

February 6, 2014 Email from Nancy Citro in Healdsburg

Good morning Sandy

I found your website after reading about the small winery ordinance that was passed recently by the St Helena city council. It is of interested because I am involved in similar issues in my neighborhood here just outside of the town of Healdsburg on Westside Road. Our Westside Community Association was formed back in the sixties mostly for social reasons but also to network around safety and other neighborhood problems. The last few years, our members have been concerned about the increase of wineries and the impacts they create. Just last year, we formed an advisory group and in 2013 we met over three dozen times, lots of meetings, planning commission hearings, discussions with supervisors and commissioners, etc.

What the wine industry tells us is that they cannot survive with the changing business model moving away from the three tier distribution system to direct sales without hosting events for their customers. Some do them legally with permits, some just do what they want since the county has a very weak code enforcement policy. The impact of special events in our neighborhood is extremely detrimental to our well being and our property values and well being of those that live close by.

The latest change to the general plan added the language that weddings and family celebrations help build brand loyalty, therefore are allowed. What it does is boost the bottom line, but not without impacts. We are not in the city limits, but on agricultural land, mostly LIA the highest ag use land classification. The trend to allow wineries to rent out to private parties changes what we believe is the definition of a winery into a special event center, a commercial use that should not be allowed.

If your ordinance stays, your residential neighborhoods will never be the same. Families won't want to live next door or even nearby. (its starting to happen in our neighborhood). Folks that live next to them, for whatever reason, decide to put their home on the market. Once the potential buyer learns of how many events and the impacts of having amplified music until ten at night, parking, safety and production noise, they won't want the house. Where will the party goers park? This happened to my neighbor, he can't sell because of it. A second friend just sold their 40 acre farm with vineyards and a farmhouse.....to a couple that just applied for a very ambitious winery project. There are wineries already on both sides of the farm, and no couple would buy it(as a private home) because of that. It ended up only potential winery owners looked at it, and eventually one bought it. Now there are three wineries properties in a row.

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Wineries are commercial production plants and do not belong in a city's residential neighborhoods. Looks like you have the signatures to get the ordinance stopped as well it should. If it does remain, each time one comes before the planning commission, your group is going to have to rally to minimize the event and other impacts. It will wear you down eventually, it gets very time consuming. We just had a neighborhood meeting for a proposed project were 70 neighbors came to listen to our presentation. Many mentioned they were tired of having to go to hearings, they just keep coming! We now have two dozen wineries on our ten mile long Westside Road. Currently there are three more in different stages, one about to go to hearing in March.

Best regards  
Nancy Citro

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