

TO THE YOUNTVILLE TOWN CLERK FOR PUBLIC COMMENTS

March 2, 2026

Dear Town Council Members, Town Manager, Yountville residents, and other stakeholders:

While knowing almost nothing about the Yountville Commons project until two weeks ago, I have since been to three meetings in 14 days. Although vaguely aware of the concept in the past, I understand that dollar amounts on the project were only provided in the February 17 meeting, not in any of the previous 23 meetings often referenced.

Despite those previous efforts on this project, many people only pay attention when money is involved – especially when it is theirs. Now, knowing the anticipated total cost of \$91 million to the town and its taxpayers for 120-150 housing units, I, and my husband Steve, are REALLY paying attention. And the more I learn, the more concerned I am.

To begin, several notes. First, my apologies for this LONG letter. But with over 145 pages of documents presented by the town on February 17 and about six hours of meetings since then, there is a lot to digest and consider. And with project knowledge of just 14 days, I recognize I am not cognizant of every nuance of these detailed proposals (which, by the way, look to be very professionally done). Nevertheless, based on what I learned and the speed at which this project seems to be progressing, I would like to share my comments, recognizing one may take issue with some details. Second, thank you Hillery Trippe and also Eric Knight for your extra efforts to meet and listen to residents, and help address the many questions that have now arisen.

Considering this project within a standard framework of fact-finding and problem-solving, here below are my concerns:

1. WHO

- A. **WHO IS THE CUSTOMER?** As a long-time marketing and public relations consultant, I am extremely concerned that few real efforts have been made by the town to gain quantifiable input specifically from the Yountville Commons (YVC) “customer” – namely, Yountville’s affordable income and workforce for whom the Yountville Commons project is designed and who would live in these units. To me, this is the first and most basic information that should have been generated to learn what this target market wants in their living spaces that the town is thinking to provide – size, bedrooms, parking, furnished or unfurnished, et al – plus basic demographic information such as age, income, number of persons in their household, etc. How do we plan a development without knowing who the likely residents are, and what they want for their homes? Numerous comments at the February 17 meeting also voiced this concern.

I learned in the recent meetings that there are approximately 3,000 persons who may be the pool of potential renters for the Yountville affordable and workforce housing – 2,100 persons who work in Yountville, and 900 persons who work at the Veterans Home.

The cost of a professional market survey – whatever it may be – is a small price to pay to generate hard facts to learn the wants and needs of these actual workers to support a \$91 million project.

- B. **EMPLOYER INPUT:** I understand efforts have been made by leading Yountville hospitality employers (hotels and restaurants) to survey their employees; this input is much appreciated in the absence of hard customer data. However, this should not substitute for getting input from the workers themselves by a disinterested third party. First, employers understandably would like their employees close by: if Bartender #1 calls in sick, it would be great if Bartender #2 is a 10-minute walk away. Second, since housing and affordability ARE top-of-mind issues -- in Yountville, Napa, California, and the U.S.-- happier employees are likely to engender happy customers at hotels and restaurants. Thus, employers' perspectives and the support of their workers are not just altruistic, but are also good business and should be commended.

Nonetheless, employers' input, as valuable as it is, should not substitute for input from the workers themselves – and I would bet employers would agree.

- C. **YOUNTVILLE'S SUCCESS:** As an aside, I note that Thomas Keller in particular has received heat in the media and from some locals for his and others' request to slow down the Yountville Commons project – perhaps exacerbated by incendiary (and inaccurate) media headlines with verbs like “[slams](#)” and “[spar](#).”

Taking a step back, we should all remember that it is Chef Keller who largely put Yountville on the map today as an international, award-winning culinary destination, beginning in 1994 with his purchase of The French Laundry. (However, while it is before our time in Yountville, I understand The French Laundry was a pioneering restaurant when owned by Don and Sally Schmitt for 16 years prior. Their very successful restaurant made Yountville a popular destination even then.)

Those of us lucky enough to purchase our homes years ago (like us in 1998), with values that have since risen dramatically, should recognize and applaud Chef Keller's contributions since then to the growth, cachet, and success of the town. His efforts were followed by others as well, further boosting Yountville's tourism appeal. These include, among others, Philippe Jeanty with Bistro Jeanty in 1998; the late Michael Chiarello with Bottega in 2008, Bardessono Hotel and Spa in 2009, and most recently Gary Jabara and The Estate Yountville (now the town's largest employer and taxpayer). It is mainly these businesses who created the need for workers.

