

Westside Community Association



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

County of Sonoma
Permit Sonoma Department
Attention Melinda Grousch, via e-mail melinda.grousch@sonoma-county.org

RE: Hop Kiln Estate, Landmark Vineyards. UPE13-0011, 6025, 6040, 6050
Westside Road

Dear Ms. Grousch:

This letter is the Westside Community Association (WCA) response to the above referral for a Use Permit modification.

Representatives of the WCA have reviewed the application and met with the Applicant, and based on agreements reached, the WCA supports the Use Permit Modifications with the noted changes, as further explained in points 1-5 below. The Applicant has:

- Engaged the community early on in a constructive and responsive way;
- Taken to heart the noise and public safety issues raised by the WCA on behalf of neighbors and the public, and modified the project to address these issues; and
- Acquired, planned and designed the project in a way that addresses sustainable levels of hospitality and visitor serving uses in the Westside Area.

The WCA appreciates the efforts by the Applicant, Landmark Vineyards, to work with the WCA and its neighbors to make this project an asset to the community.

1. Reducing noise impacts by relocation of the processing facility, winery access, and visitor parking

One of the key issues with the original application was the noise associated with winery operation and visitor parking near the property line adjacent to residential structures. Noise from delivery trucks, fork lifts, as well as parking lot noise in such close proximity to the boundary with these residences was of significant concern. WCA continues to have concerns about the accuracy of the sound studies performed, and the efficacy of a sound wall in mitigating impacts. However, moving the winery operations and truck deliveries approximately 450 feet from this property boundary will definitely offer mitigation of sound impacts to these residences.

In addition to reducing noise impacts, moving the processing facility away from the hop kiln will maintain the architectural integrity of these historic structures.

2. Maintaining historic integrity of hop kilns and scenic viewscape

The hop kilns are one of the most iconic historic structures in Sonoma County. Unlike another project on Westside Road proposing to utilize historic buildings, the Applicant's architects are keeping the exterior appearance of the structures as close to original as possible.

Another important feature of this project is that all structures associated with hospitality remain outside of the scenic setback pursuant to the Scenic Resource Element of the Sonoma County General Plan. Consistent with the intent of the Zoning Code for scenic setbacks, the existing barn, located on the opposite side of the road, and within the scenic corridor, will continue to be used only for storage with no intensification of use.

3. Ensuring public safety by relocation of project access

As public safety on Westside Road is a primary concern, the WCA applauds the Applicant for relocating the driveway 45 feet to the west to meet the County's standards for safe sight distance

According to County standards and as stated in the Applicant's traffic study, the safe sight distance requirement for project access is as follows:

“At un-signalized intersections a substantially clear line of sight should be maintained between the driver of a vehicle, bicyclist or pedestrian waiting at the crossroad and the driver of an approaching vehicle. Line of sight for all users should be included in the right of

way, in order to preserve sight lines. Adequate time must be provided for the waiting user to either cross all lanes of through traffic, cross the near lanes and turn left, or turn right, without requiring through traffic to radically alter their speed.”

The estimated speed for vehicles approaching the project’s access road is approximately 30 mph. At this speed, 335 feet of safe sight distance is required to meet the standard from the South and 290 feet from the West.

The revised sight distance analysis for the new driveway location will enable these safe sight distances.

Landmark’s decision to relocate the driveway to ensure public safety stands in stark contrast to two recently proposed projects on Westside Road that were unable to meet the County’s stated standard for safe sight distance and proposed that the public be subjected to a less safe, stopping distance standard.

Westside Road has one of the highest concentrations of tasting rooms of any road in Sonoma County, and is also one of the County’s most popular bicycle roads. Westside hosts over 20 organized bicycle events, and is a designated bikeway in the Transportation Element of the Sonoma County General Plan. Therefore, any project proposed in the Westside Area must fully meet or exceed safe sight distance standards related to road safety, without exception.

4. Reducing impacts by elimination of marketing accommodations

The WCA supports the Applicant’s decision to eliminate the marketing accommodations included in the existing use permit. Given high concentration of tasting rooms in the Westside Area, the cumulative impacts of the intensification of use from all existing and future wineries marketing accommodations potential has not been addressed.

The County has allowed marketing accommodation in some use permits, but such additional hospitality uses should be limited to areas without such a high density of tasting rooms and in such a rural area.

5. Maintaining sustainable levels of hospitality facilities and uses

The WCA believes that the number, size and hours of events in the current use permit are appropriate. The 12 events (8 industry events and 4 Ag promotional) are in line with the average number of events allowed at neighboring wineries. Given

the high number of tasting rooms in the Westside Area, permitting higher levels of events for new and existing tasting rooms would create significant cumulative impacts.

In addition, with all outdoor events ending at 5 PM, and prohibition of outdoor amplified music will greatly reduce noise impacts on neighboring residences and rural character.

Summary

The WCA has participated in the County's efforts to define protective guidelines for tasting room and hospitality uses in areas of concentration for the last three years, and has proposed standards to address the cumulative impacts of hospitality uses in the Westside Area. The WCA believes that the Applicant's proposed project modifications will essentially meet these standards as discussed above. With the modification to the driveway location and the other changes proposed by the Applicant, the WCA supports approval of the Use Permit Modification.

Westside Community Association Advisory Committee

Cc:

Matt Steel, Landmark Vineyards, Hop Kiln Estate
Tennis Wick, Jennifer Barrett, Dean Parsons, James Gore, Lynda Hopkins, Susan Gorin, David Rabbitt, Shirlee Zane
Planning Commissioners