

The Potential for Events Facilities on Agricultural Land in the Sonoma Valley

August 2004

Choices for the future

Executive Summary

This report contains the results of a yearlong study. It examines the potential, under present zoning, for a growing number of visitor-serving and events facilities on agricultural lands in the Sonoma Valley. It also identifies some of the choices that need to be made toward a course for the future that protects and reinforces the rural character and quality of life of the area in which we live.

"Events facilities" and "visitor-serving facilities", for the purpose of this study, include the ancillary buildings and/or outdoor facilities associated with agricultural activities that are used on a regular basis for gatherings, celebrations, tastings, weddings, concerts and other such activities.

Concerns

This study was undertaken in response to the rising concern voiced by many residents of the Sonoma Valley about:

- The growing number of events related facilities that are now in place, or are likely to be built in the future, in association with agricultural operations on agricultural land in the Sonoma Valley,
- The potential concentrations of such facilities along the highways and country roads of the Sonoma Valley,
- The continuing erosion of the rural character of the Sonoma Valley by large scale development,
- Traffic & Safety issues associated with increased use of the Valley's road infrastructure
- Cumulative effects of large facilities on ground water and on its availability to other residents who depend on it in the Sonoma Valley,
- The potential cumulative effects of in-the-ground and package sanitation services likely to be built to serve events facilities on the quality of the ground water in the Valley
- Cumulative effects of noise (sometimes amplified) from events facilities on the peaceful enjoyment by neighbors of their properties in the Valley
- Cumulative effects of lights from events facilities on the night sky of the Sonoma Valley
- Cumulative negative effects of event facility development on hillsides and viewsheds, especially noticeable with night lighting,
- The continuing lack of official coordination and monitoring of the frequency and size of events throughout the Valley., including the seeming lack of follow-up investigation of on-going abuses of the permitted frequency and size of events at existing events facilities.

Executive Summary Continued

Summary of Findings

The Study Area for this report includes a total of 33,125 acres in the Sonoma Valley. The study focuses particularly on 792 parcels in the Study Area, all of which lie in the large "agricultural" zones (DA, LIA, LEA and RRD) under present Sonoma County zoning. Together the 792 parcels contain a total of 26,587 acres. On site evaluation of these 792 parcels by two-person teams leads to the following observations about the future of those parcels:

- Under the present "minimum lot size" regulations of present zoning, the 792 agricultural parcels that now exist in the study Area could be subdivided to produce a total of 974 legal parcels, any of which could be developed independently at some time in the future,
- 38 parcels already contain events facilities located on agricultural land in the Sonoma Valley. Other events- and visitor-serving- facilities (hotels, restaurants, special event facilities, etc.) also exist on commercially zoned land that is not covered by this study.
- 362 of the potential 972 parcels in the Valley have been evaluated to possess a "high" to "very high" potential for future use as visitor serving and/or events facilities associated with agricultural operations and have been designated as potential "future" event sites.
- If all of those "future" parcels were to be developed to their full potential under existing zoning, i.e. subdivision of parcels based on the existing minimum lot size currently established for the parcel, the resulting total build-out would represent a more than 2500% (Two thousand five hundred percent) increase over the present day number of events facilities in the Valley. Even if only a 20% of the "future" sites were build out 75 events facilities would be added to the Valley, for a total of 113 events facilities Sonoma Valley wide.
- The potential concentrations of events facilities (see Figure M) under three possible scenarios are summarized on the chart below.

Under Scenario C (the least dense alternative, which assumes 20% build-out with the text proposed for GP2020 in force), the density of events facilities over the 24 miles of the Sonoma Valley would be 3.5 per mile. In some areas of concentration densities may exceed 4 per mile, however.

By comparison, the present density of the Oakville-to-St. Helena stretch of Highway 29 in the Napa Valley is 4 facilities per mile while the overall density from Yountville to Calistoga is 3.2 per mile. Traffic congestion in the St Helena section is acute both on weekdays and on weekends, even though the Napa Valley has a parallel road to serve as an alternate route for traffic, which the Sonoma Valley does not.

Scenario B (20% build-out) would result in an average of 4 facilities per mile in the Sonoma Valley, with higher densities in popular areas, while Scenario A (maximum build-out under present zoning) would produce a density in excess of 16.6 facilities per mile.

In summary, therefore, the residents of the Sonoma Valley seem to be facing, under present zoning regulations in Sonoma County, the following alternatives:

- at best, build-out densities as high as the most congested sections of the Napa Valley, and
- at worst, a build-out density over 4 times the level that already causes grid-lock in the Napa

Valley over a much shorter stretch of highway.