

Response to Sonoma Valley Wine Growers Association Winery Events Ad Hoc-SVCAC

Before responding to particular comments from the Growers Association, it seems essential to revisit some critical context.

Here's why the SVCAC Ad Hoc committee formed and why we created the existing Event Guidelines.

1. Over the past decade the SVCAC received many applications from wineries seeking approval for use permits that included various kinds of events. The Commission relied primarily on comments from neighbors to determine if the proposed events would involve excessive noise and/or traffic during these events. We determined that we needed a set of guidelines relevant to our valley to help us determine what might be excessive in each case. The SVCAC reviews not only Use Permit applications but also is asked by Permit Sonoma to comment on Design Review considerations.
2. Over many years, Permit Sonoma and previously PRMD had engaged groups of stake holders – winery operators and concerned citizens – to discuss the issues and try to come to a consensus as to what would constitute reasonable guidelines. Over the years different representatives appeared for a meeting or two, then were replaced by others who would, necessarily, begin to discuss the same issues without reference to what had already been debated. In an effort to move forward, the SVCAC created the Ad Hoc committee and charged it to establish the Guidelines.

Here's what the Guidelines are:

1. They are **ONLY** Guidelines, with no legal standing. Like the SVCAC itself, they exist to advise and inform, not to mandate.
2. They affect only a winery's operations as a venue for **PUBLIC EVENTS**, including public tastings, not the operation of wineries in any other aspect.
3. They affect only new or significantly renovated wineries that are on **land zoned for agriculture**.
4. As Guidelines, they are to be used, along with other criteria , e.g. neighbors' concerns, unique site conditions, and history of the operation, to determine if the proposed operation of events will be compatible with the rural character of the area, will create potentially dangerous traffic conditions and/or will impact the privacy and comfort of residential neighbors.

Perhaps most importantly, each application that comes before the SVCAC will be considered on its merits. There will be no cookie cutter recommendations. The SVCAC recognizes that each application is unique and deserves to be considered in that context.

Finally, the Guidelines were compiled based on extensive data, including large scale traffic analyses, and the growing understanding among planners of the cumulative impacts of growth, especially of tourism, in the valley.

The resulting document has never been intended to exacerbate contention but to reduce it by establishing clear, understandable boundaries for laypersons (like most SVCAC volunteer commissioners), Permit Sonoma staff and the winery applicants.

We further propose that these Guidelines remain in effect for at least two years, during which the SVCAC and the community can evaluate their effectiveness and then undertake a revision if needed.

Response to comments from the Wine Growers:

Comments referring to the need for addressing each application on its merits have been responded to above.

Many comments from the Winery industry relate to a part of the Guidelines titled Additional Recommendations to the County. The Ad Hoc recognizes that these items are not to be applied to individual winery applications.

With regard to such issues as size of winery overall and size in relation to the site, size of public serving areas, ratio of wine producing areas to public serving space, etc., the Ad Hoc committee formulated its recommendations on the clear need to reduce the impacts on local communities that winery events have had in the past. These recommendations, again, will be considered on a project-by-project basis and are merely guidelines. The Guidelines should remain in place for at least two years to see what, if any, serious limitations they impose on the industry.

In no way is the SVCAC opposed to all winery events. This body recognizes that the rights of local residents to retain their rural, residential lifestyle, safety and level of peace and quiet have been abused. Addressing that situation is the only focus of these Guidelines.