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# WATER SIDELINES WINERY PERMIT

## Opponents fill zoning hearing on Mark West area project; board asks for more information

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THE PRESS DEMOCRAT

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Sonoma County officials made no decision Thursday on a controversial use permit for a winery near Mark West Creek after opponents blasted the project at a packed public hearing.

The five-member Board of Zoning Adjustments voted to continue the matter until more information about the plans submitted by Wall Street executive Henry Cornell can be evaluated.

Cornell, a managing director for global investment firm Goldman Sachs, wants to place an 18,000-square-foot winery and 8,000-square-foot cave on a hillside off Wappo Road, northeast of Santa Rosa near the Napa County line.

The issue before the zoning board is whether to approve Cornell's permit that will allow him to operate the winery.

His attorney, John Holdredge, said at the outset of the hearing that the issue wasn't one of vineyards or what's happened in the past on property adjacent to Cornell's, "but this small winery and what impact, if any, it will have on the environment."

Holdredge contended the impact will be minimal, a view that was supported by the county's Permit and Resource Management Department, which had recommended approval of the use permit.

But about 50 opponents who packed Thursday's hearing labeled the project an ecological disaster, and accused Cornell and the hydrological and geological consultants he hired of deliberately withholding information from the county in an attempt to get approval.

"It appears Cornell's engineers will say whatever they want to get this project approved," said Jim Doerksen, a retired

public works director who lives on St. Helena Road and used to operate a popular Christmas tree farm.

The tense three-hour hearing underscored how wineries and vineyards, even those on a relatively modest scale such as Cornell's, are garnering significant opposition from neighbors who are concerned about a development's impact on the environment.

Holdredge said his client shares those concerns.

"In 20 years of representing vineyards and wineries in Sonoma County, this is by far the most environmentally conscious owner I've ever dealt with," Holdredge said during a brief pause in the proceedings.

Zoning board members, who are accustomed to toiling in relative obscurity, seemed taken aback by the emotional testimony. Member Richard Fogg asked that the hearing be continued "in light of strong allegations we don't normally hear."

Board members had several questions they wanted county staff to follow up on, including the concern brought by winery opponents that Cornell's consultants did not compile all the information they should have before submitting their reports to the county.

That includes an allegation that Pride Winery, which is near Cornell's proposed site, ran out of water the past two years and was forced to truck in water for vineyard purposes. Several St. Helena Road residents told board members they've grown weary of the big trucks rumbling along the two-lane road.

Board members said they would give the state Department of Fish and Game and the Regional Water Quality Control Board until Nov. 26 to submit reports they had promised prior to Thursday's hearing.

They will then decide when to reschedule another hearing on Cornell's use permit.

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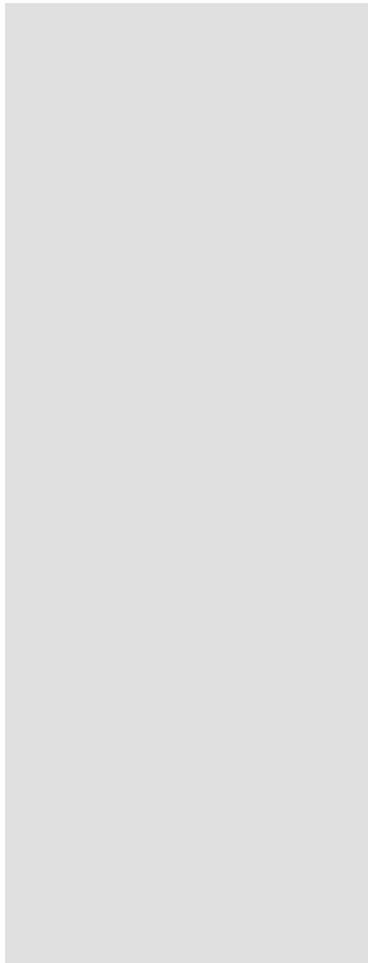
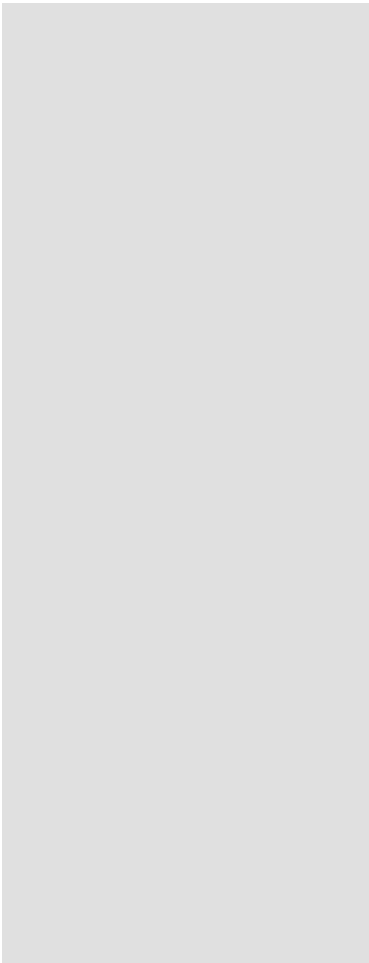
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