

STAFF REPORT

PROJECT INFORMATION

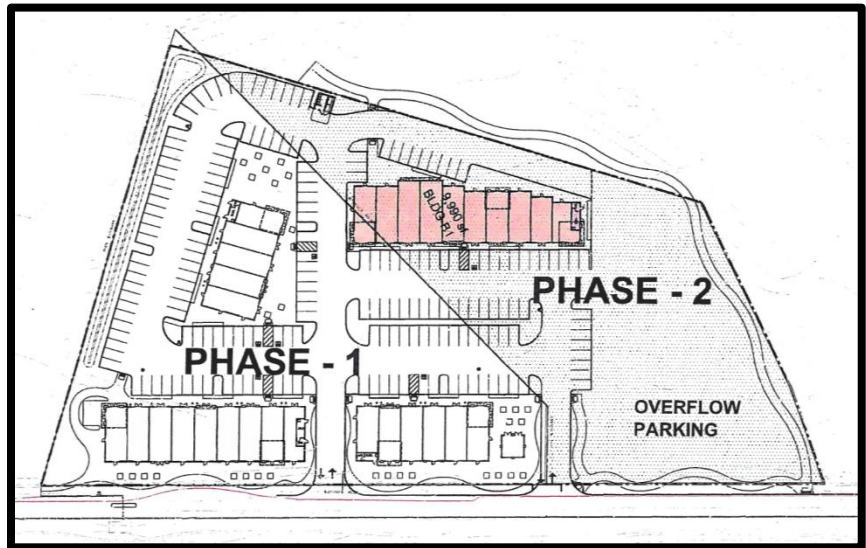
Application: PLN190027 (Zone Change and Use Permit)
Public Hearing: December 18, 2019
Applicant: Geary Coats, Coats Consulting
Owner: EH Ridgemark Family LP
Location: 151 Ridgemark Drive, approximately 800 feet south of Airline Highway
APN: 020-330-042
Zoning: Single-Family Residential (R1)
General Plan: Residential Mixed (RM)/Commercial Neighborhood (CN)
Planner: Michael Kelly

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The project proposes construction of a second phase of the 151 Ridgemark Drive commercial development to add 9,990 square feet of building and 178 parking spaces plus 87 overflow golf parking spaces. For this purpose, the project also proposes a zoning map amendment to establish approximately two acres of Neighborhood Commercial (C-2) zoning on land currently mapped as Single-Family Residential (R1). Approximately 30 percent of floor area would likely be used for a restaurant or similar food services, and the remaining area would be used for other neighborhood-serving retail and services allowed by C-2 zoning. This would function both as an expansion of presently unbuilt commercial development approved in 2018 under Use Permit 1180-17 and as implementation of the County 2035 General Plan designation of a Commercial Neighborhood (CN) land use node for Ridgemark Drive at Airline Highway (State Route 25).

BACKGROUND

In 2018, the Planning Commission approved Use Permit (UP) 1180-17, a similar proposal on directly adjacent land for approximately 20,000 square feet of commercial space on a 2.43-acre commercially-zoned site. The permit proposed retail, offices, restaurant, and a delicatessen in four detached buildings. A building permit was subsequently submitted for this construction but required revisions and has not yet been issued. In the meantime, this application for PLN190027 was submitted.



UP 1180-17 was part of a larger concept for commercial development along this portion of Ridgemark Drive. PLN190027 would expand the existing commercial zoning to permit two more acres of commercial development beyond the UP 1180-17 proposal.

The site was first zoned for commercial use in 2010, and a 19,500-square-foot building was then approved in 2011 but not constructed. UP 1180-17 reopened the potential development with a slightly larger but differently arranged building plan, which included restaurant uses that were omitted from the earlier submittal. This was approved in 2018 but has not yet been built.

Between 2011 and 2018, the County adopted its 2035 General Plan, which encouraged commercial development at several major road intersections, a feature not found in previous County policy. One such intersection was the crossing of Airline Highway, Fairview Road, and Ridgemark Drive, where the General Plan established an intended land use of Commercial Neighborhood (CN). PLN190027 addresses a project site near that intersection and would establish this land use there.

