



Growth of wine industry scrutinized in 2015

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Growth debates, Napa County-style, came to a head in 2015 and look to continue into 2016.

Many communities have growth debates about open space being swallowed by sprawling subdivisions. In Napa, the focus is on the world-famous wine country that keeps sprawling subdivisions at bay.

Some see the county in danger of losing its agricultural soul to winery glitz. Others see over-regulation as a threat to winery success. Then there are long-standing concerns over traffic congestion and a lack of affordable housing.

As 2015 dawned, the Board of Supervisors decided it was time to talk.

Supervisors kicked off this community discussion with a growth summit on March 10 attended by several hundred people. Over six hours, the Board of Supervisors got a kaleidoscopic view of what may or may not ail Napa County.

Resident Eve Kahn talked of wineries in agricultural areas featuring art, movies and music, the type of entertainment, she said, that is typically found in local cities.

“What’s happening is the wineries are becoming event

centers and entertainment venues,” Kahn said — and she didn’t mean that as a positive thing.

Resident Harvest Duhig and her husband — a fifth-generation Napa County resident — see farming and the wine business as their future. She urged the county to avoid making rule changes that might hinder them and others. “It would continue to shut out the small farmer from the vision and dream to someday become a vintner,” Duhig said.

Resident Zia Shepp said she wants future generations to enjoy the open space, clean air, water and safe, prosperous community that she experienced growing up.

“This valley has become an adult Disney World,” she said.

Napa Valley Vintners, Winegrowers of Napa County and Napa Valley Grape-growers submitted a letter saying opposition to all winery development is not the answer. They urged the county to better enforce the rules it has in place.

“We are not suggesting hard-and-fast rules to limit development, but merely a sincere effort to cull out the outlandish before everyone becomes too invested in the outcome,” the three groups wrote.

Dry Creek Road resident Patricia Damery said vineyards and wineries being built in hillside watershed areas can harm the environment unless done with care.

“My husband and I believe agriculture can coexist with

nature, but only in balance with nature,” Damery said.

The Board of Supervisors responded to the growth summit with a multipronged approach. Among the steps was creating the Agricultural Protection Advisory Committee (APAC).

In a nutshell, the board put 17 people representing the wine and farming industries, the business community, environmental and neighborhood groups and local cities in a room and told them to come up with winery growth answers. Recommendations from this diverse group had to pass by a two-thirds vote.

“If we were doing a dive in the Olympics, this would be graded as a high degree of difficulty,” committee chairman Ted Hall said.

Over 10 meetings and 30 hours, the committee hammered out 13 recommendations. These ranged from starting a new monitoring program to make sure wineries follow the rules to setting limits on how much of a parcel can be paved over for winery development.

The Board of Supervisors on Dec. 8 began deliberating on the APAC recommendations. It was back in marathon mode — it held a five-hour session attended by hundreds of people with 73 members of the public speaking.

On Jan. 5, the Board of Supervisors plans to resume this APAC discussion.

The Board of Supervisors took other steps besides forming APAC. It decided to restart work on the county’s stalled

climate action plan to set targets for greenhouse gas reduction. It decided to update the county circulation plan. County supervisors have given no indication they want to see a drastic remaking of a wine world that is the area's economic engine. But they've made it clear they want to see some changes.

At the close of 2015, the county's growth debate has a "to be continued" tag.