



Sonoma County Board of Zoning Adjustments

STAFF REPORT

FILE: Sonoma Golf Club Membership Modification; UPE18-0090
DATE: June 25, 2020
TIME: At or after 2:30 pm
STAFF: Crystal Acker, Project Planner

SUMMARY

Property Owner: Escalante-Sonoma, LLC
Applicant: David Matheson
Address: 17700 Arnold Dr, Sonoma
Supervisory District(s): District 1
APN: 133-130-007
Description: Request to revise the current Use Permit (PLP03-0076) membership allocation of 319 golf members to allow 225 additional members at the Sonoma Golf Club, consisting of 100 additional golf members and 125 new “club” members. Club memberships would allow access to all club amenities except the golf course, including dining, bocce ball, pool, and tennis court facilities. No physical changes to the existing golf club facility and no changes to operating hours or number of approved special events are requested.
CEQA Review: Categorical Exemption: Section 15301 (Existing Facilities), as an existing golf club facility involving negligible expansion of use and no new construction.
General Plan Land Use: Recreation and Visitor Serving Commercial (RVSC)
Specific/Area Plan Land Use: None
Ordinance Reference: 26-42-020(f) – Uses permitted with a use permit
26-42-030 – Permitted building intensity and development criteria
26-64-030 – Scenic corridors
26-65-030 – Riparian Corridor Prohibited uses and exceptions
Zoning: Recreation and Visitor Serving Commercial, Riparian Corridor 50-foot Development Setback, Scenic Resource – Arnold Drive Scenic Corridor (K RC50/25, SR)



RECOMMENDATION

The Permit Resource and Management Department (Permit Sonoma) recommends that the Board of Zoning Adjustments approve the Use Permit, with conditions.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Sonoma Golf Club requests modification of their membership cap of 319 golf members to add 100 additional golf members and 125 new club members for a total of 544 members. No expansion of existing facilities, hours of operation, or number of special events are requested.

Public comments have expressed concern primarily related to additional traffic on Arnold Drive. A focused Traffic Study was prepared, and later revised to include additional information in response to several public comments related to traffic. The study determined that the new memberships would result in 22 additional trips during the evening weekday PM peak hour and 42 additional trips during the weekend afternoon peak hour. Neither increase would result in a significant traffic impact.

Staff is recommending approval of the Use Permit modification because:

- The proposed project is consistent with General Plan policies for providing outdoor recreation facilities and commercial services to local residents and visitors, preserving scenic resources through setbacks along designated Scenic Corridors, and considering cumulative weekend traffic impacts and intersection improvements during review of discretionary projects;
- The proposed project is consistent with the Recreation and Visitor Serving Commercial Zoning District purpose to encourage a compatible blend of recreation and tourist-commercial uses in such a way as to perpetuate Sonoma County's recreational resources, and also complies with all applicable development criteria of Sonoma County Code Section 26-42-030, including setbacks, building height, lot coverage, and parking;
- The golf club has co-existed in the neighborhood since 1928, without any known formal complaint;
- Adequate capacity exists to continue to provide public water and sewer services for the proposed additional membership;
- No physical expansion of the facility which could alter the existing character of the neighborhood is proposed;
- No changes to current hours of operation which could generate new or additional noise are proposed; and
- The proposed membership increase would result in 22 additional weekday PM peak hour trips and 42 weekend afternoon peak hour trips, neither of which would result in a significant traffic impact to the area.



PROJECT SITE AND CONTEXT

Background

The original golf course and clubhouse were constructed by owners of the Sonoma Mission Inn in 1928, and the use has been in continuous operation since that time under various owners. In 1988, a 50-year outside service area agreement was recorded between the golf club and the County Sanitation District to provide sewer service up to 60.4 ESDs (1 ESD is equivalent to a single family dwelling). Following connection to public sewer service, multiple remodeling and expansion projects on the property have been permitted by the County, the most recent being the current facility approved May 13, 2004 (PLP03-0076).

Area Context and Surrounding Land Uses

Direction	Land Uses
North	Residential development in Rural Residential zoning; Hanna Boys Center in Public Facilities zoning
South	Vineyard and residential development in Rural Residential zoning
East	Hayfields, vineyard, and residential development in Diverse Agriculture zoning
West	Arnold Drive; hayfields, and residential development in Rural Residential zoning; Altamira Middle School and Woodland Star Charter School in Public Facilities zoning

See also Figure 2. Aerial Map, Figure 3. Land Use Map, and Figure 4. Zoning Map.

