

Planning, Building & Environmental Services Grand Jury Report Behind the Curtain: Napa County Use Permit Process

Michael Parker, Planning Manager



Introduction

- 7-month investigation
- Noted Reasons:
 - Criticisms of the Planning Division & Planning Commission
 - Recent lawsuits challenging Napa County's winery use permit process
 - Investigation evaluated efficiency, transparency, organizational structure, and public accessibility of the permitting process
- May 29, 2025 – Final Report Issued



Focus Areas of the Final Grand Jury Report

- Fees & Cost Recovery
- Winery Permits and the Winery Database
- Compliance and Inspections
- (PBES) Management
- Results: 5 Findings & 5 Recommendations



Findings

- F1: Pre-application review meetings are optional and come with a fee, which may discourage applicants from using this, reported as helpful, resource.
- F2: The County's 80% cost recovery fee model creates added burdens for applicants, with more challenges expected with the planned shift to 100% cost recovery.
- F3: The winery database is outdated and inaccurate, limiting its usefulness as a reliable permitting resource
- F4: There is no process in place for conducting random audits to ensure winery permit compliance in the County.
- F5: The Napa County Planning, Building & Environmental Services Department faces structural inefficiencies, including a high supervisor-to-staff ratio and a lack of effective management structure.



Recommendations

- R1: The Napa County Board of Supervisors make pre-application meetings mandatory, eliminate upfront costs, and fold costs into the full permit fee for those who proceed, and to do so by July 2026.
- R2: The Napa County Board of Supervisors implement a structured fee system based on project complexity whenever possible to ensure fairness and greater transparency, and to do so by July 2026.
- R3: The Napa County Board of Supervisors update and maintain the winery database as the authoritative and trusted reference for permits in the County, and to do so by July 2027.
- R4: The Napa County Board of Supervisors establish a funded audit program to monitor winery compliance, and to do so by July 2026.
- R5: The Napa County Board of Supervisors evaluate alternative management structures for the Napa County Planning, Building & Environmental Services Department to establish a flatter, more effective organization, and to do so by July 2026.



Board of Supervisors

- July 29, 2025 BOS Meeting:
Staff Responses Agendized & Discussed
- Requested BOS Changes:
 - Winery Database: Not intended as primary data source, discuss the existing disclaimer, expand upon alternatives – status determinations and public records search.
 - Compliance: History of APAC, discussion regarding compliance in general, future agenda item request on the Winery Code Compliance Program.



Updates: Grand Jury Responses 2.0

- Minor Updates
 - General updates/ language/ phrasing
 - Elaborations on responses for clarity
 - Addition of weblinks
- Examples of PBES initiatives (e.g. electronic application submittals/ resubmittals, SOPs) to increase efficiencies and provide greater transparency, set expectations, and improve processes.



Updates: Grand Jury Responses 2.0

- Winery Database & Official Records
 - Added the full disclaimer from the winery database
 - Elaborated on status determinations
 - More thorough explanation of public records searches for documents
- “Open Napa County”
- “PBES Public Records Search”
- Approval documents = primary sources, not the winery database
- Expanded on misuse and not “apples to apples comparison”. Winery proposals of today are subject to more regulations than winery proposals of previous decades.




The winery database is available to the public as open data. It is intended as an informational tool only. Winery rights and entitlements should be confirmed by reviewing their respective use permit and approval documents.

DISCLAIMER: THIS GIS DATA IS INTENDED TO PROVIDE A VISUAL DISPLAY OF DATA FOR THE USER'S CONVENIENCE. USERS OF THIS DATA ARE HEREBY NOTIFIED THAT THE APPROPRIATE PUBLIC PRIMARY INFORMATION SOURCES SHOULD BE CONSULTED FOR VERIFICATION OF THE INFORMATION. ALTHOUGH EVERY REASONABLE EFFORT HAS BEEN MADE TO ASSURE THE ACCURACY OF THIS DATA, THE COUNTY OF NAPA MAKES NO WARRANTY, REPRESENTATION OR GUARANTY AS TO THE CONTENT, SEQUENCE, ACCURACY, TIMELINESS OR COMPLETENESS OF ANY OF THE DATA PROVIDED HEREIN AND EXPLICITLY DISCLAIMS ANY REPRESENTATIONS AND WARRANTIES, INCLUDING, WITHOUT LIMITATION, THE IMPLIED WARRANTIES OF MERCHANTABILITY AND FITNESS FOR A PARTICULAR PURPOSE. THE COUNTY OF NAPA ASSUMES NO LIABILITY FOR ANY ERRORS, OMISSIONS, OR INACCURACIES IN THE INFORMATION PROVIDED REGARDLESS OF HOW CAUSED AND ASSUMES NO LIABILITY FOR ANY DECISIONS MADE OR ACTIONS TAKEN OR NOT TAKEN BY THE USER OF THE DATA IN RELIANCE UPON ANY INFORMATION OR DATA FURNISHED HEREUNDER. BECAUSE THE GIS DATA PROVIDED IS NOT WARRANTED TO BE UP-TO-DATE, THE USER SHOULD CHECK WITH THE COUNTY STAFF FOR UPDATED INFORMATION.

Updates: Grand Jury Responses 2.0

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County Executive Office

- Annual Report
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- Transparency & Disclosure
- Napa County Strategic Plan

Boards & Commissions

Countywide Communications

Napa County Strategic Plan

Elections & Voting

State & Federal Agencies

Procurement (Bids)

Open Napa County

- Public Records Search & Request
- PBES Public Records Search
- Meetings / Agendas / Minutes
- Official Records
- Property Tax Look-Up
- Assessor Parcel Data
- Filed Maps / Assessor Maps / Assessor Maps
- Permit Search
- CEQA Filings
- Fictitious Business Name Search
- Voter Information
- Procurement (Bids)
- Roads Update



Updates: Grand Jury Responses 2.0

- Code Compliance Chronology:
 - APAC's September 2015 Recommendations to the Planning Commission
 - Previous BOS: December 2015 & January 2016 Discussions
 - Previous BOS: December 2018 implementation of the Winery Code Compliance Program
 - Current BOS: June 24, 2025, request for future agenda item
 - General discussion on code compliance
 - Focused review of the Winery Code Compliance Program
 - Tentatively set for September 23, 2025





Requested Action

Approve transmittal of the proposed response to the 2024-25 Grand Jury Final Report to the Presiding Judge as prescribed by Section 933 of the Penal Code.



Thank you

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