SITE DESCRIPTION

The construction would take place along Ridgemark's main entrance road on a portion of a larger, 20-acre parcel that has mostly served as open grassy space complementing the residentially built portions of Ridgemark. The project site, however, presently contains a parking lot, a house-like office building, and four tennis courts at a slightly lower elevation and now in disrepair, with trees and shrubbery roughly delineating the site. The development would stand toward the center of the Ridgemark private residential and golf course development, although the commercial center is proposed to be accessible from outside the Ridgemark gate, which is located near the site's southeast corner. Neighboring the property are the townhouses of Joes Lane to the north and Villa Pacheco Court to the south, the latter now directly overlooking the former tennis courts. Also neighboring are park-like open spaces to the west, the Ridgemark clubhouse and hotel to the northeast, a driving range to the east, and more open space to the southeast. A concurrent application proposes further commercial use around the clubhouse and additional residential development on several other lands within Ridgemark. For Ridgemark residents the site is accessed from the Ridgemark internal street network, while for nonresidents the site would be accessed only from the intersection of Airline Highway and Fairview Road, 3½ miles southeast of the center of Hollister.

Legal Lot of Record: County Official Records Book 8 of Parcel Maps Page 11 Parcel 1 (1990).

Minimum Building Site Allowed: 20,000 square feet under C-2 zoning.

Sewage Disposal: Sunnyslope County Water District.

Water: Sunnyslope County Water District.

State Farmland Map Designation: Urban and Built-up Land.

Land Conservation Act (Williamson Act): Not a preserve.

Soils: Rincon silty clay loam, 2 to 9 percent slopes (Grade 2).

Seismic: Not within an Alquist-Priolo Earthquake Fault Zone.

FEMA Flood Zone: Zone X, or areas determined to be outside the 0.2% annual chance floodplain, according to FEMA Flood Insurance Rate Map 06069C0205D, effective April 16, 2009.

Fire Severity: Urban unzoned.

Archaeological sensitivity: Not sensitive.

PLANNING AND ZONING

Under the County General Plan Land Use Element, the site is located in the general area of a Commercial Neighborhood (CN) node within a larger area under the Residential Mixed (RM) designation. The CN node is centered on the intersection of Airline Highway (State Route 25) with Fairview Road and Ridgemark Drive and, as noted in the General Plan Land Use Element, encourages neighborhood-serving commercial activities that "are located within a reasonable walking distance of a community, are centrally located to serve an unincorporated community that is lacking neighborhood commercial services, or where the need for expanded neighborhood commercial services can be demonstrated."¹ The Land Use Element further notes among its policies on commercial land use that the County "desires to promote commercial uses on strategic unincorporated parcels in order to accommodate commercial demand, promote economic development, and increase revenue."² The node indicates abstractly the location for commercial use, while more specific proposals such as this could be regarded as implementing the overall vision of the node. Meanwhile, the area's Residential Mixed designation itself also supports some commercial use, with the district "provid[ing]

¹ General Plan Policy LU-5.1 (New Commercial Neighborhood Nodes).

² General Plan Land Use Element Commercial and Mixed-Use Development policy introduction text.