Access

Primary site access is from Arnold Drive on the east side of the property, nearest to the clubhouse. A dedicated northbound left turn lane into the golf course is present at the primary site entrance. A secondary access for employees is present from Carriger Road near the maintenance building at the southwest corner of the property (Figure 5. Site Plan). No changes to current site access are proposed.

Water/Wastewater/Utilities

Potable water for club facilities is provided by the Valley of the Moon Water District. The District has indicated they have capacity to continue to serve the parcel, and have advised that a meter upgrade may be necessary.

Sewer service is provided by the Sonoma County Water Agency – Sonoma Valley County Sanitation District through an Outside Service Area Agreement up to 12,080 gallons per day or 60.40 ESDs (Equivalent Single-family Dwelling units). Flows have been under that level to date, and the Water Agency has indicated they do not expect a membership increase without building expansion would exceed the current permitted flow level and further stated that the proposed modification was acceptable.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Existing Facility/Current Use Permit Approval

The Use Permit is for 319 golf members; currently, the club has 285 members. Approximately 50 percent of members own homes outside of Sonoma County, and use the club once or twice per month. A membership allows access to the member, spouse/partner, and dependent children under 18. A member may bring a guest; no guest is allowed more than 6 times per year.



The current facility includes: an 18-hole golf course and driving range; 7,000 square foot maintenance building; 690 square foot snack shack; 36,535 square foot clubhouse; and an outdoor swimming and tennis recreation complex including two unlighted tennis courts, a 25 meter swimming pool, a 20 foot diameter wading pool, and a 1,501 square foot recreation building containing lockers, a pool snack bar, tennis pro shop, and restrooms. Existing parking includes 175 spaces in the main lot off Arnold Drive and 18 spaces in an employee lot off Carriger Road, plus up to 15 overflow spaces in the grass by the main lot.

The current approved hours of operation are 6:00 am to 10:00 pm daily for regular operations; hours of operation for indoor banquets on Friday and Saturday nights are allowed until 1:00 am.

The maximum number of special events allowed is 200 per calendar year, with the maximum number of attendees per event limited to 250 persons. Note that member activities, such as Friday night dinners and tournaments, are not considered special events; the club offers these sorts of activities to members as part of the membership amenity package. Special events at the club are organized by the Fairmont Sonoma Mission Inn (i.e., no third parties can rent out the facility), and primarily have been weddings and meetings. Professional Golfing Association (PGA) tournaments operated at the golf course are not included in the Use Permit event allowance and are subject to separate permit approvals. A Use Permit (UPE04-0055) was issued for the annual Charles Schwab Cup Championship; however, that event is not currently being held at the Sonoma Golf Club.

Proposed Use Permit Modification

Sonoma Golf Club requests to add 225 memberships to their current approved total of 319, comprised of 100 additional golf memberships and 125 new club memberships. Golf members have access to the entire facility, including golf, while club members would have access to all club facilities except golf. No physical changes to the current facilities and no modifications to allowed hours of operation or the number of special events are proposed. The club will continue to operate existing facilities as approved and conditioned by the current Use Permit (PLP03-0076). Maximum occupancy of existing structures will remain unchanged; the proposed modification will allow a larger roster of members to access the current facility.

It is not clear why the current Use Permit specifies a number of memberships that can be sold, which is a business decision of the operating company. The County does regulate the land use itself (i.e., whether a golf course with special events is allowed in the zoning and compatible in the neighborhood), and enforces applicable building and fire codes, which then set the occupancy of the use (i.e., the maximum number of people who can utilize the land use). For example, the County may limit the size of a proposed hotel based on any number of environmental impacts- traffic, parking, aesthetics, etc. in order to make findings that the use is compatible with the area. However, once approved, the County does not set a limit on the number of different guests who may stay in the hotel. A 50-room hotel may have a maximum occupancy of 100 guests when full, but the operation is not limited to 100 specific guests. Another visitor-serving example, a winery, would typically be approved with limits on special events and tasting operations to manage potential traffic and noise impacts, but the County would not impose a maximum number of wine club memberships that could be sold.

