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Sunday's Letters to the Editor

| November 8, 2015



Vineyard scrutiny

EDITOR: Regarding the Close to Home column by Duff Bevill and Kevin Barr ("Growers speak out in defense of grape industry," Wednesday): The industry is under scrutiny because, like an intemperate drinker, it won't admit when it's had too much.

If the alcohol industry would control its own — acknowledge how event centers masquerading as wineries are an excessive indulgence and collectively destroy the rural quality of the North Bay — it wouldn't have to play defense on questions about exploiting or respecting the landscape.

It's a matter of degree. When the indulgence affects too many other people; when local governments ignore their concerns and proceed with business as usual; when residents feel obliged to organize, protest and write letters about traffic and the loss of rural character, then the alcohol and tourism industry has taken a good thing too far.

DONALD WILLIAMS

Calistoga

BOHEMIAN RhapsoDies

Choked Valley

Napa County (population 142,000) is a rural relief valve for the Bay Area's 75 million urban residents, but its burgeoning wine and tourist industry is overwhelming the area's limited natural resources. Residents increasingly object to the county's seemingly endless commercialization. The plan to develop Walt Ranch in the hills above Napa is just one more proposal of dozens pending to denaturalize this irreplaceable North Bay landscape.

Previously mostly agricultural and still harboring vineyards but star-struck by wine fame, increasingly urbanized and touristy Napa Valley now also features music festivals, bike races, cooking classes, art shows and auctions. Now 3.3 million tourists throng its 500 wineries annually. Urban traffic chokes semi-rural Napa Valley.

Astonishingly, the natives are not too restless—at least not enough to disturb county supervisors who, in a county enjoying a \$13.3 billion boom from agribusiness, appear untroubled by excessive traffic, tourism or water depletion.

Hence, the Walt Ranch proposal: 209 more acres of vines replacing woodlands and chaparral. Though its environmental impact report was subject to scathing professional criticism, Walt Ranch promises "environmental responsibility," "sustainable stewardship" and "commitment to the greater Napa Valley ecosystem." But besides threatened trees and water, that ecosystem also includes, inconveniently, neighbors.

Insouciant remarks like "What else should be done with that land?" or "Well, that's business," disrespectfully dismiss the fertile idealism that may be the bane of business but the salvation of Napa County. If economic interests continue to trump aesthetic values, and the countryside vanishes, little time will pass before the great Bay Area awakening that wonders, belatedly, "How could they have let this happen to Napa County?"

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DONALD WILLIAMS
Calistoga

Ignoring key part of the environment

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But besides threatened trees and water, the ecosystem includes neighbors unimpressed with its plan.

Why stubbornly develop a vineyard when so many people in the neighborhood object? In any ecosystem, any neighborhood, the measure of success is cooperation (not wealth).

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But those reasons neither build neighborliness nor foster community. It's difficult to conceive that a project as supposedly solicitous of the environment as Walt Ranch would exclude from its concern a crucial part of the ecosystem: neighbors.

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Donald Williams, Calistoga

Weekly Calistoga

12/1/16

Napa Register 11/30/16

YOUR TURN

Resist the colonialism of winery development

DONALD WILLIAMS

Wineries as event centers mark the doom of the Napa Valley. They are the outposts of the advancing army of attractions — foot and bike races, movie festivals, music events — that flatter and extol us for the valley's agricultural and rural identity — and then exploit and debase it.

This is the story of the American West, again. Outposts — event centers — are established. Hotels and restaurants root nearby. Adoring urban media succumb to the fiction of rustic sophistication. They rhapsodize over the food, lodging, and loveliness of this supernal valley. Enterprising commercial pioneers follow. Accordingly, unsurprisingly, they issue mass invitations — advertisements — to visit this favored Arcadia. And of course, the visitors and settlers come. And come. And come.

They leave money but extract from Napa Valley its water, rural landscape, and rustic tranquility; essentially, its identity.

Why do we submit to this colonialism? We submit because we are cajoled, or we are indifferent, or we are inattentive, or we are needy.

Consider the rationales offered to justify the development. "There has to be a balance between preservation and growth." "We need the money the tourists spend." "Wineries can't survive without direct sales."

It's always about the money. In the local construction industry, I've benefited myself from building. But I've always thought the discussion reduces to two values: economics and aesthetics. And resolving them requires reference to our identity as a place.

If we primarily want Napa Valley to be rural and agricultural, because we genuinely cherish its remarkable beauty, then decisions should be informed by aesthetic questions: "Does this proposal enhance, or diminish, its beauty?" "Is this proposal consistent with the valley's identity or contrary to it?" "Are we being authentic and true to ourselves or are we selling out?"

