

July 1, 2026

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing this letter to ask that you prioritize consideration to the Chamber of Commerce's bid to take over the River Lodge and bring it back to what it was built for. It was built in 1998 and *"it was developed as an Eel River Valley Conference Center, with the goal of increasing local tax revenues and attracting additional lodging to the area."* In the past 26 years that I have owned my catering business, I have worked closely with the Fortuna Chamber of Commerce CEO's when catering events at the River Lodge. They have helped with planning excursions and giving suggestions to the out of town guests of what our city and county has to offer. They go ABOVE AND BEYOND to make the experience of coming to Fortuna a pleasant and easy one! The River Lodge needs to continue to be available to not only our local residents, but to the out of town businesses/corporations to utilize and to come spend, stay and play!

As a local caterer for the last 26 years, I have catered more events at the River Lodge than I can count! In the last few years alone, I have catered 50 plus events ranging from small Birthday Parties, Wedding Showers, Celebrations of Life, Weddings, Conferences both big (350+ people) over the course of 3-4 days, and Small (100 people or less). I have had the honor to work with the River Lodge staff who have ALWAYS gone Above and Beyond to make these events run smoothly. The River Lodge is the BEST venue in Humboldt County. I say this with confidence as I cater in many different venues, and no venue is even close to the beauty of the River Lodge, has the parking, has the beautiful backdrop of the river, a kitchen that is awesome, can accommodate 500 people without it feeling like it is overcrowded and is close to the local motels, and food establishments.

Last May I had the honor to cater Chevron's disaster drill and it brought in over 150 guests who stayed at our hotels, ate at local food establishments, and spent money in the City of Fortuna. I also catered the Partnership Conference in 2018 that brought in over 200 people from all over the US, the Western Field Ornithologists which also brought in 200+ people from all over the US. Every out-of-town conference I have catered has LOVED the venue, the staff and what Fortuna and the County has to offer. This IS what the vision of River Lodge was when it was created. It wasn't built to make the City of Fortuna big profits from the "individual event rental" monies coming in. The vision was much broader, and it continues to meet that vision. Even smaller events like weddings, class reunions, private celebrations fill our hotels, and bring in sales tax from the local shopping our guests do while in Fortuna.

An important issue that you need to consider is the loss of business for your local caterers, floral companies, event rental companies, cake vendors, photographers, dj's, event planners, and so many others. This will hurt us! This will also trickle down directly to the city of Fortuna in the loss of the sales tax we pay to the city when we cater these events. With you wanting to increase the sales tax in the city – this is ridiculous that you are thinking of throwing this money away and trying to replace it with a tax measure. In

the last year alone the sales tax revenue from my contracts at the River Lodge/Monday Club to the City of Fortuna was about \$5400, with gross sales from catering events from River Lodge/Monday Club alone was about \$55,000. Over the past couple years “the out of town” conferences like Chevron brought in \$740 sales tax, Forest Landowners/Partners for Fish and Wildlife \$518, Western Field conference \$1026, just to name a few. If the River Lodge is leased to the High School, this sales tax will no longer be coming into the City of Fortuna. Not to mention the TOT you will lose in giving this contract to the High School. That will be a big hit to my business – and I am just one of many! This will really impact the small business community, not only in the City of Fortuna, but County wide.

I know the plan Mr. Duey talked about at the City Council Meeting outlining the plan for the River Lodge included using it for District Office Space and would be used ONLY for nonprofit, school, and educational events. Clint also talked about using the River Lodge as a place for bringing in school conferences which really surprised me as we have the Sequoia Conference Center that was built primarily for educational purposes. In addition, the Sequoia Conference Center rents the facility to nonprofits only which means there is already a venue available to fill all those needs. In my opinion it would be a shame to see the River Lodge be made into a high school district office with total control of the facility given to the school district when it has so much potential for the citizens of Fortuna, Humboldt County and Nationwide Companies and Organizations to be able hold their events there – which is what it was designed to be used for in the first place.

I have worked with Felicia at the chamber office, and she is amazing and has more energy than anyone I know! She works hard to make sure the City of Fortuna and its businesses, both big and small, have a place in our community to thrive. Felicia, the Board and staff would be the perfect fit to make the River Lodge thrive again. She has the connections, the drive and energy to make this work for everyone involved. They need the chance to get the River Lodge back on track not only for the City of Fortuna, the community members who rent the Lodge for funerals, weddings, showers, celebrations, local conferences, out of state conferences, but for every small business/vendor that works with the Chamber and the River Lodge to make a living. I am COMPLETELY confident she will see to it that it will be booked and maintained to the highest level possible. PLEASE consider our community and what a loss it will be to SO MANY if it turns into office space and a place for nonprofit events only. I know it would be devastating for my business, and countless other businesses that count on this venue to make our businesses succeed.

Thank You,

Julie Winburn

Julie Winburn
Moonlight Catering