In analyzing the proposed membership modification, staff has focused on identifying any additional environmental impacts that may be associated with the proposed membership increase.



Project History

The table below summarizes key project milestones and events.

Date	Project Event/Milestone
11/28/2018	Application to add 250 sports memberships
1/29/2019	Application deemed complete
2/1/2019	Referral to prominent agencies
2/5/2019	Site Visit
6/3/2019	Project Revision to reduce request to 225 new sports memberships in response to referral comments from Transportation and Public Works
8/6/2019	Notice of Hearing Waiver
8/6/2019	Hearing request received
12/17/2019	Project Revision to further modify request to 125 new club memberships and 100 additional golf memberships (225 total- proposed project) in response to public comments and discussions with existing members
6/12/2020	Notice of Public Hearing

Prior Review

The Table below summarizes prior actions undertaken for the Project.

Date	Authority	Action Taken
5/1966	Board of Zoning Adjustments (BZA)	Permit for clubhouse expansion & driveway access improvements (File No. 4056)
8/30/1988	Sonoma Valley County Sanitation District	Approved Outside Area Service Agreement to provide public sewer service to the golf club; Recorded 11/2/1988 (Doc. # 88094106)
11/8/1989	Design Review Committee (DRC)	Design Review approval for remodel of existing clubhouse and parking lot (DRC89-558)
3/14/1991	BZA	Use Permit approval for driving range expansion (UP90-814)
10/24/1991	BZA	Use Permit approval for new maintenance building along Carriger Rd (UP91-301)
5/13/2004	BZA	Use Permit approval for major golf course remodel and expansion - current facility (PLP03-0076)
6/2/2004	DRC	Design Review approval for current facility (PLP03-0076)
4/13/2005	BZA	Use Permit approval for annual PGA tournament (UPE04-0055)



General Plan and Area Plans

The following General Plan policies are applicable to the project:

LAND USE ELEMENT

The General Plan Land Use Element does not contain any specific policies applicable to the proposed project. However, the overall purpose and definition for the Recreation and Visitor Serving Commercial land use category is to provide outdoor recreation facilities and commercial services for both local residents and visitors, including restaurants, lodging, campgrounds, resorts, marinas, golf courses, tennis and racquet clubs, and similar types of uses.

OPEN SPACE AND RESOURCE CONSERVATION ELEMENT

Policy OSRC-3c: Establish a rural Scenic Corridor setback of 30 percent of the depth of the lot to a maximum of 200 feet from the centerline of the road unless a different setback is provided in the Land Use Policies for the Planning Areas. Prohibit development within the setback, with the following exceptions [...]

CIRCULATION AND TRANSIT ELEMENT

Policy CT-7nn: Require a traffic analysis and consider cumulative weekend traffic impacts in the review of discretionary projects throughout the Sonoma Valley Planning Area.

Policy CT-7qq: Consider intersection improvements such as signalization and left turn lanes at various intersections along Arnold Drive to reduce congestion, provided that the improvements are consistent with the designated road classifications.

The project is not subject to an area or specific plan.

Zoning

The table below summarizes: 1) the development standards that apply to the site as outlined in the Sonoma County Zoning Ordinance, 2) the existing condition, 3) the proposed project condition, and 4) whether the project is consistent with the Zoning Ordinance.

Standard	Ordinance Requirement	Existing Condition	Proposed Project
Land Use	Recreation and Visitor Serving Commercial (K)	Private golf course w clubhouse and recreational facilities	Allowed with Use Permit under Sec. 26-42-020(f); Consistent; No Change
Lot Area	8,000 square foot minimum	177 acres	Consistent; No Change
Front Setback – Arnold Dr	15 ft / 45 ft rd centerline	175 ft / 200 ft rd centerline	Consistent; No Change
Front Setback – Carriger Rd	15 ft / 45 ft rd centerline	130 ft / 150 ft rd centerline	Consistent; No Change
Side Setback	5 ft	70 ft	Consistent; No Change
Rear Setback	10 ft	N/A – 2 fronts	Consistent; No Change
Height	35 ft; additional may be allowed by Use Permit	38.5 ft (bell tower) Approved by PLP03-0076	Consistent; No Change
Lot Coverage %	50 %	<2 %	Consistent; No Change