Of course, the economics matter. You can't pay the bills with your pretty view. But imagine the valley without all the proposed new developments. Imagine it only a generation or two ago. It survived. It lacked today's cachet, but people were happy and the county was not just nominally but truly semi-rural.

If, on the other hand, we're going to encourage Napa Valley to be the greater Bay Area's cool entertainment center, let's be honest and forget about preserving its rural nature. It will be lost. It may already be lost. My town of Calistoga capitulated.

But the winds of fashion are fickle, and when visitors and travel writers also realize that Napa Valley's been exploitative, its essential

nature overrun, its appeal tired, then new entertainment centers will arise elsewhere to siphon money from tourists. Our golden goose will have been slain.

The time to stop the proliferation of entertainment centers masquerading as wineries is now. Reasonable compromise makes a lot of sense — except when it means the subject's death.

Suppose, trying to balance preservation and growth, we do permit one more winery building. Then, with the same rationale, one more. Then, again, one more. When does it stop?

County land is finite. The buildings must be closer and closer together. The closer they are, the less rural is this place. Must Napa Valley look like Santa Clara valley before it stops? It has to stop sooner or later. Why wait till later, when the valley is less and less rural? The time to stop is now!

There will always be pressure for development. Always, someone will propose just one more project. There's nothing wrong with that. But we have the right to define our identity and to decline the proposals for more wineries, entertainment venues, and requests for just one more "reasonable" variance and one more "sensible" exception to general plans.

If we want to resist creeping colonialism, appreciate the aesthetics of this county, and preserve its identity for the future, now we must rise.

Williams lives in Calistoga.

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Napa Register 3/5/15

Weekly Calistogaw 3/5/15

SH Star 3/5/15

Napa's Last Hope

If the wine industry had stuck with agriculture instead of greedily cultivating tourism as well, it might not have to deal with a locals uprising in Napa. The Oak Woodlands Initiative (Measure C) is people-driven, born out of frustration with county supervisors who keep approving more visitors, events and wine production despite locals' objections about traffic and tourism in their supposedly semi-rural county.

The main opposition to the initiative is from the industry and county officials. No surprise. Aggressive tourism enriches the industry and government coffers. It also crowds the valley, consumes the water and degrades the semi-rural quality of Napa. Faced with a populist uprising, the opposition is fairly frantic. The argument they wrote for the ballot pamphlet was so filled with material misstatements that the court ruled they had to rewrite it and pay \$54,000 in court costs as well.

The alcohol industry complains about

Napa's strict regulations. It doesn't mention that enforcement of regulations is a fiction. It relies on—seriously—self-reporting. A few years ago the county did a spot check of 20 wineries: 40 percent were not in compliance with their permits.

Please vote yes. The Oak Woodlands Initiative is Napa's last hope.

DONALD WILLIAMS
Calistoga

'If government won't set limits,' residents will

Dear Editor:

Measure C is about more than saving trees and water.

It's about recognizing that there are limits in Napa County.

It's not the job of business to set limits. It's the job of business to make money. That's why wine industry organizations oppose C: their job is to make money. It's the job of government to establish rules on how to do that.

And if our government won't set limits, it becomes our job as residents and stewards of the land to do it.

That's why this important preservationist proposal was generated---not from the top by our legislators, but instead from the bottom by the thousands of us who signed to get it on the ballot. For years our supervisors have not seen fit to recognize limits. There still are no county-wide limits on production, or visitors, or events at wineries. Can the valley host an infinite number of visitors or events?

Nope. The numbers must be limited.

But county government has not done its job. Doling out permits for visitors and events without knowing the valley's limits is an irresponsible expenditure of an irreplaceable resource. If our representatives won't protect us from excessive tourism, tree-cutting, water exploitation, and helicopter noise, we must do it ourselves.

The St. Helena Star and other "C" opponents complain that initiatives are difficult to modify. They prefer collaboration among stakeholders. Sounds good, right?

Pshaw! After 8 hours of testimony in a meeting of 500 locals in 2015, county government established just such a committee. Now its APAC report slumbers on a shelf, forgotten and ignored, a waste of time and paper. Measure C, by contrast, written in collaboration with wine industry representatives, and endorsed by many in that industry, will actually save trees and water.

The Star and other opponents quibble while Rome burns. Now is the time when traffic chokes our roads. Now is the time when tourism is supplanting agriculture. Now is the time when our towns are dangerously addicted to tourism. Now is the time not to equivocate. Now is the time to approve C.

