

June 15, 2015

In order to address growing concerns about the long term sustainability of the Napa Valley, I offer my thoughts and recommendation for consideration by the Committee regarding Napa County's policies on the development and expansion of new wineries. .

1. Proposal: Continue to issue variances, but limit variances

A limited number of variances can potentially be beneficial and should be allowed in order to tailor a project to the specific site and minimize impacts to the neighbors, watershed, and farmland. Wineries are an auxiliary, conditional use subordinate to production, not a right. Allowing variances requires strict guidelines for the Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors to ensure they are used to minimize impacts rather than to force a winery to fit on a parcel that is not appropriate for development. The extent of variances should be limited to 20%.

2. Proposal: No net loss of vineyard for winery development

I feel the committee really needs to reconsider our lack of action on this item. While it may be true that there has only been a relatively small net loss of vineyard in the Ag Preserve and Ag Watershed to date, this should still be cause for concern. First of all, any farmland that is lost to development is for all practical purposes irreversible. According to the updated staff report from June 8, 2015, if the General Plan winery numbers are realized, we are looking at as many as another 137 new wineries and an unknown number of modified permits by 2030. Keeping on the current trajectory of the relatively low average loss of 40 acres per year (staff report April 27, 2015 P. 7), in 15 years that is 600 acres, which I would argue is not a trivial amount. Added to the 874 acres lost over the past 20 years, that's over 1400 acres. The fact that we have had very little net loss of vineyard only means there is conversion of forest to vineyard, putting more pressure on our water availability, habitat and other watershed services.

3. Proposal: Limit number of winery permits issued annually in the Ag Preserve and Ag Watershed, and consider a cap on the total number of winery permits issued in these areas.

If there are some 50 new and expanded permits currently in the pipeline, the cumulative effect of that scale of development needs to be weighed. Again, the General Plan anticipated another 137 new wineries by 2030, but did not take into consideration the expansion of existing wineries. We have to find a way to strike a balance that allows for sustainable agriculture, controlled growth while taking into consideration the need to protect ag land for agricultural use, our limited natural resources, the constraints of our infrastructure, and respect for our neighbors. We must consider the cumulative impacts of development on our watershed and our community.