

Westside Community Association



Formed for the purpose of furthering the welfare of the Mill Creek and Westside Communities

January 14, 2015

Tennis Wick
Director, PRMD
2550 Ventura Avenue
Santa Rosa CA 95403

RE: UPE14-0008; 7097 Westside Road Healdsburg, Ramey Vineyards LLC

Dear Mr. Wick,

The Westside Community Association (WCA) submits the following comments regarding the proposed Use Permit for a new winery and entertainment facilities at 7097 Westside Road (Project).

The Project, which includes a large winery, several tasting rooms, restaurant related facilities, lounge and overnight accommodations, is:

1. Too large in scale,
2. Disproportionately focused on entertainment and events,
3. Located within the scenic corridor,
4. Situated in a high concentration of existing wineries and tasting rooms, and
5. Has cumulative impacts that have not been assessed.

1. Too Large in Scale: This is the most intense project ever proposed for Westside Road, and is out of scale with other recently permitted projects. The project consists of over 46,000 square feet of new construction plus the construction of wine caves, four (4) separate tasting rooms, including a VIP lounge, three (3) kitchens, and two (2) overnight accommodations.

A 60,000 case operation would be significantly larger than neighboring facilities. Westside Road has 23 permits for grape processing. While decades ago two facilities were permitted for more, the average maximum permitted production of

the other 21 faculties is 20,000 cases. The 42 acres of grapes planted on the Project site translates into roughly 7,000 to 9,000 cases of production utilizing on-site fruit.

The Project proposes to import fruit from as far away as Lake, Mendocino, Napa and Marin counties. Since the vast bulk of the fruit will be transported to the winery, there is no justification for a winery size in this rural location much larger than the 20,000-case average in the area.

In addition, a 60,000 case winery, importing the bulk of its fruit from far away does not appear to have a strong agricultural justification for re-locating a processing facility currently located within the City of Healdsburg to an already impacted and important rural roadway.

Furthermore, the existing winery in Healdsburg employs a staff of 15 people. Moving the existing operation out of town will mean that 15 people that now work in a location with access to transportation and other services will have to commute out to the far reaches of Westside Road, and in addition to the extra truck trips for importing fruit, will add yet more traffic on this already impacted rural roadway.

2. Disproportionate focus on entertainment: A large proportion of the Project's square footage is geared around entertainment, events and commercial office space, and calls into question whether the visitor serving and administrative components of the project are truly incidental and secondary to agriculture. With the 3-story baling barn, tasting rooms in the hop kilns, and tasting rooms and kitchen located within the winery as well, there is more than 11,700 square foot of entertainment and visitor serving facilities, and 6,000 square feet of office space. Actual winery processing space is 27,050 square feet, which means that entertainment and office space is equal to approximately 65% of the space dedicated to actual wine processing. The County has determined that amount of marketing and administrative office uses should not exceed 15% of the winery size to be considered "incidental" in use.

The proposed lounge, commercial kitchen, food service facilities, and lodgings together, effectively represent a restaurant or resort facility, which is not allowed in neither LIA zoning nor on Williamson Act lands, and these features should be removed from the project.

The strong hospitality and entertainment orientation weakens the agricultural connection justifying a location in a very rural area on Westside Road. It suggests that the main reason for moving the existing processing facilities from a location in Healdsburg, with good highway and transportation access for it operations and employees, to Westside Road; is to exploit the location on this rural roadway, for commercial marketing purposes.

3. Scenic Corridor and Non-Conforming Use Restrictions: Westside Road is a designated Scenic Corridor under the Open Space Element of the County General Plan. The proposed project would result in several structures, parking and other development within the 200-foot setback. (See Attached WCA Letter submitted on December 2, 2014 to the Design Review Committee.)

The WCA does not believe that constructing tasting rooms and other visitor serving facilities in the location of the current hop kilns and bale barn complies with either Sonoma County zoning ordinances, the General Plan Open Space Element or Section 65567 of the State Planning and Zoning law.

Westside Road embodies Healdsburg's rich agricultural heritage, with scenic vistas and historic structures, which provide continuity with our past and enhance our quality of life. The Project threatens this heritage. This Project includes large structures and parking adjacent to historic buildings and viewsapes, and includes intense visitor serving uses that will be degrade the rural character of the area.

4. Situated in a high concentration of existing facilities: Per General Plan Ag Resource Elements AR – 5F(3), 5G, and AR-6F, a detrimental concentration of wineries, tasting rooms and event facilities is a rationale for the County to deny a discretionary Use Permit.

There are already three (3) other facilities with visitor serving uses within the quarter mile stretch of Westside Road where the Project is proposed to be located¹. Adding a fourth, very large project in this particular stretch of road, in close proximity to several other event facilities, will create traffic issues that have not been assessed. In addition, Westside Road is a designated County bicycle way. It is one of the most popular bicycle routes in the County, and is used by farm equipment and many local and visiting motorists as well. Such a tight concentration of event facilities will also greatly impact the rural character and rural landscapes on this already impacted and important rural scenic byway.

Also, having the winery across the street from the tasting room and entertainment facilities will create additional road safety issues with visitors and employees forced to cross the narrow roadway with limited sight lines.

