



CITY COUNCIL AGENDA REPORT

CITY HALL

CITY OF SONORA 94 N. WASHINGTON STREET, SONORA, CA 95370 P: (209) 532-4541

SERVICE, INNOVATION, INTEGRITY, COLLABORATION, RESPECT, LEADERSHIP

DATE: September 8, 2026

TO: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council

FROM: Tyler Summersett, Community Development Director

SUBJECT: Review Appeal Submitted by Use Permit Applicant Fred and Rhonda Buess for Additional Activities Including Lunch/Brunch and Special Events at 253 Knowles Hill Drive (Bed and Breakfast) and Schedule a Date for the Public Hearing.

RECOMMENDATION:

Consider Acceptance of the Appeal Filed for the Planning Commission Decision on August 20, 2026, and Schedule the Appeal Hearing for October 19, 2026. Giving Staff Sufficient Time to Publish the Public Notice and Prepare the Appeal Hearing Documents.

BACKGROUND:

The Inn at Knowles Hill Property was rezoned from Residential, Single-Family (R-1) to Planned Development (PD) in 1983 to allow for use as a bed and breakfast. Although approvals for operation were in place, the bed and breakfast did not open at this time. The estate was purchased by the Herriage's circa 1998 and the required guardrail and reflectors originally conditioned with the Bed and Breakfast were installed in 1999. The Herriage's opened the Bed and Breakfast later this same year. The property was purchased by the Applicants around 2005. According to City records it appears the Bed and Breakfast re-opened under its current name of the Inn at Knowles Hill in 2012. The property has been used in this manner without interruption since this time. In addition to the Bed and Breakfast use, the applicant has held periodic private Special Events and Brunch/Lunch by reservation only since 2012. The Inn on Knowles Hill is a boutique hotel set on a little over two (2) acres, featuring gardens and sweeping views of downtown Sonora looking to the East. Locally, the mansion is referred to as the "Big House" encompassing approximately 12,500 square feet. The property consists of eight unique suites within the mansion. Rooms range from ±210 square feet to ±425 square feet. The legal occupancy of the property based on the size of the home is 62 people (per table 1004.5 of the California Building Code).

The Use permit was first scheduled for a Planning Commission hearing on June 22, 2026. Due to the number of comment letters received from the neighborhood, the meeting was continued to July 27. The July meeting was continued due to evacuation warnings in place for the Dove Fire. The item was finally heard by the Planning Commission on August 20, 2026. The Use Permit was denied on 4-1 vote by the Commission.



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DISCUSSION / ANALYSIS:

An appeal of the Planning Commission's decision was received and paid for on August 24, 2026, meeting the 10-day window outlined in the Sonora Municipal Code.

The Sonora Municipal Code, Section 17.62.100 (*Appeal to Council*) provides as follows:

The decision of the (*Planning*) commission on a permit may be appealed to the council by the applicant or by any person directly and adversely affected by the decision, in accordance with the following procedure:

A. The appeal shall be filed with the community development department, on a form furnished by said department, accompanied by a fee as adopted by resolution of the city council, no part of which may be refunded within ten days after the date of decision of the commission. Such decision becomes final if an appeal is not filed within the time herein specified.

B. The city council shall consider the appeal at its next regular meeting, and if such appeal is validly made, shall set a time and place for a public hearing thereon.

Staff received one appeal for the project consistent with the outlined procedure.

1. Fred and Rhonda Buess

It is important to note, this item is not the public hearing for the appeals. This item is to inform the Council of the filed appeals and to schedule the public hearing. The appellants paid the appeal fees and filed the appeal forms prior to expiration of the 10-day appeal period. Upon the scheduling of the appeal hearing, staff will create a report and present the project to Council. The Council will have the option to uphold or overturn the approvals by the Planning Commission. The appellants along with the public will have the opportunity to submit written comments and voice their opinions on the project.

FISCAL IMPACT:

No fiscal impact to the General Fund.

ATTACHMENTS:

Request for Planning Commission Decision Appeal to the City Council- Fred and Rhonda Buess

CORE COUNCIL PRIORITIES:

Fiscal Responsibility and Stability, Public Safety and Disaster Preparedness, Economic Development/Growth and General Plan