Standard	Ordinance Requirement	Existing Condition	Proposed Project
Parking Spaces	174	193	Consistent; No Change
Scenic Corridor Protection – Arnold Drive	Structures set back 30% of the depth of the lot to a maximum of 200 ft from the centerline of the road	Pool/tennis complex 200 ft from centerline / clubhouse <400 ft from centerline	Consistent; No Change
Riparian Corridor Protection	Prohibit development within 50 feet of stream bank; except by Use Permit	Stream <150 ft from club house; stream flows through golf course	Consistent; No Change
NO ZONING INCONSISTENCIES HAVE BEEN IDENTIFIED			

ANALYSIS

Consistency with General Plan

The project parcel has a Recreation and Visitor Serving Commercial land use designation in the Sonoma County General Plan. This category is intended to provide a variety of outdoor recreation facilities and commercial services to local residents and visitors; the existing golf club facilities clearly support the overall Land Use goals. Specific policies requiring a 200-foot Scenic Corridor setback (Policy OSRC-3c) and traffic analysis for discretionary approvals (Policy CT-7nn; Policy CT-7qq) have also been met. Results of the traffic study are discussed below.

Environmental Analysis

Club Facility Member Usage Patterns. Traffic and noise generation are both affected by usage patterns of club members; therefore, a summary of facility usage was compiled and provided below. Members are required to sign in prior to using a facility.

Golf Course and Practice Range: Open daily 7:00 am to dusk year-round, weather depending, although most use occurs in good weather during spring through fall. In the summer when days are longer, the golf course could support a maximum of 244 players per day if every tee time (61 available at peak season) was booked with a full foursome. In winter, a maximum of 136 golfers could play per day if all 34 tee times were booked with a foursome. However, a fully booked day in either season rarely occurs.

The golf course follows traditional weekly recreational use patterns with the busiest times falling on Friday afternoons and Saturday mornings. The 2019 round count was 18,571 (one round = one golfer playing 18 holes); 15,561 rounds were members (about 84%), and the remaining 3,010 rounds (16%) were either club member guests or Sonoma Mission Inn guests. There were 9,454 rounds played by members during weekdays and 6,107 played on weekends. The majority of member rounds played were June – August (5,258 rounds) and September – November (4,636 rounds).

Clubhouse (includes lockers, fitness center, Vintage Hall, Clubhouse Grill, patio, bocce outside adjacent to patio): Open daily 6:30 am to 7:00 pm in winter (November - March); 6:30 am to 8:00 pm in summer (April - October). Dining service ends an hour before the clubhouse closes. Clubhouse use is similar to the golf course, in that it is utilized primarily by golfers before or after a round, and therefore, is busiest when the golf course is.



Pool: Open 7:30 am – 6:00 pm Memorial Day weekend (end of May) through September, weather dependent. Pool usage primarily occurs on weekends, which average about 25 people per day; weekdays average less than 15 people per day.

Tennis: Open daily 8:00 am to dusk year-round, weather depending, although most play occurs in good weather during spring through fall. The tennis courts average roughly 8 players per day, with the majority of play ending in the early afternoon when winds pick up. The tennis courts are used more Thursday through Sunday than Monday through Wednesday.

Organized Member Activities: Typically, two golf tournaments or other golf events (e.g., putting contest) are held per month April - October. A member dinner is held the last Friday of every month. Other social activities for members have included a Founders Day BBQ, weekend brunch on the patio, junior golf clinics, and summer camps for children. In 2019, a total of 43 organized member activities were held, which averaged about 50 people per activity. Member activities are held during regular operating hours. Note that member activities are not considered special events.

Special Events: Special events are hosted at Sonoma Golf Club by the Fairmont Sonoma Mission Inn, primarily weddings and meetings. Special events are held in the clubhouse Vintage Hall (maximum occupancy 200), the courtyard, and courtyard lawn. No special events are allowed in the pool or tennis courts so that these facilities can remain available to members. In 2019, a total of 44 special events were held. Special events can be held from 6:00 am to 10:00 pm Sunday through Thursday, and until 1:00 am Friday and Saturday nights in Vintage Hall. All outdoor special events end by sunset. Weddings are typically held on Saturday afternoons and evenings and various luncheons/meetings are held sporadically throughout the week.

