issue because there is ample parking in the parking lot for the maximum vehicle load of 12 trucks and vans and parking occurs during a time the church is not otherwise in use.

The proposed launch location at the southern end of Town is beneficial because of the prevailing wind pattern that will immediately carry balloons out of the Town limits and away from sensitive uses. Launches would occur in an open field surrounded by vineyards and low-lying buildings, and over 200 feet from the power poles on the east side of Washington.

Staff’s only concern with the launch location is the potential for nuisance noise to residents. Options and potential solution have been presented for the Town Council consideration.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

Categorically Exempt per California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guideline; Class 1, Existing Facilities

STRATEGIC PLAN GOAL

Is item Identified in Strategic Plan? Yes

If yes, Identify Strategic Goal and Objective. **Quality of Life:** The Town enhances the livability of Yountville by providing well-maintained public facilities, parks, and trails, and quality programs and events. **Visionary Leadership:** The Town's leadership maintains an open-minded, forward-thinking decision-making process. We value engagement and participation from all members of the community as we work together to create policies and plan for the future.

Briefly Explain Relationship to Strategic Plan Goal and Objective. Project review to ensure that uses are appropriate for the site and surrounding area.

ALTERNATIVES

1. Approve the project as presented.
2. Do not approve the project as presented and provide feedback to applicant.
3. Deny the project use Permit.

RECOMMENDATION

Receive staff report and direct questions to staff.

Receive the applicant's presentation.

Conduct public hearing and receive testimony.

Conduct Council discussion on the proposed Use Permit request.

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