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Recommended Findings

**PLANNING COMMISSION HEARING – SEPTEMBER 3, 2025
RECOMMENDED FINDINGS**

**VINEYARD HOUSE WINERY USE PERMIT, EXCEPTION TO THE CONSERVATION REGULATIONS AND
EXCEPTIONS TO THE ROAD AND STREET STANDARDS
P18-00448-UP AND P21-00341-UP
1581 OAKVILLE GRADE ROAD, NAPA, CA 94562
APN 027-360-022-000**

ENVIRONMENTAL:

The Planning Commission (Commission) has received and reviewed the proposed Mitigated Negative Declaration pursuant to the provisions of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and of Napa County's Local Procedures for Implementing CEQA, and makes the following findings. That:

1. The Planning Commission has read and considered the Mitigated Negative Declaration and Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program (MMRP) prior to taking action on said Mitigated Negative Declaration and the proposed project.
2. The Mitigated Negative Declaration and MMRP is based on independent judgment exercised by the Commission.
3. The Mitigated Negative Declaration and MMRP was prepared and considered in accordance with the requirements of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).
4. There is no substantial evidence in the record as a whole, that the project will have a significant effect on the environment provided that measures to mitigate potentially significant impacts to biological and cultural resources are incorporated into the project approval.
5. There is no evidence, in considering the record as a whole that the proposed project will have a potential adverse effect on wildlife resources or habitat upon which the wildlife depends.
6. The site of this proposed project is not on any of the lists of hazardous waste sites enumerated under Government Code Section 65962.5 and is not within the boundaries of any airport land use plan.
7. The Secretary of the Commission is the custodian of the records of the proceedings on which this decision is based. Records are located at the Napa County Planning, Building, and Environmental Services Department, 1195 Third Street, Ste 210, Napa, California.

EXCEPTION TO THE ROAD AND STREET STANDARDS (LEFT TURN LANE GEOMETRY DESIGN):

The Commission has reviewed the Road and Street Standards (RSS) Exception request in accordance with the exception criteria in Section 3 of the RSS and makes the following findings:

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Vineyard House Winery Use Permit (P18-00448-UP), Exception to the Conservation Regulations (P21-00341-UP) and Exceptions to the Road and Street Standards

8. The exception will preserve unique features of the natural environment which include, but are not limited to, steep slopes, heritage oak trees, or other trees of at least 6" dbh and found by the decision-maker to be of significant importance, but do not include manmade environmental features such as vineyards, rock walls, ornamental or decorative landscaping, fences or the like.

Analysis: The Exception will preserve unique features of the natural environment including avoiding removal of at least 10 mature, native oak and other native tree species all greater than 6" dbh, and avoid grading on steep slopes of 15-30% and allow for completing of road improvements within the limitations of the existing and legal property boundary constraints, and topographic constraints.

9. Grant of the RSS Exception will provide the same overall practical effect as the Standards do in providing defensible space, and does not adversely affect the life, safety, and welfare of the public or persons coming to the property.

Analysis: The modified Left Turn Lane design meets the same overall practical effect as the RSS towards providing defensible space and consideration towards life, safety and public welfare, while improving emergency vehicle access to the subject property and the area in general. The same overall practical effect will be achieved through the installation of left turn lane utilizing eleven-foot wide lanes and a ten-foot wide turn pocket with two-foot wide shoulders. An approximately 7.3-foot tall retaining wall will be constructed to accommodate additional road width.

EXCEPTION TO THE ROAD AND STREET STANDARDS (SHARED DRIVEWAY STANDARDS):

The Commission has reviewed the RSS) Exception request in accordance with the exception criteria in Section 3 of the RSS and makes the following findings:

10. The exception will preserve unique features of the natural environment which include, but are not limited to, steep slopes, heritage oak trees, or other trees of at least 6" dbh and found by the decision-maker to be of significant importance, but do not include manmade environmental features such as vineyards, rock walls, ornamental or decorative landscaping, fences or the like.