So let's give credit where it's due: the business efforts and successes of Yountville's acclaimed hospitality and culinary sectors have greatly benefited all of us who live here, and in multiple ways. Let's also recognize that the Top 10 taxpayers – mainly hospitality and restaurant businesses – account for approximately 43% of the total tax revenue!

(Source: AI: “top taxpayers in Yountville California”)

Furthermore, these businesses also contribute meaningfully to the Transient Occupancy Tax (TOT) so important to the financial well-being of our town. (For context, of the [expected General Fund revenue in 2025/ 2026](#), TOT represents 59%, sales tax – often tourism-related revenues –

represents 12%, and property tax represents 18%. These three main sources comprise 88% of total revenues.)

- D. **RENTER ISSUES:** It also seems some crucial questions on renter eligibility remain open-ended and unclear. With very strict federal and state Fair Housing Acts (FHA and FEHA), what is the plan to legally choose certain renters without discriminating against others? Is it permissible to say that only those with a job in Yountville are eligible for a unit in YVC? And beyond that, what happens when a Yountville worker who is a YVC resident gets a new job outside of Yountville? Are they evicted?

These and other potential pitfalls should be addressed sooner than later.

II. WHAT

- A. **HOUSING REQUIREMENTS:** It was very interesting to learn that, contrary to what we and many others believed, Yountville is NOT REQUIRED to build any new affordable housing at present. The Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG) requirements have been met through 2031. So the YVC project is, in essence, optional at present – it is not mandated or urgent. Despite this fact, there has been and is a great deal of town spending and momentum behind this project, which, as of February 17, seems to be moving aggressively down the track toward a decision date.

This haste is made more understandable now I know the #1 goal of the Town Council, as noted in [the Town Manager's Budget Message](#), "... the three most important goals established by the Town Council: 1) Acquisition and development of the YES site (now known as the Yountville Commons Project)..." I wonder if most residents would agree with this priority. The myriad concerns expressed by residents at the recent meetings I attended suggest definitely not.

In any case, it is important to keep in mind as the project overall is considered – the town DOES NOT have to do this project now. Furthermore, the "learn as we go" or "ready/fire/aim" approach proposed for the three phases seems like a very risky and unwise policy: the Town of Yountville and its expensive and permanent YVC construction project is not a Silicon Valley or AI start-up where we can easily back up and start again.

- B. **CURRENT PLANS:** But let's consider that plan as it currently stands, per the "February 17, 2026 – Public Study Session." Per page 8, the initial plan for Yountville Commons (Phase 1 - Baseline) is for 24 studios and 16 one-bedroom units. According to page 18 regarding the "Village" units, the studios' sizes average about 320 square feet (sf) – comparable on average to a standard U.S. hotel room of 325 sf. Both the 1-bedroom and 2-bedroom units assume 620 sf.

Two other plans are indicated on page 8. The second plan proposes 30 units: eight studios, six 1-bedroom, and 16 2-bedroom units. Note that rental income is likely to be impacted negatively because of fewer units. A third alternative includes smaller but furnished units for a total of 46 units – using the very clever but not inexpensive (\$25-35K per unit) Ori system to utilize the ceiling to expand the living space from bedroom to living room; this assumes 18 each of studios and 2-bedroom units, and ten 1-bedroom units.

However, employers' internal surveys showed that 2-bedroom units were most desirable – whether for roommates or a small family – and studios were least desirable of all. This is not surprising: who wants to live day in and day out in a “home” that is the size of a standard hotel room? This finding reinforces the absolute need for: 1) market research of actual YVC users, and 2) to then revisit the financial assumptions of the project overall (since, based on current rents, more studios may generate more rental income than the fewer and larger units).

(As an aside, although plans indicate the units may possibly be furnished, it is likely most residents would have their own furniture and not need or want the Ori system, unless they are just coming out of school.)

- C. **PROJECT RESULTS:** It is important to note the actual scope and anticipated results of the Yountville workforce housing. If the numbers presented in a recent meeting are correct, there is a pool of about 3,000 workers in Yountville who might take advantage of YVC offerings. However, extrapolating from the initial Phase I plan to all three phases, the total of 120 currently planned residences would only house about 4% of the pool of people who work in Yountville (or 5% if there are 150 total units, and an 30 extra units are squeezed into the buildings' footprints).