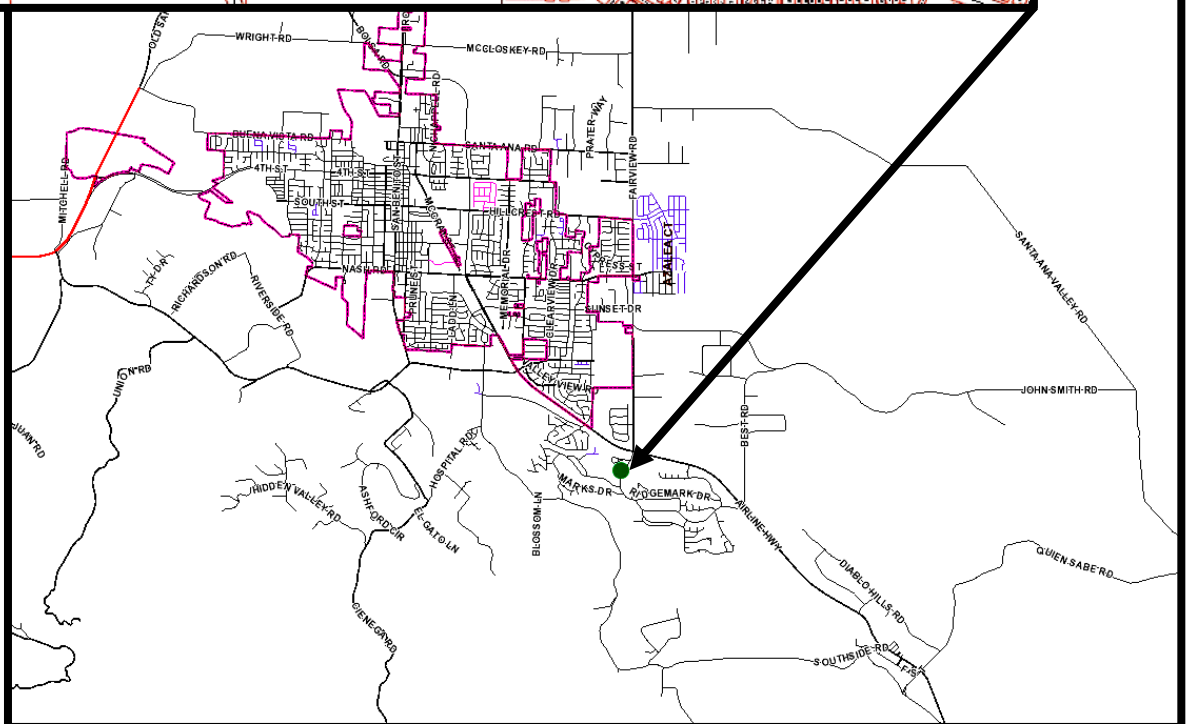
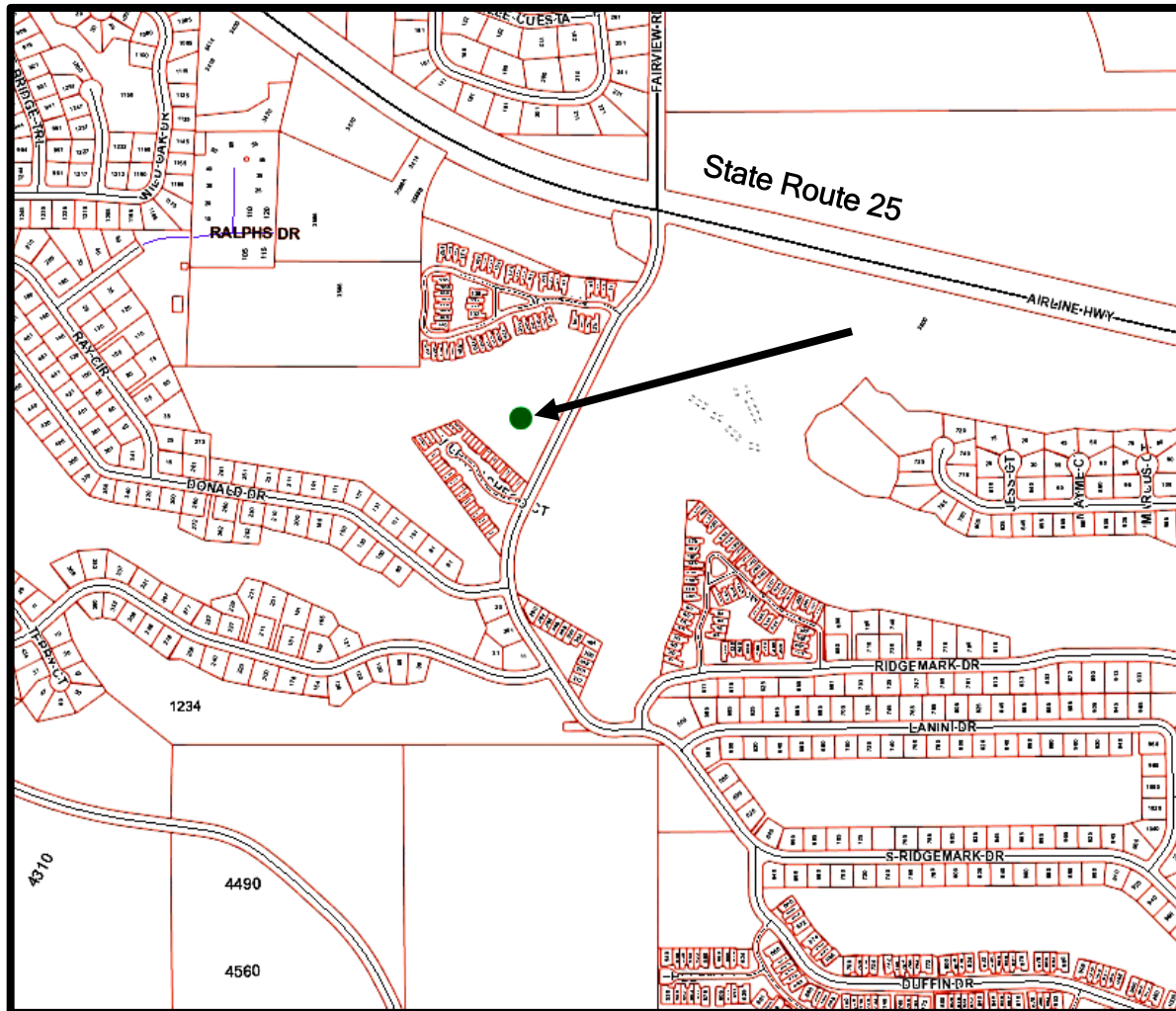
individuals with the opportunity to live in an unincorporated village or neighborhood atmosphere ... with some commercial uses serving the residences.”