Traffic. The 2004 traffic study conducted for the original Use Permit approval was based on trip generation numbers for a private club with 295 members and 200 special events with up to 250 participants per event. That study did not indicate total daily trips, but did calculate that the project would generate 47 trips during the weekday PM peak hour and 68 trips during the weekend afternoon peak hour. Weekday AM and weekday after-school peak hours were also analyzed, but had much lower trip generation. Traffic conditions have changed since 2004, due both to population growth in the area and to the installation of the roundabout at the Arnold Drive/Agua Caliente intersection just north of the golf club.

A focused traffic study was conducted for the proposed membership increase utilizing standard trip generation rates for an 18-hole golf course, supplemented by project-specific traffic counts. In response to a public comment, the study also provided a comparison of trip generation for a public health club/ gym the same size as the golf clubhouse, although the clubhouse does not operate like a public gym. The fitness room is about 1,100 square feet and designed to provide an extra amenity to members, but not substitute for a full fitness center experience.

Traffic counts were taken at the golf course driveway in March 2019 to capture current weekday commute patterns during the school year. Weekday counts during the summer when school is out would be expected to be lower than those observed in March. Whereas, weekend counts taken in March are lower than would be expected in summer. However, both weekday and weekend March counts were lower than presented in the 2004 study, indicating an overall lower existing trip generation than previously calculated in the 2004 study and approved for the current 319 membership.

See Table 1 below taken from the traffic study.



Table 1 – Trip Generation Summary											
Land Use	Units	Daily		Weekday PM Peak Hour				Weekend Peak Hour			
		Rate	Trips	Rate	Trips	In	Out	Rate	Trips	In	Out
2004 TIS											
Private Club	295 members	30.38*	547	0.16	47	11	36	0.23	68	24	44
Current ITE Rates											
Golf Course	18 holes	30.38	547	2.91	52	28	24	3.03	55	27	28
Comparison Rates											
Health/Fitness Club	25.9 ksf	-	-	3.45	89	51	38	3.19	83	40	43
Trip Generation Rates based on Counts											
Existing											
Total Permitted Memberships	319 members	1.10	351	0.10	32	10	22	0.19	61	22	39
Proposed											
Total Proposed Memberships	544 members	1.10	598	0.10	54	16	38	0.19	103	38	65
Net New Trips (change from existing)			247	22	6	16	42	16	26		
Net Change from Approved			51	7	5	2	35	14	21		

Notes: * Daily rate is from *Trip Generation Manual*, 10th Edition, Institute of Transportation Engineers, 2017 for the land use "18-Hole Golf Course"; ksf = 1,000 square feet

The 2004 study anticipated 547 daily trips based on maximum utilization of the facility with 295 members; 2019 traffic counts indicate a much lower number is actually occurring- 351 daily trips. Using current trip generation standards, the 2019 study calculated a maximum trip generation for the facility with 544 members at 598 daily trips. Note that although the proposed membership is about a 70% increase, this does not translate to a 70% increase in traffic generation, because maximum occupancy of the golf course, clubhouse, and other facilities is not changing. Additional members will likely facilitate a higher usage than is currently occurring; however, that increase cannot be greater than the maximum occupancy.

The 2019 study calculates the project would generate 247 more daily trips than the existing condition, including 22 trips during the weekday PM peak and 42 trips during the weekend afternoon peak. When compared to the trip numbers approved for the current facility and 319 membership, the proposed membership increase would generate 51 new daily trips, including 7 trips during the weekday PM peak and 35 trips during the weekend afternoon peak.

The study concludes that the introduction of 22 new peak hour weekday trips would not have a significant impact on traffic operation. Although introduction of 42 new trips during the weekend afternoon peak is a



comparatively larger increase, the study concludes that weekend traffic on Arnold Drive is substantially less than weekdays, and that the road system can easily accommodate that level of additional trips.

The study also evaluated the need for intersection improvements at the Country Club Drive/Arnold Drive intersection, including a signal, all way stop, and a longer left-turn lane pocket, and determined that none are warranted.