Fully built out, the project results in a total estimated cost of \$91 million. To give some context to the total cost vs. the number of residences, the cost per unit is \$758,333 for 120 units or \$606,666 for 150 units. Phase I, with a maximum of 40 units (24 units are studios or 60%) and a cost of \$40 million comes in much higher – at a cost of \$1 million each! For a studio that is an average of, say, 320 square feet, this is a cost of \$3,125 per square foot! (For context, the median price per square foot of Yountville homes is \$1,150 as of early 2026, according to [Redfin](#).) If the final Phase I total is 30 units, adding desirable 2-bedrooms to the mix, the cost per unit is \$1,333,333.

- D. **PARKING:** There are other concerns as well. Parking as planned seems to be insufficient, and overflowing street parking may not be welcomed by residents in the area. The Phase I onsite parking spaces total 130, but 76 (58%) of these exist already (Town Hall and Yount Street).

It's interesting to note that there are an average of roughly two cars per household in Napa County, per the comprehensive [2025 Napa Valley Travel Behavior Study](#). This suggests that YVC residents are very likely to have their own vehicles – and require far more parking spaces.

- E. **SERVICES & AMENITIES:** While we all love the Ranch Market for many reasons, it is probably not a permanent substitute for a large, full-service grocery store like Safeway. And what about a drug store or laundromat? (The latter looks to be planned in a future phase, Alternate I, which is unfunded at present.) Is it realistic to assume workers without a car will take an Uber or bus to Napa or St. Helena to get groceries or do laundry? I think not. In addition, looking forward, a swimming pool is planned at a cost of \$3 million: will this enjoyable amenity be available to all Yountville residents – or only those who live at YVC?
- F. **RIVER TRAIL VILLAGE HOUSING: A CAUTIONARY TALE:** Current projections of YVC assume a 5% vacancy rate, which may or may not be realistic. However, the recent experiences of River Trail

Village, built with high expectations for student housing at Napa Valley College, may be instructive and useful to consider.

Officially inaugurated in September 2024, the project is a three-building, 280-unit, 588-bed housing complex built at a cost of \$121 million (or \$43,214 per unit, with an average of 2.1 beds per unit) and heralded initially as [“life-changing” by one student](#). While later reports noted the cost was \$114 million, the actual occupancy rate in February 2025 was just 30% – no doubt much to the surprise and dismay of its project planners – and a far cry from the 75% minimum occupancy goal in Year I. As a result, the project was opened up to non-students as [River Trail Apartments](#) to fill up the project – with incentives like paid utilities and Wi-Fi, an in-unit washer & dryer, and two months’ free rent on eligible apartments.

I know it has been said this situation is different than YVC. Maybe. Maybe not. But it should at the very least force project planners to envision and cost out different scenarios of success – or lack thereof – so the YVC project is entered into with eyes wide open.

- G. **THE FUTURE OF TOURISM:** This brings up another concern. As we all see around us, numerous vineyards are – very sadly! – being ripped out near Yountville and in Napa and Sonoma Valleys. While the wine industry is Napa County’s dominant sector, Napa wine consumption is down dramatically, with consecutive year-over-year declines. Reports say this is due to a number of factors: e.g., younger generations not drinking as much wine (preferring mixed drinks, non-alcoholic drinks and/or cannabis), wellness trends, inflation, and high tasting-room fees.

Here are [some sobering comments](#). By 2034, “Napa, despite producing only about 4% of the state’s gallons, carries disproportionate weight in premium markets and could face \$1 billion to \$5 billion in lost retail value each year...The U.S. wine industry is in structural decline, and Napa is on the front line of its impact.”

Whether these changes are temporary or structural remains to be seen. However, thinking ahead, it is not much of a stretch to envision that, if wine is less popular, then perhaps visits to the Wine Country might dwindle as well. This of course would affect hotels, restaurants, retail outlets, and tasting rooms in Yountville – considered to be Napa Valley’s top destination – and impact the TOT on which many YVC planning assumptions are based.

III. WHERE

- A. **THE “HEART OF THE HEART”:** The Chamber and other organizations proudly state that Yountville is [“The Heart of the Napa Valley”](#) – and rightfully so! Coupled with the town’s small-town charm and stunning bucolic location among the vineyards makes it ideally located for visitors going up- or down-valley. Furthermore, its exceptional hotels, acclaimed restaurants, and diverse retail outlets make it a “must visit” for those to come to Napa Valley.

Thinking about this, the case can easily be made that, if “Yountville is the Heart of the Napa Valley,” the property that is the site of the YVC buildings is “the Heart of Yountville.” You will see

this if you look on a map – the approximately 7-acre YVC property is right in the middle of town. (Specifically, east of Highway 29 to the commercial and residential area, excluding the Veterans Home, which is owned and operated by the State of California.)