Analysis: The Exception would preserve at least 30 mature, native oak and other native tree species all greater than 6" dbh, avoid grading on steep slopes of 15-30%, and preserve existing drainage courses. These f unique features of the natural environment, and through will be preserved by grant of the exception.

11. Grant of the Road and Street Standards Exception will provide the same overall practical effect as the Standards do in providing defensible space, and does not adversely affect the life, safety, and welfare of the public or persons coming to the property.

Analysis: The proposed driveway turnouts and an entry sign will meet the same overall practical effect as the RSS towards providing defensible space and consideration towards life, safety and public welfare, while improving emergency vehicle access to the subject property and the area in general.

EXCEPTION TO THE CONSERVATION REGULATIONS FINDINGS:

The Commission has reviewed the use permit request in accordance with the requirements of Napa County Code §18.108.040 and makes the following findings:

12. Roads, driveways, building and other man-made structures have been designed to complement the natural landform and to avoid excessive grading.

Analysis: The primary wine cave portal and a portion of the covered crush pad/bottling area are located within the stream setback. The cave portal and covered crush pad/bottling area have been designed to complement the natural landform, by pushing the entrance into a hillside. The proposed entrance to the wine cave requires the crossing of a blue-line stream, subject to permitting by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife. Additionally, a secondary cave portal entry and associated walkway is located within the stream setback. The secondary cave portal and associated walkway are designed to complement natural landforms through the implementation of retaining walls that meander to follow the site's topography. Additionally, the proposed project includes restoration and expansion of the riparian area, to enhance the stream setback. The project has been conditioned with additional mitigation measures to offset potential impacts.

13. Primary and accessory structures employ architectural and design elements which in total serve to reduce the amount of grading and earthmoving activity required for the project including the following elements: a) multiple-floor levels which follow existing, natural slopes; b) foundation types such as poles, piles, or stepping levels which minimize cut and fill and the need for retaining walls; c) fence lines, walls, and other features which blend with the existing terrain rather than strike off at an angle against it.

Analysis: The tasting room will be located within an existing structure that is multiple-floor levels. The cave portal entrances follow existing natural slopes and are designed to be minimally intrusive into the hillside. The proposed project includes minimal structures that are to be located on the surface. The proposed winery production and storage facility are to be located within a cave, which reduces the required surface grading and impervious surface on the project parcel. One cave entrance includes retaining walls that conforms to the site's topography to create a minimally intrusive cut into the hillside. Proposed design will employ curved edges that aesthetically blend the majority of the project into the hillside and match with existing terrain. The largest hillside feature is a proposed bridge used to gain access into the primary entrance.

14. The development project minimizes removal of existing vegetation, incorporates existing vegetation into the final design plan, and replacement vegetation of appropriate size, quality and quantity is included to mitigate adverse environmental effects.

Analysis: The project will require the removal of approximately 20 oak trees for improvements to Oakville Grade, the shared driveway, and the construction of the proposed cave entrance and covered crush pad/bottling area. The applicant proposes planting 60 oak trees. The proposed project, including the siting of the proposed cave and covered crush pad/bottling area, minimizes the removal of existing vegetation. Replacement vegetation required for mitigation will be incorporated into the project as identified in the Mitigated Negative Declaration and associated project plans.

15. Adequate fire safety measures have been incorporated into the design of the proposed development.

Analysis: The project includes improving Oakville Grade Road and the shared driveway to meet the same practical effect as the RSS, with turnouts and a turnaround. All required defensible space clearing will be implemented along the road and in the area of the proposed project. The project has been reviewed and recommended for approval with conditions by the Napa County Fire Marshal's office.

16. Disturbance to streams and watercourses shall be minimized, and the encroachment, if any, is the minimum necessary to implement the project.

Analysis: The proposed cave entrance bridge and covered crush pad/bottling area are proposed within the stream setback and include the minimum necessary design features to implement the project. The cave bridge provides the necessary ingress and egress for the proposed winery production space located within the hillside. The proposed construction of a cave greatly reduces the required impervious surface area and surface disturbance that an alternative design would require.

