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December 11, 2019

Valerie Negrete – Associate Planner
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County of Santa Clara
County Government Center, East Wing, 7th Floor
70 West Hedding Street
San Jose, CA 95110-1705

Subject: *935 Southside Drive, Santa Clara County (Assessor Parcel Number 841-15-005) Project Description for Use Permit and Architecture and Site Approval (ASA), Record Number PLN18-11235.*

Dear Ms. Negrete:

As you are aware, California agriculture is faced with many challenges, not the least of which is providing skilled seasonal labor and affordable housing. Christopher Ranch is committed to providing seasonal housing for its labor work force in south Santa Clara County. As requested, we are providing a Project Description to accompany the Use Permit and Architectural and Site Approval application that includes information related to the subject property located at 935 Southside Drive, Santa Clara County. The narrative below also addresses comments provided in your comment letter dated March 22, 2019 and Incomplete Letter dated November 18, 2019.

Request

Christopher Ranch LLC., is requesting a Use Permit and Architectural and Site Approval for renovation of six existing Agriculture Labor Housing buildings, which includes five living quarter buildings (with one building "A" having a community room) and a bath/laundry facility. Additionally, the applicant will also be requesting a permit for a Site Manager's trailer that will be located onsite.

It is critical for Christopher Ranch to acquire these permits from the County of Santa Clara due to time constraints with the United States Department of Labor to enroll in the H-2A program for seasonal skilled agricultural workers. Without the above for mentioned permits, Christopher Ranch cannot provide H-2A housing on this site. Skilled agricultural labor is a fundamental component to the success of Christopher Ranch. It is especially vital in order to continue farming throughout south Santa Clara County and San Benito County due to the lack of available skilled agricultural workers.

Project Intent

The proposed project, once renovated, will be used to house H-2A agricultural workers, hired under the H-2A Temporary Agricultural Program. Under the H-2A program, workers are granted temporary permits and are allowed by the United States Department of Labor to fill seasonal positions. The applicant anticipates 160-200 maximum seasonal skilled agricultural workers to reside at the project site for a period of up to 8 months (from April – December).

Christopher Ranch anticipates renovation upgrades to the six (6) existing buildings. These buildings were originally constructed with County building permits in 1957 (Building Permit #49739), and registered by the State Farm Labor Housing Department (Facility ID 43-0090-EH).

Building renovation upgrades include the following:

- Renovation of five (5) 3,600 +/- square foot (each) living quarter buildings; with building "A" having a community recreational room. There are a total of 38 living units with each unit having its own entry door. Each living unit is approximately 500 +/- square feet in area to accommodate approximately 5 beds. These units will be for individual persons, not families. Each living quarter building will be upgraded with the following features to bring the Project's existing structures in conformance with Santa Clara County code requirements: double paned windows, new exterior and interior doors, sheet rock, minor electrical, exterior and interior paint and new roofs.
- 1,460 +/- square foot bath/laundry facility, Building F. The City of Gilroy's potable water connection will service the showers, bathrooms and laundry facilities (located within the most northerly building. The only other water connection proposed will to the Site Manager's trailer and onsite fire hydrants. The renovation upgrades are as follows to bring the existing structure in conformance with Santa Clara County code requirements: double paned windows, new exterior and interior doors, sheet rock, electrical, exterior and interior paint, 16 toilets (2 ADA toilets), 4 urinals, and 6 sinks.
- Indoor and outdoor recreational areas are located throughout the project site for the H-2A agricultural workers (Refer to the Architectural plan set for locations).

Background

The subject property is the former site of Rodriguez Labor Camp, established in the 1970's and operated through the 1990's. The Rodriguez Labor Camp has not been in operation for the past fifteen years. Christopher Ranch acquired the subject property in June 2018 with the intent to rehabilitate the existing facilities to accommodate its H-2A seasonal agricultural workers. The bedroom count, approximately 38 units, remains consistent with the previous Rodriguez Labor Camp and the applicant is not proposing any changes to the floor plans within Buildings A-E, with the exception of Building "A", which is the removal of the commercial kitchen to serve as a community recreational room. As mentioned above, all existing structures were permitted through the County of Santa Clara.

Project Location/Existing Conditions

The subject property is located at 935 Southside Drive, Santa Clara County (Assessor Parcel Number 841-15-005). The property is located outside the City of Gilroy limits and urban service area and lies east of an existing Farmworker Labor Camp (known as Ochoa Labor Camp) and north of the City of Gilroy's Wastewater Treatment Plant. The project is approximately 3.1 +/- acres with six (6) permitted existing structures. The project has an existing sanitary sewer connection to the City of Gilroy regional Wastewater Treatment Plant. There is an existing 12-inch City of Gilroy water main within the Southside Drive public right-of-way from Rossi Lane intersection terminating at a fire hydrant located in front of the Ochoa Labor Camp. An 8-inch water line extends from the terminus of the 12-inch line along the subject property's frontage to the end of Southside Drive cul-de-sac and then out to the City's Wastewater Treatment Plant. The City of Gilroy has approved the Project's potable water connection to this 8-inch water line and is currently preparing the issuance of the Water Will Serve letter for the project.

