

February 11, 2018

Gary Helfrich
Permits Sonoma
County of Sonoma

Re: UPE17-0012 :Jack London Taproom

Dear Mr. Helfrich,

I understand that the Jack London Taproom (JLTaproom) application has been transferred to you for evaluation and processing. The Valley of the Moon Alliance (VOTMA) filed an objection on May 24, 2017 to proceeding without a hearing on a recommended CEQA categorical exemption for this project. We followed up with a June 23, 2017 comment letter on why we believed this project required a more substantive environmental analysis given the potential traffic, safety, and cumulative impacts as the project relates to the current activity load at the Cornerstone site. We are not sure of the current status of PRMD's analysis.

We are aware, however, of the December 11, 2017 Fehr & Peers trip generation report (F&P report). Having reviewed that report we are supplementing our prior comments to identify shortcomings in that assessment and to urge you to take a broad perspective on this application in terms of the potential impacts of the project as well as the integration with the already expanded cumulative effects of the overall Cornerstone impact footprint.

It is clear from the application and the Kickstarter information that we attached to our June 23rd comment that the applicants have expansive plans for the Taproom. We can see from a business perspective that the Taproom could be a very successful venture. The proposed operating model correctly characterizes the Taproom (as reflected in project promotional materials) as essentially a restaurant. The hours of operation (extending from 10 am to midnight, 7 days a week), the arranged availability of food service via a food truck and/or otherwise, the addition of a large outdoor beer garden in back and the use of the Pavilion area in front of the Taproom entrance near the food truck location (expanding the "operating" floor space beyond that just accounted for inside the building footprint), and references to planned music and party events all suggest a broad and busy beer/entertainment/food venue. To suggest that this business plan is somehow consistent with a wine tasting facility or even a brewing facility seems inconsistent with the anticipated scope of activities. It bears noting also that the various existing permitted tasting rooms at Cornerstone have limited hours that end at 5-6 pm, and have restrictions on sale of food. Any events held in any of those tasting rooms (to the extent permitted) must also be reconciled with the total event authorization contained in UPE-99-0147 (Condition 39—60 events per year for a maximum of 170 persons at any one time). VOTMA believes PRMD's assessment must take these changed activities and scope of use by the JLTaproom into consideration.

When these plans are linked up with the current activities at the Cornerstone site, the cumulative impacts of the overall operation (JLTaproom *along side* the current Cornerstone menu of activities) require a full traffic study to assess both day-long and weekend Highway 121/116 segment congestion at the Big Bend as well as at the Wagner Road/Highway121 intersection, as well as peak period impacts (especially in spring, summer and harvest weekends). The F&P report completely ignores the cumulative impacts of the evolving Cornerstone activities inclusive of the JLTaproom, and focuses only the projected incremental impacts of the JLTaproom. The F&P report thus lacks a contextual foundation to assess impacts.

The absence of any cumulative assessment is not a new issue for Cornerstone. When the most recent retail conversion of a retail space to a tasting room was being evaluated in 2016 (UPE16-0011) County staff commented that the various incremental changes that have occurred at Cornerstone since the original use permit was approved in 2000 (UPE99-0147) had resulted in a situation in which “what is on the ground there now does not look anything like the site plan submitted with the application for UPE99-0147.” The staff comment did not suggest that the trip generation for the site, even with the then-current application factored in, then constituted a significant change from the original approval. However, the comment concluded on a note significant for purposes of the JLTaproom application—“However, I think any further conversion of uses should be subject to a cumulative review for comparison to the original approval.” (email from Mitch Simson to Blake Hillegas, dated March 15, 2016, located in PRMD file for UPE16-0011, copy attached)

The F&P report clearly is not such a review. Even in its present form the F&P report uses very limited urban and rural brewing facilities trip counts for largely new facilities as a proxy for JLTaproom trip generation. Those facilities do not appear to have been in operation for long, do not contain permitted facilities for food service, and are certainly not located on a busy State highway that is already a frequent choke point daily, and especially during heavy tourism months. All three facilities operate as individual businesses (or as part of a winery) and not as part of what is essentially a significant event venue in Sonoma Valley. The scant trip generation data set backing the F&P report (collected on November 11 and 16, 2017) from the "comparable" brewing facilities hardly constitutes an adequate study to capture the probable trip generation that the JLTaproom will generate and that Cornerstone will experience on any busy midsummer weekend when there is an event at Cornerstone and also a major wine industry event in the Valley, or an event at the Sonoma Raceway. To think that the Taproom will not be a significant magnet for pre and post raceway patrons alone is not credible. Nor is it adequate to project spring/summer/harvest month winery related trip generation based on counts taken on two solo days in mid November.

Along with traffic issues, the scope of this application also calls for an evaluation of the significant highway/road safety issues at the Wagner Road intersection and the Big Bend Hwy121/116 intersection less than a mile away. Safety issues are too important to be ignored in assessing the impacts of this new taproom proposal.

The increased customer generation for Cornerstone and broader nature of use the Taproom will generate (beer, food, music, outdoor venues in the Beer Garden and at the Pavilion Canopy in front of the JLTaproom entrance) will also have impacts on the water use and septic facility capacity at Cornerstone. Although VOTMA has not reviewed the full set of files on the various active use permits for the Cornerstone site, the pattern (e.g., UPE16-0011, UPE07-0036, UPE06-0089) of adding incremental tasting room use permits over the years (using exemptions from impact assessments and Notices of Waiver of Hearings), together with the expansion of activity associated with the Sunset Gardens relocation puts Cornerstone at the point now where it would be prudent to evaluate the current water, septic and cumulative intensity of use issues (as well as traffic and related safety impacts) that will occur if the JLTaproom serves as yet the next incremental expansion of activity at Cornerstone.

Similarly, VOTMA understands that all "event" activity at Cornerstone is governed by the terms of such use set forth in UPE-99-0147. To the extent that the JLTaproom is proposing private parties, live music and various public and private events, those all need to be reconciled with the existing "events" inventory at Cornerstone and the limits established in Condition of Approval #39 in UPE-99-0147. PRMD should start by requiring the applicants to provide a list of all events that have occurred at Cornerstone over the last 3-5 years to provide a baseline for evaluation.

VOTMA's concerns about the continued need for an adequate review of the impacts of the proposed JLTaproom should not come as a surprise. Our June 23, 2017 letter to Ms. Nguyen was a transparent effort to put all the issues reiterated in this letter on the table early in the process. That letter was sent more than 7 months ago now; the F&P report has been the only tangible response, and is an inadequate one. Rather than be faced with an inadequate initial study/MND sometime down the road, VOMA is restating its request now so that this application will receive appropriate evaluation and attention to these baseline issues. We have been clear and explicit in our view that the environmental, community and safety impacts of this project, both individually and in the context of the cumulative activities at Cornerstone, constitute a fair argument of significant impacts that need serious attention. We ask again that this matter be given the close planning evaluation it so clearly requires.

Regards,

Roger Peters

Roger Peters

VOTMA Board Member