Parking. County parking regulations (Zoning Code 26-86-010) require 174 spaces for the existing golf course facility. The 2004 Traffic Study evaluated actual parking use and found that 106 parking spaces were in use on a fair weather fall Saturday when the golf club was in full operation and an afternoon wedding with 150 attendees was being held. The study further calculated that if another 100 special event attendees were present (to get to the 250 maximum allowed), and the typical special event rate of 2.5 people per car was applied to that 100, an additional 40 spaces would be needed bringing the total parking use to 146 spaces. The current Use Permit imposed the more conservative of the two parking demand calculations, and required 175 total parking spaces.

Existing parking includes 175 spaces in the main lot off Arnold Drive and 18 spaces in an employee lot off Carriger Road (a total of 193 improved spaces), plus up to 15 overflow spaces in the grass by the main lot. The project will not expand capacity of any existing facility (i.e., no increased occupancy of the golf course, driving range, clubhouse, pool, or tennis courts), and will not expand operating hours (i.e., no additional tee times or additional hours of use for any facility). Therefore, the current parking demand is expected to remain the same, and the existing parking supply is determined to be adequate to continue to support the use.

Noise. The project does not propose any changes to operating hours, does not propose new or expanded facilities, and does not propose any new uses or changes in current operations that could introduce new sources of noise or move existing noise to new locations. Public concern has been expressed that an increase in pool usage from new members might result in more noise being generated, which could carry into surrounding residential neighborhoods. The golf club property does abut residential properties on three sides (north, west, south); however, the pool is located near the western parcel boundary about 200 feet from Arnold Drive. As mentioned previously, the pool is open during the daytime in summer, from 7:30 am - 6:00 pm, when ambient traffic noise from Arnold Drive would also be occurring. In addition, the 7:30 -10:00 am timeslot is for lap swimming only, which would preclude potentially noisy merry-making until mid-morning, when most people would no longer be attempting to sleep. To date, no noise complaints have been submitted to County Code Enforcement for the pool, or special events, or for any reason. It is, therefore, reasonable to assume that the facility will continue to operate in compliance with General Plan noise standards.

CEQA Determination. The proposed project was determined to be categorically exempt from the provisions of the California Environmental Quality Act Guidelines pursuant to the Provisions of Title 14 of the California Administrative Code, Section 15301 (Existing Facilities), as an existing golf club facility involving negligible expansion of use and no new construction. No exceptions listed under Section 15300.2 apply. There is no reasonable possibility that the project would have a significant effect on the environment.

NEIGHBORHOOD/PUBLIC COMMENTS

Several public comments have been received on the project. Most were concerned about additional traffic on Arnold Drive. The focused Traffic Study was revised to include additional information in response to several public comments related to traffic, but did not identify any additional traffic impacts.



Comments were also received that the new non-golf members would likely consist of families joining to use the fitness area, pool, and tennis courts daily, resulting in more traffic and more noise than current golf members. As mentioned previously, the fitness room, small pool, and two tennis courts are meant to be additional amenities for members, but in no way compare to a dedicated health club, which would have substantially more exercise equipment available in a larger space, plus various aerobics/dance/yoga/spin classes, larger and/or multiple pools, aquatic programs, and many other additional services not offered at the Sonoma Golf Club. For example, the Sonoma Park Point Health Club offers all of this, and more, for a family of four for about \$250 per month (\$3,000 per year), which presumably is a better value for a family seeking primarily a gym membership.

A few comments cited noise concerns, primarily related to existing special events and golf maintenance operations, which are not changing, and increased use of the pool, which was addressed above.

The golf club has existed in the neighborhood since 1928. Traffic and noise concerns expressed by members of the public, including some neighbors, were evaluated by staff and do not appear to result in any incompatible uses.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Staff Recommendation

Staff recommends approval of the Use Permit subject to Conditions of Approval.

ATTACHMENTS

1. Draft Resolution
2. Draft Conditions of Approval
3. Figures: 1. Vicinity Map; 2. Aerial Map; 3. Aerial Blow Up; 4. Land Use Map; 5. Zoning Map; 6. Site Plan
4. Sonoma Golf Club Proposal Statement
5. Focused Traffic Study for the Sonoma Golf Club, W-Trans, 12/17/2019
6. Sonoma Golf Club Traffic Study, Crane Transportation Group, 1/13/2004
7. PLP03-0076 Staff Report and Final Conditions of Approval, 5/13/2004
8. Public Comments

