

# Yountville Sun

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## Pope Valley Fire Consumes 3,800 Acres

The Johnny White home in Pope Valley is surrounded by CDF fire trucks, burned brush and smoke Tuesday afternoon near James Creek. The blaze grew to 3,800 acres yesterday and forced evacuees from the Berryessa Estates development to spend a second night away from their homes. The fire started just after noon on Tuesday and has destroyed one home, damaged another and burned four out buildings. It is only 30 percent contained. White is a Pina Vineyard Management employee. (Photo courtesy of Becky White.)



### Local Landmark

This famous blue door will be opened Sunday for a grand 20th anniversary celebration of a local landmark. Read more about it on Page 5.

# Controversial 3-1 Vote Okays Yountville Hill

A controversial winery proposal was approved yesterday following a controversial vote by the Napa County Planning Commission.

A day-long public hearing Wednesday was peppered with opposing "facts" surrounding a winery use permit application by "Yountville Hill" founder Eric Sklar.

That six-hour-plus session ended abruptly when one member of the Napa County Planning Commission reversed his stated opposition to the application.

Commissioner Matt Pope voted with Chairman Bob Fiddaman and Mike Basayne to approve the application, with Terry Scott opposing. This 3-1 vote sealed the deal for Sklar.

As the hearing began at 9 a.m., Commissioner Heather Phillips recused herself, saying that the location of her Oakville residence did not legally preclude her from participating but that a conversation with Sklar convinced her that her participation in the matter would likely result in a conflict of interest challenge.

That left the decision to the remaining four men on the Commission.

Initially it appeared the proposed winery use permit would be denied, as both Scott and Pope said they could not support it. Basayne and Fiddaman weighed in with support for Yountville Hill.

A 2-2 vote would have denied the application.

When the four commissioners made their positions known, Sklar asked the Commission to consider a continuance of the hearing so that he might continue to revise his proposal.

After some discussion, staff and commissioners agreed a continuance was neither feasible nor appropriate.

Fiddaman recessed the

meeting to give Sklar a few minutes to come back with a possible alternative.

When the meeting reconvened Fiddaman called for a vote, and the result was 3-1 in favor of the application, with only Scott dissenting.

Pope had prefaced his initial remarks in opposition to the permit by saying how conflicted he was over this issue.

"I don't know about this one," he admitted.

He called Sklar a "responsible land steward in Napa County" and predicted the unintended consequences of denying the permit might be to see the smaller guys pushed out of Napa County only to be replaced with large corporate concerns.

Pope also said he was concerned about the cumulative impacts of this decision as well as its precedence-setting impacts.

Initially he concurred with Scott, saying the plan is "too ambitious of a project for too restrictive of a site."

After the hasty change in outcome precipitated by Pope, the opponents of the permit sat in stunned silence as the Commissioners moved on to other business.

A morning that had started with an overflow crowd of supporters and opponents sporting buttons announcing their positions ended in the late afternoon with an awkward, unforeseen surprise.

The proponents wore round white buttons with the word "Restore" in red letters. The opposition showed up with red buttons with "Save Yountville Hill" in white type.

"I'm disappointed in the process, and the way the Commission handled the situation," said Tod Motsero, an organizer of the opposition to Yountville Hill.

The approval of the use per-

mit, exception to the conservation regulations, setback variances and viewshed application will enable Sklar to establish a new 100,000 gallon capacity winery, construct two winery buildings, 35,600 sq. ft. of cave area, 37 parking spaces and carry out an ambitious marketing plan which will start with 420 visitors per week and ramp up within three years to 1,000 visitors per week on a 10.9 acre parcel.

Napa County's Planning Department recommended approval of the plan.

Principal Planner Sean Trippi said the plan projects adequate water, complies with the viewshed ordinance and meets acceptable noise, lighting and traffic standards.

Sklar emphasized that the winery will not take any land out of agricultural production and that, over time, an ambitious reforestation plan will obscure the visual impacts of the visitor center, improving the view of the site over what currently exists with the Castle in the Clouds B&B.

Bruce Donsker reported Yountville Hill obtained 549 signatures on a supporting petition.

A well-organized opposition presented 16 speakers in succession who took issue with traffic safety and volume, parking adequacy, violation of conservation regulations by allowing construction on slopes of 30 percent and more, storm water runoff, adequacy of sustainable water, noise impacts, visual impacts and the viability of the applicants reforestation plan.

Ren Harris, Yountville resident, owner of Paradigm Winery and a veteran of 50 Napa Valley harvests, led the comments for the opposition by recalling the three purposes for which the ag preserve was established -- to preserve agri-

cultural land, to prevent commercialization and to maintain the Valley's rural atmosphere. His father-in-law was one of the architects of the ag preserve.

"You have all the tools you need to deny this. It's just a bad plan," he concluded.

Cherise Moueix of Dominus Estate told the Commissioners over 660 signatures had been collected on a petition urging them to deny the Yountville Hill petition.

Gary Margadant, president of the Mount Veeder Stewardship Council, said he was not convinced the site can support its own water requirements.

"The site is delicate. What are you going to do if they water comes up short on this project?"

Margadant pointed to the County Planning Commission's approval of the Carneros Inn, which he said currently must import six million gallons of water a year.

"I wish those trees more luck than I fear they will have," said Tony McClymans of the applicant's plan to reforest the site to obscure the new buildings and retaining walls which will be constructed.

"Today's variances are tomorrow's precedences," he added.

Motsero, who holds a master's degree in Architecture from Tulane University, presented visuals of a 3D model of how the plan appear on the site. He emphasized the height of retaining walls and the "benching" necessary to excavate the site to accommodate what is planned.

"No amount of landscaping will be able to cover the Yountville Hill Winery," he stated.

Laura Holmes Peters urged the Commission to abide by the law and not to grant any of

the variances or exemptions the applicant was seeking.

"I know that Mr. Sklar believes this is restoration. Frankly, I believe it's mutilation of this hill," she concluded.

When the public hearing was closed each commissioner spoke.

Basayne was first with, "I believe this project has been very well vetted. It amounts to an improvement to current conditions. With landscaping, over time, the viewshed will be improved."

"This site is marginally appropriate for a small winery . . . In spite of costly mitigation proposed this application is too ambitious for this site. . . The visitation trail seems to be wagging the wine production dog," said Scott. "I cannot support it."

"I happen to believe this project does comply with the WDO. It must be considered in terms of the regulations that are currently in place. . . We're here to apply not implement existing regulations. I always think twice about going against a staff recommendation," said Fiddaman in announcing his support for the plan.



sundial

|                     | High | Low |
|---------------------|------|-----|
| Wednesday 6/25      | 85   | 54  |
| Thursday            | 83   | 59  |
| Friday              | 88   | 55  |
| Saturday            | 88   | 52  |
| Sunday              | 99   | 51  |
| Monday              | 97   | 55  |
| Tuesday             | 79   | 56  |
| Precipitation = nil |      |     |
| Season Total = 0    |      |     |
| Last Year = 0       |      |     |