With this in mind, does it make sense to take this prime plot of real estate for affordable and workforce housing that only a very small number of people can use and enjoy? Is there not a better place for this housing project? The land behind St. Joan of Arc Catholic Parish is for now sale: could this (or another local parcel) be an alternate – and indeed preferable – site? In fact, the Parish parcel is over 12 acres and is zoned for housing. This larger parcel would provide housing that is less crowded, with even more room to expand.

More importantly, could not the YVC property be used, envisioned, and created as a beautiful green space, community garden, and/or welcoming gathering place – like Central Park in New York – that ALL residents of Yountville could enjoy? This could be a showplace and showpiece venue for all residents, both old and new, and visitors – regardless of income or work status.

- B. **COMMENTS ON MEASURE S.** I know that the Town bought the approximately 7-acre YVC property for \$11 million several years ago. (As an interesting aside, I read recently that Napa Valley’s di Rosa Preserve is now for sale for \$10.9 million – for 217 acres.) I see that [Measure S](#) “increased the Transient Occupancy Tax (TOT) by one percent (1%) to support workforce and affordable housing efforts. It is a special tax for funding programs and services related to workforce and affordable housing and may only be used for that purpose, including projects within and outside the jurisdictional boundaries of the Town of Yountville.”

However, from what I see, Measure S does NOT specify where the affordable and workforce housing must be sited – only that its proceeds go toward affordable and workforce housing for YV workers – and both inside and outside of Yountville’s boundaries are acceptable. I would bet that people who enthusiastically voted for Measure S did not envision it would be smack-dab in the middle of town, in “the Heart of Yountville.” Perhaps another site is better suited for the project, and this prime and very unique YVC site should be reconsidered for more general use.

While this idea is outside the box of current thinking, I think it deserves serious consideration -- and I think many residents would agree.

IV. WHEN

Perhaps a timeline has not yet been developed, but I have not seen an estimate on how long each phase is expected to take, once legal and financial commitments are made. For residents in the surrounding and nearby areas, this is important: traffic, construction noise, dirt and dust, parking and other factors are likely to inconvenience residents. They probably would like to know how long the project will take.

I assume this question and many others will be addressed in the business plan, eagerly awaited and said to be coming soon.

V. WHY

ACTUAL NEED: Furthermore, this brings up another point made by a friend that made me think. It may be controversial, but here goes: is there really a need for YV workers to live in Yountville? Why? Is this belief really a false assumption or red herring for this project?

The average Bay Area commute time was 30 minutes in 2023. In Napa, the average commute time was 23.5 minutes — and people drove alone to work.

Regarding nearby towns, according to [Rome2Rio](#), Yountville is a 13-minute drive from Napa, 24 minutes from American Canyon, and 35 minutes from Fairfield – hardly onerous journeys!

Moreover, keep in mind the fact that – fully built out for \$91 million – the YVC project of 120-150 units will only house less than 6% of the pool of 3,000 or so Yountville workers who might qualify for affordable or workforce housing. Is this enormous expenditure justified when so little of the perceived affordable/workforce housing problem is addressed? Moreover, given the modest commute times to surrounding areas, where new housing is being built, is it REALLY a problem?

VI. HOW

EXECUTION AND BY WHOM: A variety of proposals have been shown to residents, and final plans are to be determined. However, the current thinking is that the town would manage this project. I have heard numerous concerns in the meetings I have attended about this – that such a big and costly real estate development project is outside the area of expertise and purview of the town. Conceptually, that concern makes sense. I would like to hear more on why residents should support the town shouldering this enormous and risky financial venture – I understand the largest in the town’s history – without much greater certainty that it is likely to succeed.

Meanwhile, details of project implementation should come in the forthcoming business plan.

VII. HOW MUCH

- A. **PROJECT COST:** Before the February 17 meeting, I read that the project cost was estimated at \$40-60 million. Perhaps the media got this wrong. But the numbers presented on February 17 were \$91 million for the total project and \$40 million for Phase I (i.e., \$26 million to come, plus \$14 million already spent). Why is there such a difference between the original estimate and that presented on February 17? Wasn’t a budget given to those who prepared the project plans? (Or as one gentleman at a meeting suggested, were the project plans perhaps over-developed?)
- B. **RENTS VS. INCOME:** I am not sure I understand the rent structure relative to income. In the BAE document, pages 12-13, there are two tiers of rents (plus related discussion): “... two affordability tiers for potential rents for housing units in Yountville Commons , with rents ranging from \$1,500 per month for studio units up to \$2,000 per month for junior two-bedroom units in the most affordable tier (WF1). The second tier (WF2) assumes rents that are somewhat higher,

but still likely to provide below market rents, ranging from \$2,000 per month for a studio to \$2,800 per month for a junior two-bedroom unit...