The project would implement temporary and permanent erosion control measures, standard best management practices and construction conditions of approval that will ensure that disturbance to the stream is avoided or minimized to the maximum extent possible.

17. The project does not adversely impact threatened or endangered plant or animal habitats as designated by state or federal agencies with jurisdiction and identified on the County's environmental sensitivity maps.

Analysis: The applicant provided a Biological Resources Report, conducted by Sol Ecology, dated November 29, 2021 and a supplemental memorandum, dated August 3, 2025. The project includes environmental commitments as conditions of approval, including the implementation of pre-construction surveys by qualified biologists for sensitive species of birds and bats. Therefore, it is not anticipated that any adverse impacts on special status species would result from project implementation.

18. An erosion control plan, or equivalent NPDES stormwater management plan, has been prepared in accordance with NCC Section 18.108.080 and has been approved by the Director or designee.

Analysis: The proposed project application submittal materials included a Stormwater Control Plan (Applied Civil Engineering, dated August 30, 2019). The materials were reviewed by the

Engineering Division and found to comply with the requirements of the County's NPDES stormwater management program approved by Napa County Engineering Division.

19. The proposed development does not result in a net increase in soil loss and runoff.

Analysis: The proposed project application submittal materials included a Stormwater Control Plan (Applied Civil Engineering, dated August 30, 2019). The report concludes that the vegetated vineyard areas will filter, disperse, and infiltrate runoff before it reaches the receiving waters. The materials were reviewed by the Engineering Division and found to comply with the requirements of the County's NPDES stormwater management program approved by Napa County Engineering Division.

USE PERMIT:

The Commission has reviewed the use permit request in accordance with the requirements of Napa County Code §18.124.070 and makes the following findings:

20. The Commission has the power to issue a use permit under the zoning regulations in effect as applied to the property;

Analysis: The project is consistent with Agricultural Watershed (AW) zoning district regulations. A winery (as defined in Napa County Code Section 18.08.640) and uses in connection with a winery (see Napa County Code Section 18.20.030) are permitted in an AW zoned district with an approved use permit. The project complies with the requirements of the Winery Definition Ordinance (Ord. No. 947, 1990) and the remainder of the Napa County Zoning Ordinance (Title 18, Napa County Code) as applicable.

21. The procedural requirements set forth in Chapter 18.124 of Napa County Code have been met;

Analysis: The use permit application has been appropriately filed, noticed, and public hearing requirements have been met. The public hearing notice and intent to adopt a Mitigated Negative Declaration was posted and published in the Napa Valley Register on June 12, 2025, and copies of the notice were forwarded to property owners within 1,000 feet of the Property.

22. The grant of the Use Permit, as conditioned, will not adversely affect the public health, safety or welfare of the County;

Analysis: Granting the Use Permit for the project as proposed and conditioned will not adversely affect health, safety or welfare of the County. Affected County divisions and departments have reviewed the project and commented regarding the proposed site access, grading, drainage, the existing septic system capacity, parking, building permits, and fire protection. Conditions are recommended which will incorporate these comments into the project to assure the protection of the public health, safety, and welfare.

23. The proposed winery use complies with the applicable provisions of Napa County Code and is consistent with the policies and standards of the Napa County General Plan;

Analysis: Compliance with the Zoning Ordinance The project is consistent with the AW zoning district regulations. A winery (as defined in the Napa County Code Section 18.08.640) and uses in connection with a winery (refer to Napa County Code Section 18.20.030) are permitted in the AW zoning district subject to an approved use permit. The proposed project includes the construction of a new winery facility with a visitation and marketing program. The project, as conditioned, complies with the Napa County Winery Definition Ordinance (WDO) and all other requirements of the Zoning Code as applicable.