5. Cumulative Impacts: The cumulative impacts for an additional and very large project as proposed in the area will be significant. Westside Road currently has 27 permitted tasting rooms, entertainment facilities, and wineries. It is an area that has one of the highest concentrations of events and event facilities in the County, and already has a detrimental concentration of events and event facilities.

¹ Other three facilities - Arista UPE09-0026, William Seylem UPE04-0074, Gracianna Family Winery UPE10-0021,

As a consequence, the cumulative impacts of any additional projects will degrade the rural character of the area. A project proposing a 60,000 case, 46,000 square foot facility with 10,700 square feet of entertainment facilities, 6000 square feet of office space, hosting 44 event days, public tasting and lodging facilities, will have a detrimental impact on the neighborhood.

In addition, the project site is located in a cluster of tasting rooms and wineries that, with the addition of the proposed Project would result in four facilities within approximately one-quarter mile along Westside Road.

Conclusion: The Project is simply too large, and commercially oriented for a rural area such as Westside Road, and will be detrimental to the rural character of the area. In addition, having restaurant facilities and buildings located within the scenic corridor, the Project violates Sonoma County Zoning Code and General Plan requirements. For these reasons, the WCA does not support the County granting a discretionary use permit for the Project. The WCA is also concerned that features of this Project do not comply with the zoning code or Rule 8 of the Williamson Act, and calls into question why the Project was sent for Initial Study review before the non-compliant features are removed.

For the above reasons, the WCA believes that this Project is not suited for the proposed location on Westside Road and should be denied.

Respectfully Submitted,

Westside Community Association Advisory Committee

cc

Supervisor James Gore

Supervisor Efren Carrillo

Planning Commissioner Tom Gordon

Planning Commissioner Willie Lamberson

Planning Commissioner Pamela Davis

Planning Commissioner Tom Lynch

Planner Tracy Tesconi

Attachment

Westside Community Association



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December 2, 2014

Sonoma County Joint Design Review/Landmarks Commission
2550 Ventura Ave.
Santa Rosa, CA 95403

RE: 7097 Westside Road, UPE14-0008

Dear Commissioners

This letter is on behalf of the Westside Community Association (WCA) regarding the proposed use of the existing hop kiln structures for entertainment and visitor serving uses, which is included the Ramey Use Permit application.

The WCA does not believe that constructing a tasting room and other visitor serving facilities in the location of the current hop kiln structures complies with either Sonoma County zoning ordinances, the General Plan Scenic Resource Element or Section 65567 of the State Planning and Zoning law.

Section 65567 of the State Planning and Zoning law prohibits issuance of a building permit in contravention of the General Plan's Open Space Element. The proposed new tasting room, entertainment and parking facilities intrude into the 200 foot setback and may not be built consistent with either State law or the General Plan requirements.

The existing hop kiln structures are non-conforming structures because they are located within the 200 ft. scenic corridor setback. The provision of Section 26-64-030 Scenic Resource Combining District apply to properties along scenic corridor, and delineates the conditions whereby construction may be permitted on the properties covered by this provision. The proposed project is located in a scenic corridor and thus subject to the provision of this section. Since the proposed project is not a maintenance, restoration or reconstruction of the existing hop kiln, but rather a new use, requiring virtually all new construction, there is no provision that would permit such new construction and new use within the 200 foot setback.

The provision of Section 26-64-030 allowing construction new barns and similar agricultural support services would also not apply as agricultural support services are spelled out in Policy AR-5f as processing, storage, bottling, canning, and packaging. The proposed use is clearly visitor serving.

Similarly Article 94 – Nonconforming Uses of the Sonoma County Zoning Code delineates the circumstances under which a non-conforming use may be continued or reconstruction may be permitted. Again, the proposed new use and construction does not comply with County codes. Under section 26-94-010 the non-conforming use may be replaced by a use of the same or less intensity upon obtaining a use permit. The proposed project does not qualify under this provision for two reasons. First, the use of the hop kiln structure has been abandoned for a sufficiently long time that any new use would not be replacing a current use. Second, the proposed use is not “the same or less intensity”. A tasting room, VIP lounge, marketing accommodations, and two kitchens and dining areas is certainly not a less intensive use.

Section 26-94-020 delineates how a non-conforming use can be reconstructed. Under this provision, the need for reconstruction would have to be as the result of several enumerated circumstances – explosions, acts of god and the like, and presumably be replacement of an existing, non-commercial use. The proposed project does not meet these standard for a reconstruction.

Finally, even if the proposed new construction and use were a continuation of an existing non-conforming use, which is not the case, the proposed modifications, in addition to being a more intense use, would increase the foot print of the structures by more than 10% limitation contained in Section 26-94-010. Based on drawing A1.10 of the application the existing hop kiln structures would be increased by approximately 19%.

Therefore, for the above stated reasons, the WCA requests that the Landmarks Commission not recommend approval of this new construction because it does not comply with the County’s General Open Space Element and the County’s Zoning Ordinances.

Thank you for your consideration of the important matter.

Sincerely,

Westside Community Association Advisory Board

cc Tracy Tesconi