Christopher Ranch Family Business

Christopher Ranch, headquartered in south Santa Clara County, is a family run business for over 60 years; is the largest agricultural grower, packer, and shipper of California garlic. Overseeing more than 5,000 +/- acres of row crops including garlic, bell peppers and shallots in Santa Clara County and San Benito County.

Over the years, Christopher Ranch has been affected by a shortage of skilled seasonal agricultural workers due to changes to State and Federal laws, immigration uncertainty, and lack of affordable housing. While the agricultural industry is desired in this region, the local demand for housing has an especially distressing effect on the ability to provide seasonal housing for H-2A agricultural workers, especially in south Santa Clara County. 935 Southside Drive property was purchased by Christopher Ranch in 2018 with the intent to rehabilitate the property into a clean and safe housing facility for its H-2A agricultural workers. The subject property will be used to house agricultural workers, hired under the H-2A Temporary Agricultural Program. Under the H-2A program agricultural workers are granted temporary permits and are allowed by the United States Department of Labor to fill seasonal agricultural positions.

There are three essential requirements that are mandated by the United States Department of Labor prior to hiring an H-2A agricultural worker: secure housing; transportation; and prepared meals. To secure housing for H-2A agricultural workers, farm labor contractors rent hotel rooms to fulfill the housing requirement. Due to the increase of H-2A agricultural worker demand, motels have begun to increase rates and room availability has decreased. With the increase of motel rates and decrease in room availability, Christopher Ranch decided to purchase 935 Southside Drive property, bring it into conformance with the State of California EDD housing requirements and have it become a permanent housing facility for approximately 125-150 H-2A agricultural workers for Christopher Ranch.

The US Department of Labor regulations for H-2A housing requires a "Permit to Operate". This application must be submitted to the California Department of Housing and Community Development 75 days prior to occupancy. Once the permit is issued, it is sent to the US Department of Labor for approval. This process is required each year to qualify for access to hire H-2A agricultural workers.

Standard of Operations

Christopher Ranch H-2A agricultural employees work a maximum of 9 hours a day, six days a week (working hours regulated by the United States Department of Labor). A typical work day begins with bus pick up at the Project site around 4:00 a.m./4:30 a.m. and drop off in the afternoon at 4:00 p.m./4:30 p.m. The Project's transportation is housed onsite within designated bus parking spaces (total of 5). Each bus driver has a dual job: they act as the daily bus drivers and as field crew. Bus drivers remain onsite and stay in the living quarters. Each bus seats up to approximately 40-45 H-2A agricultural workers. The H-2A agricultural workers are not allowed to own individual cars. For scheduled off-site activities the contract labor company will provide the agricultural workers with transportation for small grocery items, retail, recreational activities and medical appointments.

The on-site manager trailer will be the home of one (1) person to manage the property year round. The Site Manager will be housed in the trailer located within the front portion of the project, to serve as site security, oversee the maintenance and schedule, and meet with vendors and visitors. There is one (1) parking stall located directly across the trailer; this stall will be designated for the Site Manager only.

As part of the H-2A requirements, food is contracted out to various vendors to provide fresh food to the H-2A employees housed onsite. Food is delivered to the project site approximately twice a day; once in the morning for breakfast and lunch and again in the evening for dinner (six days a week, and three deliveries on Sunday). A loading area is designated directly adjacent to the Community Room where meals are eaten.

Janitorial service is contracted out to Empire Labor to provide cleaning and laundering services to the five living quarter areas, restrooms and community room, up to 2 times a week, with a maximum of 5 employees. Empire Labor provides transport to the site in one automobile.

The Project will also have two (2) site maintenance employees that are responsible for site pest control, landscaping, and general maintenance. These services are on an as needed basis and work during the hours of 7:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m. The maintenance employees will transport to the site in one automobile.

Parking

The project site provides twelve (11) standard parking spaces and 5 bus parking spaces onsite. One of the eleven spaces is designated for the Site Manager only. Refer to the Site Plan for location details that are a part of the Use Permit and Architectural and Site Approval submittal package.

Pursuant to the County comment letter dated March 22, 2019, the parking requirements for agricultural employee housing states one (1) parking space (minimum) per bedroom. This parking requirement is not applicable to the proposed H-2A facility, which will be providing transportation for all workers. Therefore, the applicant will be requesting a parking reduction pursuant to Santa Clara County Zoning Ordinance Section 4.30.100 Parking Exemption B where the client base is demonstrably less inclined to use automobiles than the general public.

This concludes our Project Description and response to County Staff comments. We are anxious to move forward with the above permitting so that we may begin operations by the spring of 2020. Please let us know our next steps and if you have any other questions.

Respectfully,



Bill Christopher - C.E.O. Christoher Ranch, LLC.

CC:

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