



DOWNTOWN ACTION ORGANIZATION (DAO)
Executive Committee Meeting
September 22, 2020
3:00pm – 4:00pm
Zoom Meeting ID: 806 654 7370
Passcode: Downtown
Phone: 669-900-9128

A G E N D A

- 1.0 **CALL TO ORDER** Natalie Balfour
- 2.0 **PUBLIC COMMENTS ON NON-AGENDA ITEMS (limited to two minutes each)**
Comments from the public will be allowed on all agenda items at the time each item is called.
- 3.0 **CONFLICTS OF INTEREST OR ABSTENTIONS** Natalie Balfour
- 4.0 **REVIEW AND DISCUSSION OF LETTER REGARDING HOTEL AZURA** All
Committee will review and finalize draft of letter stating DAO's opposition to the County of Sonoma's purchase of Hotel Azura through Project Homekey.
- 5.0 **ADJOURNMENT** Natalie Balfour

Downtown Action Organization (DAO) does not discriminate on the basis of disability in the admissions or access to, or treatment of or employment in, its programs or activities. Disability-related aids or services, including printed information in alternate formats, to enable persons with disabilities to participate in public meetings and programs are available by contacting reception at (707) 545-1414 one week prior to the meeting. Meeting information can also be accessed via the internet at <https://www.downtownsantarosa.org/districtnews>.

September xx, 2020

Geoffrey Ross, Assistant Deputy Director
California Department of Housing & Community Development
2020 West El Camino Avenue
Sacramento, CA 95833

RE: Project Homekey, Sonoma County – Hotel Azura

Mr. Ross,

Project Homekey is a welcome opportunity for dealing with homelessness and we thank California Department of Housing & Community Development for making this investment possible.

The Santa Rosa Downtown District (District), a non-profit dedicated to building the vibrancy of the City's downtown core, has sought opportunities to support homeless services and affordable housing in the City's core, including projects like Caritas Village – a partnership between Burbank Housing and Catholic Charities. And, we share the desire to do more.

However, the District would like to convey its serious concerns with the County of Sonoma's proposed use of Project Homekey funds for the purchase of Hotel Azura in Santa Rosa, a project directly adjacent to the District's border. These concerns have also been expressed to City of Santa Rosa and County of Sonoma officials, who are copied on this letter. This letter is specific to the proposed project in the City of Santa Rosa; this letter has no relation to the proposed project in the City of Sebastopol.

Lack of Process

Several years ago, the cities of Santa Rosa and Petaluma, and County of Sonoma formed the "Home Sonoma County" collaborative to coordinate services and investments. The collaborative ensures services are not duplicated and decisions have the benefit of stronger community support. The County of Sonoma has not – as of this writing – discussed the Hotel Azura project in that public forum. While process should not prevent good opportunity, the Sonoma County Civil Grand Jury has recently identified breakdowns in the County of Sonoma's use of this multi-jurisdictional partnership, and lack of a strategy. By not adhering to this agreed upon process, officials of city in which the project is located (Santa Rosa) as well as surrounding neighbors were told of the planned purchase without an opportunity to provide meaningful input.

Concentration of Services

Downtown Santa Rosa, an identified Opportunity Zone, has a disproportionate concentration of homeless shelters and service providers. Each of these projects is

valuable and critical for addressing our homeless crisis. Projects like Caritas Village, operated by Catholic Charities in partnership with Burbank Housing, add to the vibrancy of downtown. Collectively, however, adding another large permanent supportive housing project further concentrates the location of services rather than spreading housing opportunities throughout the City, which we believe is better for the individual projects and City as a whole. The City of Santa Rosa Council has had numerous discussions on the point of service concentration, and has made intentional efforts to expand shelter capacity in many different areas of the City.

Suitability of Location

There are ongoing questions as to the suitability of the Hotel Azura's location as supportive housing for the most critical homeless in our community. While it may be an appropriate site, the County of Sonoma has explained the site was selected because the owner approached with a sale offer rather than the County making a strategic investment. Numerous neighbors from the historic St. Rose neighborhood have voiced serious concerns to the Downtown District as well as City and County officials on this point.

Unknown Service Provider

The success of Permanent Supportive Housing is heavily dependent on the service provider delivering care to the residents. The County of Sonoma has stated it will not be the service provider should the Hotel Azura project move forward. However the County has not, to our knowledge, secured an alternative provider. Making a significant investment in site acquisition and construction to make the hotel suitable for a new use without a service provider identified seems to be a gamble with public funds.

As evidenced by the District's prior support for homeless services and housing within and near the District's boundaries, we believe the intent of the Hotel Azura purchase and re-use is commendable. However, we feel compelled in this instance to raise the concerns identified by our District's Board echoed by surrounding neighbors.

On behalf of the Santa Rosa Downtown District, I appreciate your consideration of our concerns in your deliberations.

Sincerely,

Natalie Balfour, Chair
Santa Rosa Downtown District

CC
Sonoma County Board of Supervisors
Santa Rosa City Council

Sean McGlynn, City Manager, City of Santa Rosa
Sheryl Bratton, County Administrator, County of Sonoma

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