The project site is accordingly proposed to be zoned Neighborhood Commercial (C-2), which is “intended to establish and provide centers for convenient shopping to residential neighborhoods, planned and controlled to provide service to neighborhoods.”³ The zone allows several types of retail and services satisfying common day-to-day needs under an administratively reviewed permit. Potentially more intensive or higher-traffic uses including grocery and hardware stores and restaurants are considered under a more thorough conditional use permit, typically reviewed by the Planning Commission.⁴ This permit, which includes restaurant use, is one such case of the latter type while also considering the less intensive uses.

County Code Chapter 25.43 authorizes the Planning Commission to decide conditional use permits based on concerns of “the health, safety, peace, comfort and general welfare of persons residing or working in the neighborhood of the proposed use.” Use permits may be approved on conditions that address topics such as but not limited to structures, parking, access, signs, landscaping, maintenance, environmental effects, hours of activities, and duration of use, as listed in the code chapter. The permit term is not indefinite and will expire unless the recipient of a use permit begins activities approved by the permit within one year of approval. Conditions of approval for this permit are found in the attached resolution, and, like the conditions of the earlier commercial component from Use Permit 1180-17, these conditions respond to the issues listed by Chapter 25.43.

³ County Code §25.16.040.

⁴ County Code §25.16.042 and §25.16.043.



ENVIRONMENTAL EVALUATION

The proposal follows the 2035 San Benito County General Plan environmental impact report (EIR). Commercial use for this location was proposed under the 2035 General Plan, adopted on July 21, 2015. Its EIR, certified that same day, listed the plan's environmental impacts, including those that would result from several newly designated commercial sites, or nodes, found mostly at prominent intersections of roads and highways. The node located at Airline Highway, Fairview Road, and Ridgemark Drive was designated Commercial Neighborhood (CN), the type of commercial use proposed under the present application. Given the consistency of this commercial use with the intent of the CN node and other policies of the General Plan, and given the mitigation measures and overriding considerations associated with the certification of the EIR, any environmental effects of this project have been sufficiently addressed. An addendum in the attached resolution further specifies the basis for making this finding.

Furthermore, a traffic generation estimate performed for the 19,500-square-foot commercial project approved here in 2011 (under Commercial District Review 67-10) concluded that the location, project scale, and neighborhood-serving nature of the uses would add an "imperceptible" number of trips to the area's public streets. This considered the possibility of both general retail and restaurant activities at the site. Following both the prior and current applications, the site would be built with approaching 30,000 square feet and generate proportionally greater traffic beyond the earlier estimate. However, this project being effectively 2035 General Plan implementation, the plan's policies and programs and the EIR's mitigation measures would accommodate for this traffic.