Here is the chart from that section, which assumes no more than 30% of income is spent on rent and utilities:

Table 12: Preliminary Yountville Commons Rents and Affordability

WF1 Tier Rents					
	Rent	Utility Allowance	Income Needed (a)	Household Size	Affordability Category
Studio	\$1,500	\$115	\$64,600	1	Low
1-Bedroom	\$1,700	\$135	\$73,400	2	Low
Jr. 2-Bedroom	\$2,000	\$177	\$87,080	3	Low

WF2 Tier Rents					
	Rent	Utility Allowance	Income Needed (a)	Household Size	Affordability Category
Studio	\$2,000	\$115	\$84,600	1	Low
1-Bedroom	\$2,400	\$135	\$101,400	2	Low
Jr. 2-Bedroom	\$2,800	\$177	\$119,080	3	Low

Note:

(a) Assumes rent plus utility allowance is no more than 30 percent of monthly income.

Sources: Town of Yountville, 2026; Napa Housing Authority, 2026; BAE, 2026.

As the chart indicates, depending on the tier, income for studios ranges from \$64,600 to \$84,600; for 1-bedroom \$73,400 to 101,400; and \$87,080 to \$119,080 for a Jr. 2-bedroom. (While I am not sure what the Junior unit is, a 2-bedroom unit can accommodate two renters with two incomes or perhaps a family with children and just one income.).

Are these incomes what Yountville workers actually earn – including, say, hotel housekeepers, restaurant servers, and Veterans Home caregivers? I certainly hope so – but that is NOT what I understand from anecdotal conversations with people likely to know others' salaries. This concern is supported by the BAE report of February 13, 2026, page 5, which states: "... almost half (48 percent) of the local workers earn \$49,999 or less per year..." This figure alone translates to a maximum rent of \$1,250 per month – about 20% less than the least expensive rental unit, a studio, at \$1,500 per month.

Thus, there seems to be quite a disparity between the proposed rents and what is actually affordable for Yountville workers. So now we come full circle: market research of 'the customer' – those persons who work in Yountville would be likely to rent in YVC – is absolutely essential.

- C. **IMPLICATIONS OF PLANNING MISCALCULATIONS:** While the town is ostensibly on the hook for any shortfall, financial miscalculations, or planning errors, it is really WE the residents and taxpayers who would likely bear the brunt.

I would like to understand better this statement from the Community Reference Document, #1r: “The leased property would be an existing Town asset, not the Commons project itself, and project revenues are not expected to secure the debt. As a result, even if the project generates less revenue than anticipated, the Town would still be required to make the debt payments.”

Furthermore, the presentation of “Preliminary Funding and Financing Discussion,” page 16, indicates that there are four scenarios (status quo plus three borrowing scenarios), with “Project Fund Proceeds” of \$0 (status quo), \$15.9 million, \$30 million, \$50 million with “Net Direct Debt Per Capita” of \$2,193, \$7,917, \$12,909, and \$19,992, respectively. These kinds of financials are not my area of expertise. Does this mean that each Yountville resident (“per capita”) has a potential debt obligation of this amount? Clarification is needed on these financial issues.

In addition, now that some numbers have been put forth, it makes good business sense to consider revisiting the business and financial scenarios – both better and worse. No one wants an unsuccessful development – and I am sure no Yountville resident wants to pay for it.

VII. SUMMARY & NEXT STEPS

As the construction idiom goes, “measure twice and cut once.” It seems the town is in a hurry to make decisions on this major project. Let’s pause/slow down/hold off until key questions are answered. Importantly, let’s delay crucial decisions before we commit scarce resources – more time, energy and money – until there is a very high likelihood of success. On judgment, we are not there yet. If we do not take the time now to do this right, we will need lots of time in the future to try and fix it – plus our money as taxpayers.

In summary, here is a recap of key points and next steps:

1. Hold off on any further financial or legal commitments on the YVC project.
2. Start with a professional market research study to determine the actual needs of persons targeted for the affordable and workforce housing.
3. Examine if the YVC project is needed now – or indeed really needed at all.
4. Consider with an open mind some unorthodox ideas – namely to build the project at an alternate site and to develop the current YVC site as a showpiece for all residents and visitors to enjoy.
5. Revisit the planning assumptions and related financial scenarios based on input to come.

Thank you for your attention and consideration.

Sincerely,



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