



*Rio Dell City Hall
675 Wildwood Avenue
Rio Dell, CA 95562
(707) 764-3532
cityofriodell.ca.gov*

August 1, 2023

TO: Rio Dell City Council

FROM: Kyle Knopp, City Manager

SUBJECT: Discussion and Possible Action to Authorize the Mayor to Sign Correspondence to Governor Newsom Related to California Department of General Services Purchase of Real Property in the City of Rio Dell

IT IS RECOMMENDED THAT THE CITY COUNCIL:

Review, provide direction to staff and authorize the Mayor to sign the attached correspondence.

BACKGROUND AND DISCUSSION

Attached is a draft letter to the Governor outlining the City's proposed position on the recent DGS purchase.

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DRAFT

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August 1, 2023

Governor Gavin Newsom
1021 O Street, Suite 9000
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: Appeal to the Governor for a Shared Solution Regarding Department of General Services' Purchase of an 18 Acre Parcel for a CalFire Regional Headquarters that Should also Include Opportunities for Important Housing and Commercial Development

Dear Governor Newsom,

On April 27, 2023, the California Department of General Services (DGS) closed the acquisition of an 18-acre undeveloped parcel in the center of Rio Dell. All 18 acres have now been identified for the future and exclusive use as a new regional headquarters for the Humboldt-Del Norte CalFire region.

The parcel has long been looked at by the City as a vital location for future development that includes commercial and housing projects. The site is zoned for mixed-use commercial and residential development. The City's recently approved Housing Element identifies the parcel to accommodate approximately 100 units of low and low-to-moderate income housing units. Should all 18 acres be used exclusively for the new CalFire headquarters, the community's future housing and commercial development options would be unnecessarily limited at a time when it is vital that both types of development occur.

We firmly believe there is a solution to this problem that meets everyone's needs. The Rio Dell City Council's position is summarized in the following points:

- 1.) Similar CalFire facilities, including those recently built by the State, are located on areas of land in the 5 – 7 acre range. With smart planning and efficient land use, there should be no need for a CalFire Headquarters facility that utilizes the entire 18 acres.

2.) The acquisition was done with little effort to engage the community. DGS recently engaged in community outreach for a proposed project in our neighboring city of Eureka for a new CHP headquarters. This is being done in Eureka prior to purchase, whereas DGS's acquisition in Rio Dell was conducted with no community outreach in the midst of the community's response to the December 20, 2022 Earthquakes that displaced over 200 Rio Dell residents and caused an estimated \$30+ million in public infrastructure damage. These earthquakes did not meet the federal declaration threshold. We are disappointed in the lack of DGS's engagement, especially given the circumstances.

3.) Despite being approached by the City to consider working with the community to create a shared holistic solution at the site, both CalFire and DGS have been nonresponsive and continue to insist upon their need for the exclusive use of the entire 18-acre parcel. We believe this is short-sighted, ignores housing as a priority in land use, and further disadvantages an already economically disadvantaged community.

4.) The City wishes to welcome CalFire to Rio Dell with open and enthusiastic arms but does not believe the 18-acre parcel's highest and best use is or should be exclusive to State government use. There is a way to meet everyone's needs with a parcel of this size.

5.) Prior to the DGS acquisition, the Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD) awarded \$225,000 dollars to plan and pre-permit a mixed-use housing and commercial development for the site, with HCD staff calling it a "game changer" for the community that brought important State and City goals into alignment. Those goals are now at risk.

6.) Although DGS claimed the acquisition and development of the site is consistent with California Government Code Section 65041 which calls for the efficient use of land, as proposed this project is not an efficient use of land. As previously stated, based on a similar recent development in Butte County, we believe the headquarters can be sited on 5 – 7 acres.

7.) Section 65402 of the California Government Code requires a General Plan consistency finding for public agencies prior to acquiring or disposing of real property. Neither CalFire or DGS requested a General Plan consistency finding prior to the acquisition. Had they, the City could not make the required finding. The proposed development is not consistent with the General Plan.

8.) As stated earlier, this parcel is critical to the long-term economic viability of the City. The parcel has direct access to and from Highway 101 and

outstanding visibility from the Highway. These elements make the parcel ideal for much needed commercial visitor-serving facilities, including a motel, restaurant(s), gas station, etc.

9.) The property is a premier commercial site. If used exclusively for State purposes the City, school districts and County will never realize badly needed future revenue from the site to fund police, education, roads and a myriad of other local services. No sales, transient occupancy taxes or property taxes would ever be realized from the property. This is not a good outcome for the community.

For these reasons, the City of Rio Dell requests your intervention with DGS to do the right thing and create a shared holistic solution to the challenges and needs of our time.

Sincerely,

Debra Garnes
Mayor
City of Rio Dell

Cc:

Senator McGuire and Assemblymember Wood
Cal Cities Regional Public Affairs Manager (via email)
League of California Cities
Supervisor Michelle Bushnell
Kurt McCray, Humboldt Del Norte Battalion Chief
Joe Tyler CalFire Director
George Morris III, CalFire Northern Region Chief
Department of Housing and Community Development
Department of General Services
Media Release