Analysis: Compliance with the General Plan As proposed and conditioned, the requested Use Permit is consistent with the overall goals and policies of the 2008 Napa County General Plan. The General Plan land use designation for the subject parcel is Agricultural, Watershed, and Open Space (AWOS). General Plan Agricultural Preservation and Land Use Goal AG/LU-1 guides the County to “preserve existing agricultural land uses and plan for agriculture and related activities as the primary land uses in Napa County.” General Plan Goal AG/LU-3 states that the County should “support the economic viability of agriculture, including grape growing, winemaking, other types of agriculture, and supporting industries to ensure the preservation of agricultural lands.” Goal AG/LU-3 and Policy AG/LU-2 recognize wineries as agricultural uses. The use of the property for fermenting and processing grape juice into wine supports the economic viability of agriculture within the County, consistent with Goal AG/LU-3 and Policy AG/LU-4 (“The County will reserve agricultural lands for agricultural use including land used for grazing and watershed/open space...”). By allowing the proposed agricultural use, the requested Use Permit supports the economic viability of the existing vineyards and agricultural product processing, consistent with Economic Development Goal E-1 and Policy E-1. The “Right to Farm” is recognized throughout the General Plan and is specifically called out in Policy AG/LU-15 and in the County Code. “Right to Farm” provisions ensure that agriculture remains the primary land use in Napa County and is not threatened by potentially competing uses or neighbor complaints. Napa County’s adopted General Plan reinforces the County’s long- standing commitment to agricultural preservation, urban centered growth, and resource conservation.

Applicable Napa County General Plan goals and policies:

Goal AG/LU-1: Preserve existing agricultural land uses and plan for agriculture and related activities as the primary land uses in Napa County.

Goal AG/LU-3: Support the economic viability of agriculture, including grape growing, winemaking, other types of agriculture, and supporting industries to ensure the preservation of agricultural lands.

Policy AG/LU-4: The County will reserve agricultural lands for agricultural use including lands used for grazing and watershed/open space, except for those lands which are shown on the

Land Use Map as planned for urban development. Policy AG/LU-8: The County's minimum agricultural parcel sizes shall ensure that agricultural areas can be maintained as economic units.

Policy AG/LU-15: The County affirms and shall protect the right of agricultural operators in designated agricultural areas to commence and continue their agricultural practices (a "right to farm"), even though established urban uses in the general area may foster complaints against those agricultural practices. The "right to farm" shall encompass the processing of agricultural products and other activities inherent in the definition of agriculture provided in Policy AG/LU-2.

Goal CON-10: Conserve, enhance and manage water resources on a sustainable basis to attempt to ensure that sufficient amounts of water will be available for the uses allowed by this General Plan, for the natural environment, and for future generations.

Goal CON-11: Prioritize the use of available groundwater for agricultural and rural residential uses rather than for urbanized areas and ensure that land use decisions recognize the long-term availability and value of water resources in Napa County.

Policy CON-53: The County shall ensure that the intensity and timing of new development are consistent with the capacity of water supplies and protect groundwater and other water supplies by requiring all applicants for discretionary projects to demonstrate the availability of an adequate water supply prior to approval. Depending on the site location and the specific circumstances, adequate demonstration of availability may include evidence or calculation of groundwater availability via an appropriate hydrogeological analysis or may be satisfied by compliance with County Code "fair-share" provisions or applicable State law. In some areas, evidence may be provided through coordination with applicable municipalities and public and private water purveyors to verify water supply sufficiency.

Policy CON-55: The County shall consider existing water uses during the review of new water uses associated with discretionary projects, and where hydrogeological studies have shown that the new water uses will cause significant adverse well interference or substantial reductions in groundwater discharge to surface waters that will alter critical flows to sustain riparian habitat and fisheries or exacerbate conditions of overdraft, the County shall curtail those new or expanded water uses.

Policy CON-72: The County shall seek to reduce the energy impacts from new buildings by applying Title 24 energy standards as required by law and providing information to the public and builders on available energy conservation techniques, products, and methods available to exceed those standards by 15 percent or more.

Policy CON-77: All new discretionary projects shall be evaluated to determine potential significant project-specific air quality impacts and shall be required to incorporate appropriate design, construction, and operational features to reduce emissions of criteria pollutants

regulated by the state and federal governments below the applicable significance standard(s) or implement alternate and equally effective mitigation strategies consistent with BAAQMD's air quality improvement programs to reduce emissions. In addition to these policies, the County's land use policies discourage scattered development which contributes to continued dependence on the private automobile as the only means of convenient transportation. The County's land use policies also contribute to efforts to reduce air pollution.

