

Ag protection committee to plunge into knotty issues



April 11, 2015 • [BARRY EBERLING beberling@napanews.com](mailto:BARRY_EBERLING@napanews.com)

They are the 17 Chosen Ones, though in this case being chosen means having to spend a lot of time wrestling with such Napa County hot-button issues as winery tourism, traffic and growth.

Picked by the Napa County Board of Supervisors, they are members of the Agricultural Protection Advisory Committee, supported by 12 alternates. More than 50 people applied to help the county with policy recommendations.

Is Napa County's winery and tourism growth out-of-control and, if so, how should it be reined in? People with different perspectives on the topic will try to blend their views and arrive at recommendations.

Jeri Gill is on the committee. Fifteen years ago, she would have been skeptical that such an undertaking could be successful, she said. Since then, she's seen Napa County work through similar challenges.

"This diverse group of people can come together with a lot of 'yesses,'" predicted Gill, chief executive officer of the nonprofit Sustainable Napa County. "It's been done before."

Gill said she'll bring perspectives on energy, transportation, climate and other issues and how they interact. Her background includes working for Napa Valley Vintners, the Lodi-Woodbridge Winegrape Commission, the San Joaquin Farm Bureau and Benicia Vallejo Humane Society.

Eve Kahn is on the commission. She is a real estate agent and chairwoman of Get a Grip on Growth.

For Kahn, cumulative impacts are an issue -- rural projects that might not have a big effect individually, but do collectively.

"We have finite resources," Kahn said. "We're not going to widen Highway 29 up the valley. We're in a drought."

Former county planning commissioner Bob Fiddaman is an alternate on the commission. He submitted a nine-page paper discussing Napa's wine industry challenges, from grape production to traffic to water availability.

"I think it's close to a certainty we will be making some changes in our winery (and possibly vineyard) land use regulations over the next year or so, and those changes are likely to moderate future growth of wine production," he wrote.

Board of Supervisors Chairwoman Diane Dillon summed up the committee's task on Tuesday.

"What is at the heart of what we're trying to do here is grapple with our success," Dillon said. "We have a challenge the rest of the country would love to have."

Supervisors gave the committee topics to explore. Among them is whether to increase the 10-acre minimum property size for new wineries and whether to require a majority of new winery employees to be engaged in production or vineyard activities rather than hospitality.

Other topics are having new wineries result in no net loss of vineyards, limiting the roadside setback variances issued for new wineries, requiring new wineries to grow a minimum percentage of grapes onsite and having different rules for new Napa Valley wineries and wineries located elsewhere in the county.

The committee is to make recommendations to the county Planning Commission by Sept. 2. It will meet twice a month.

Agricultural Protection Advisory Committee Members

Municipalities:

Yountville Mayor John Dunbar, alternate St. Helena City Councilman Peter White

Napa City Councilman James Krider, alternate Bob Fiddaman, former county planning commissioner

Business:

Stanley Boyd of Visit Napa Valley, alternate Clay Gregory of Visit Napa Valley

Debra Dommen of Napa Chamber of Commerce, alternate Harvest Duhig of Duhig Construction

Neighborhood Groups:

Eve Kahn of Get a Grip on Growth, alternate Thornton Bunch, retired attorney

Bruce Phillips, Save Yountville Hill, alternate Jeff Dodd, environmental law and water law attorney

Environmental:

Christina Benz, Napa Sierra Club, alternate Gary Margadant, Mount Veeder Stewardship Council

Dan Mufson, Defenders of the East Napa Watersheds, alternate Phillip Blake of RSA+ Napa

Agriculture/Wine:

Lucio Perez, Napa County Farm Bureau, alternate Norma Tofanelli, Napa County Farm Bureau

Ted Hall, Napa Valley Grapegrowers, alternate Larry Bettinelli, Napa Valley Grapegrowers

Peter McCrea, Napa Valley Vintners, alternate Rex Stults, Napa Valley Vintners

Tony LeBlanc, Winegrowers of Napa County, alternate Michelle Benvenuto, Winegrowers of Napa County

At-large:

Sharon Gardner, Jeri Gill, David Graves, Charles Hossom, Oscar Renteria