

2014 Update to 2004 VOTMA Study -

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

Choices for the Future”

April, 2015

This report summarizes data showing that over the last 10 years there has been a substantial increase in the event/visitor-serving permits allowed on agriculturally zoned lands in Sonoma Valley. Within the original Study Area since 2004, 298 newly permitted events will allow an increase of 55,292 people to participate in events every year on land zoned for agricultural use.

Background:

In August 2004, the Valley of The Moon Alliance (VOTMA) completed a study examining the potential for development of visitor- serving and event centers on agriculturally zoned land in the Sonoma Valley. The Study Area was focused on 792 parcels which lie in the large agricultural zones (DA, LIA, LEA, and RRD) designated under Sonoma County zoning. Together, the 792 parcels contained a total of 26,587 acres. Since the study was evaluating the “potential” for development, the parcels within the Study Area were limited to parcels along the valley floor adjoining Highway 12 starting at Melita Road and ending at Madrone Road, then along Arnold Drive ending at the Sonoma Raceway. The Study Area did not include parcels adjoining Carneros Highway (Highway 121) east from Arnold Drive to Highway 29. Parcels with good traffic access, visibility, and special environmental features showed a higher potential for development within the study. Out of the 792 parcels identified, there were 33 agricultural zoned parcels that were already authorized to operate events on their facilities, which allows for 705 events a year and 115,500 visitors. Note: Other event and visitor-serving facilities which existed on commercially zoned parcels were not covered by this study.

2014 – Ten years later - note – (this time period includes the recession of 2008.)

To update this study VOTMA did two things. First, we re-examined county records to see how many of the parcels in the original Study Area had been developed with events and visitor-serving facilities over the last ten years. Each of the 792 parcels was compared to the online PRMD permit history (county records) through 2014 to determine if there had been use permits issued since 2004. The PRMD winery use permit data base updated in 2014 was also used to crosscheck parcels in the Study Area. Second, we also looked at the PRMD winery use permit data base for permits approved *outside* the Study Area to get a more complete picture of the events/visitor-serving impacts on Sonoma Valley agricultural land.

Findings within the Study Area

- There were 16 new winery use permits approved since 2004 and 4 use permits where the prior approved activity was expanded or modified. These 20 permits identified now allow up to 260 events and 45,000 additional people to participate in events and activities per year on agricultural zoned land.

- There were 5 new non wine-related event permits added and 4 event permits modified or expanded from 2004 – 2014. These permits added 38 events with 10,352 people allowed to participate on agricultural zoned land.

SUMMARY IN FINDINGS within THE STUDY AREA

- In total there is a **87.8% increase** in the number of permits issued over the last ten years within the Study Area – 29 new or expanded permits were added over the 33 that were listed in the 2004 study.
- In total there is a 42% increase in the number of events allowed over the last ten years within the Study Area. – 298 events annually were added since 2004 over the 705 approved before the study.
- In total there is a 47% increase in the estimated number of visitors annually over the last ten years within the Study Area – 55,352 visitors were added to the 115,500 annual visitors approved before the study.
- There were also 12 additional use permit applications for larger projects that were either denied by PRMD or withdrawn by the applicant.
- These numbers represent the period through Oct. 2014 and do not include any permits filed or approved subsequent to this date.

Findings *outside* the Study Area

- During the same period 2004 – 2014, there were 27 new winery use permits approved in Sonoma Valley, as per the PRMD winery use permit data base, allowing up to 111 events and 23,400 people on agricultural zoned lands outside our original Study Area. Twenty three of these permits did not include events and were for tasting rooms or production only. Twelve of these were for commercially zoned parcels. The original Study Area seems to show the main effect of increased visitor impact on our agriculturally zoned parcels.

Conclusion

- Permits allowing events/visitor-serving facilities have increased dramatically over the past ten years in Sonoma Valley. By our assessment, 48 new use permits were granted and 8 existing permits were expanded during this period. Taken together, these permits allow an additional 78,352 people per year to travel into the Sonoma Valley to participate in events designed to take place on land zoned for agricultural use. Our study focused on agriculturally zoned lands because of the potential for negative impacts involved with event/visitor-serving activities on our rural character and other resources, the very elements that give Sonoma Valley its beauty and attraction. More than 78,000 people per year now entering the Sonoma Valley under these new permits are in addition to the over 115,500 who would already be allowed to fill the roads and highways under pre-existing use permits. This substantial increase in usage has brought Sonoma Valley to a crisis point.

- Data available upon request.