

Planning Commissioner Heather Phillips statement of recusal from planning commission deliberations on the Yountville Hill DEIR, Aug 3rd, 2016 (transcribed from hearing video)

“On June 30th 2014, two days before the original Yountville Hill application would be heard, the attorney representing the applicant contacted me to request that I recuse myself, as I am a partner in a vineyard well beyond the 500’ recusal threshold that was in relative proximity to people who opposed the project. Legally I was able to participate in the hearing but chose to recuse myself to insure the integrity of the commissioner’s decisions. Following my recusal from hearing the original Yountville Hill application my family was free to participate in the ensuing discussion. Concurrently I received a ruling for the California Fair Practices Commission on Sept 28th 2015 confirming my ability to participate in my role as Planning Commissioner in any future Yountville Hill applications. Prior to the county’s release of the Yountville Hill Winery draft EIR on June 30th 2016, I was again contacted by the applicant’s attorney, and on July 11th the applicant requested that I recuse myself based on a family member’s participation in the appeal process associated with the prior project application. If I were not to recuse myself I would need to be either prepared to personally retain legal council, which I am not in a position to do, or risk the possibility that the planning commission’s decision could be challenged based on the applicant’s assertions with regard to my participation. As such I feel I have little choice but to recuse myself from further consideration of the revised project application in the interest of insuring the integrity of the Commission’s process. When one planning commissioner is targeted we are all targeted. We all become vulnerable. When I recused myself for the APAC proceedings based on an anonymous complaint questioning my ability to act in my role, I pondered if we were seeing a pattern and whether it would become an accepted tactic to tailor a planning commission. And what I think we learned from the APAC proceedings is that the process and its integrity suffers when this occurs.”