STAFF ANALYSIS

Despite the Planning Commission's earlier approval of Use Permit (UP) 1180-17, Ridgemark and close neighborhoods continue to lack commercial services without traveling more than two miles to the closest cluster of retail, located in the City of Hollister's commercial district near Airline Highway and Tres Pinos Road. A commercial area closer to this neighborhood, with a population of multiple thousands⁵ in and around Ridgemark, could satisfy a demand and reduce travel time and distance to such services while potentially encouraging more economic activity.

As earlier described, the site would not be an isolated area of commercial use such as that discouraged by General Plan Policy LU-5.5 but a follow-up to the 2035 General Plan mapping of a CN land use node here of the type encouraged by Policy LU-5.4. The site lies 800 feet south of the node's center point at the Airline Highway–Fairview Road–Ridgemark Drive intersection, a distance that in part results from slope and creek features that make commercial use on the intersection's immediate south edge infeasible. This project site is more physically suitable and also closer to much of the population most likely to use the development's neighborhood-oriented services, though still easily accessed from the intersection. This proximity to a market of customers, including neighboring higher-density housing residents, meets both the General Plan's stated intent for the CN designation and General Plan Land Use Element Policy LU-5.1's encouragement of new neighborhood-level commercial use at mapped commercial nodes close to population concentrations. The project would also expand the existing C-2 zoning found on the adjacent land, where such use has been found suitable by the County through three prior planning applications.

The presence of commercial activity between two townhome courts would add a degree of mixed use to this primary neighborhood corridor in reflection of Policy LU-5.7. The location would be brought from disuse, its former tennis courts no longer serving their former purpose, into productive infill activity encouraged by Policy LU-1.5. This commercial activity would likely include restaurant or similar food services in approximately 30 percent of the new C-2 zoning's interior floor area and the remaining 70 percent for other neighborhood-serving retail and services allowed by C-2 zoning convenient to the nearby residents. Under

⁵ US Census Bureau, 2013–2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, Ridgemark Census-designated place and Census Tract 6, San Benito County, California.

the CN land use definition, interior floor area may be equal to a maximum of 80 percent of the overall site (a 0.8 floor-area ratio), which allows 154,377 square feet on the overall commercial site including the existing and newly proposed C-2 zoning; the five buildings of the prior and current use permits together propose about 30,000 square feet, substantially less intensive than the policy maximum. Parking would be arranged among the buildings, its visual impact diminished by the presence of commercial buildings along Ridgemark Drive and by landscaped screening, which is found both in project plans and in conditions of approval.

Significant conditions of approval. The attached resolution recommended for adoption contains several conditions of approval similar to those applied to UP 1180-17. These address compatibility of the design with the surrounding neighborhood, including operating standards, and also impacts of construction. Sufficient parking was a concern in UP 1180-17; a condition requires satisfaction of County Code parking requirements, and the application includes more than sufficient parking for both the UP 1180-17 and current applications for general retail purposes. Additional parking spaces are also included that can be used for the golf course and resort. A landscaping condition of approval addresses removal of trees along the tennis courts and parking lot's western edge, with replacement trees and other landscaping features to satisfy County Code §25.29.216(J) (a portion of the San Benito County Permanent Tree Protection Article) as well as General Plan Policies LU-7.7 and LU-7.10.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the Planning Commission review the staff report, hold a public hearing, and hear any proponents and opponents of the proposed project. Staff further recommends that the Planning Commission consider Resolution 2019-____, which includes an environmental impact report addendum regarding environmental effects of the project and also an ordinance to enact the proposed C-2 zoning, and adopt said resolution, subject to the findings and conditions of approval included therein, in order to

- adopt the said addendum;
- recommend to the Board of Supervisors adoption the proposed ordinance; and
- approve County file PLN190027, including its zone change and use permit.

ATTACHMENTS

- A. Current Site Images
- B. Site Plan and Building Illustrations
- C. Planning Commission Resolution 2019-____ (draft), including
 - Exhibit A, Conditions of Approval
 - Exhibit B, Addendum to San Benito County 2035 General Plan Update Environmental Impact Report for Planning File PLN190027
 - Exhibit C, Zoning Map Amendment Ordinance