Policy CON-81: The County shall require dust control measures to be applied to construction projects consistent with measures recommended for use by the BAAQMD [Bay Area Air Quality Management District].

Goal E-1: Maintain and enhance the economic viability of agriculture.

Policy E-1: The County's economic development will focus on ensuring the continued viability of agriculture in Napa County.

Policy SAF-20: All new development shall comply with established fire safety standards. Design plans shall be referred to the appropriate fire agency for comment as to:

- 1) Adequacy of water supply.
- 2) Site design for fire department access in and around structures.
- 3) Ability for a safe and efficient fire department response.
- 4) Traffic flow and ingress/egress for residents and emergency vehicles.
- 5) Site-specific built-in fire protection
- 6) Potential impacts to emergency services and fire department response

24. The proposed use would not require a new water system or improvement causing significant adverse effects, either individually or cumulatively, on an affected groundwater basin in Napa County, unless that use would satisfy any of the other criteria specified for approval or waiver of a groundwater permit under Section 13.15.070 or 13.15.080 of the Napa County Code.

Analysis: The subject property is not located in a "groundwater deficient area" as identified in Section 13.15.010 of the Napa County Code, and is consistent with General Plan Conservation Policies CON-53 and CON-55 which require that applicants, who are seeking discretionary land use approvals, prove that adequate water supplies are available to serve the proposed use without causing significant negative impacts to shared groundwater resources. Based on the submitted Water Availability Analysis (WAA) by Richard C. Slade & Associates LLC, the subject parcel is split between two groundwater basins. Well 1 and approximately 39.3 acres of the project parcel are outside of the GSA and has an estimated groundwater recharge of 16.7 acre-feet per year (af/yr). Well 2 and 3.4 acres of the project parcel are within the GSA and has an estimated groundwater recharge of 1 acre-foot per year (af/yr). Water Demand Calculations submitted for the project indicate the water demand for existing uses on the property as 11.765 af/yr which includes: a primary residence (0.75 af/yr), lawn (4.360 af/yr), landscaping (0.455 af/yr), and a neighbor's well that is located on the project parcel (6.2 af/yr). The proposed

groundwater demand would use the following: Potential future primary residence (0.75 af/yr), lawn (2.799 af/yr), landscaping (1.185 af/yr), vineyard (4.45 af/yr), winery process water (0.43 af/yr), winery employees (0.103), tasting room visitation (0.029 af/yr), marketing events (0.006 af/yr), and a neighbor's well that is located on the project parcel (6.2 af/yr).

The proposed project would increase water usage by 4.187 af/yr, to a total of 15.952 af/yr. Currently, Well 2 (within the GSA) draws 3.83 AFY of water from the GSA, which is higher than the GSA portion of the parcel's recharge total of 1 AFY, as calculated using the County's Interim Standards. Due to this fact, the project has been conditioned to shift 2.83 AFY of groundwater extraction from Well 2 (located within the GSA) to Well 1 which is located outside the GSA and has ample available groundwater recharge. Based upon this shift, the project would not increase groundwater extraction beyond the yearly maximum estimated groundwater recharge of 16.7 af/yr for Well 1 and 1 af/yr for Well 2. Additionally, the project has been conditioned to implement a Groundwater Demand Management Program that will monitor and report well meter readings to the County. The project will not interfere substantially with groundwater recharge such that there would be a net deficit in aquifer volume or a lowering of the local groundwater level.

Therefore, the project is considered not to have the potential to significantly impact groundwater resources. Since the projected water demand for Well 1 and Well 2 are equivalent to or below the estimated water availability acre feet per year for the parcel, the requested Use Permit is consistent with General Plan Goals CON-10 and CON-11, as well as the policies mentioned above that support reservation and sustainable use of groundwater for agricultural and related purposes. The project will not require a new water system or other improvements and will not have a negative impact on local groundwater.