Donald Williams
Calistoga

Napa Valley Register 5/12/18
Calistoga Tribune 4/27/18
St Helena Star 5/13/18
Weekly Calistoga 4/26/18

Ignoring Key Part of the Environment (Napa Valley Register, November 30, 2016)

Donald Williams

Walt Ranch promises “environmental responsibility,” “sustainable stewardship,” and “commitment to the greater Napa Valley ecosystem” if it replaces 209 acres of woodlands and chaparral with more grape vines.

But besides threatened trees and water, the ecosystem includes neighbors unimpressed with its plan.

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Perhaps the Walt owner has a dream. Or the competitive urge to make the best cabernet.

But those reasons neither build neighborliness nor foster community. It’s difficult to conceive that a project as supposedly solicitous of the environment as Walt Ranch would exclude from its concern a crucial part of the ecosystem: neighbors.

Insouciant remarks like “What else should be done with that land?” or “Well, that’s business,” disrespectfully dismiss the fertile idealism that may be the bane of business but the salvation of Napa County. If economic interests continue to trump aesthetic values, and the countryside vanishes, little time will pass before the great Bay Area awakening that wonders, belatedly: “How *could* they have let this happen to Napa County?”

WHY BOARD NEEDS CHANGING

It's time for us to put Cio Perez on the Board of Supervisors.

Thirty years ago, Napa County was aware of the pernicious possibility of tourism supplanting agriculture. The 1988 Grand Jury wrote that "the intent of the General Plan is to: 'PRESERVE AGRICULTURE, and CONCENTRATE URBAN USES IN EXISTING URBAN AREAS . . . PRODUCTIVE FARMLAND AND URBANIZATION ARE NOT COMPATIBLE.'" It observed "an increase in the number of commercial, promotional, cultural, and entertainment activities occurring in wineries . . . on agriculturally zoned land." And it noted that the board of supervisors and county officials have failed to coordinate efforts "to prevent the occurrence of activities on Ag zoned land which violate the General Plan."

In 2015, twenty-seven years later, 500 exasperated Napers met with the board of supervisors. Speakers complained about increasing traffic; depleted water resources; wineries that failed to observe their limits on production, events, and visitors; and the diminution of the semi-rural character of the county.

The supervisors' response? Another report on a shelf.

Today, in 2018, the 1988 Grand Jury warning remains unheeded. The county in January gave Cuvaison permission to increase visitors 140%, to 65,520 per year. For Vine Cliff Winery in Oakville it approved an increase of annual tasting room visitors from 100 to 18,200. In 2012, 2.9 million visitors came to Napa; only four years later it increased 20% to 3.5 million.

Small changes accumulate till we realize: cumulatively they are large.

When government won't respond to the public's pleas for protection against incursions, ignored till they devour the lifestyle that attracted them, it's time for a change in government.

Right now, personally, I think the best opportunity for change is Lucio Perez, candidate for the board of supervisors. He's a native of St. Helena, a farmer, active in civic affairs, aware of the changes the county has suffered in recent years, and focused on the health of the valley. Please visit his website (CioForSupervisor.com). Ask to meet him.

If this valley is to be preserved, then paradoxically something has to change. The change to Cio will be a good start.

*Calistoga Tribune
3/30/18*

BREAKING Officials: Eight to 10 people killed in Texas high school shooting

https://napavalleyregister.com/star/news/opinion/mailbag/walt-ranch-conundrum/article_717fa3f6-7412-5680-b424-99850ebb441e.html

Walt Ranch conundrum

Don Williams Nov 25, 2016

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Small Napa County (pop. 142,000) is a rural relief valve for the Bay Area's 7.5 million urban residents, but its burgeoning wine and tourist industry is overwhelming its limited natural resources. Residents increasingly object to the county's seemingly endless commercialization. The plan to develop Walt Ranch in the hills above Napa is just one more proposal, of dozens pending, to denaturalize this irreplaceable North Bay landscape.

Previously mostly agricultural, and still harboring vineyards, but star-struck by wine fame, increasingly urbanized and touristy Napa Valley now also features music festivals, bike races, cooking classes, art shows and auctions.

Expenditures to encourage Napa's Disneyfication rocketed from \$461,000 in 2010 to \$5.5 million last year. Now 3.3 million tourists throng its 500 wineries annually. Urban traffic chokes semi-rural Napa Valley.

Astonishingly, the natives are not too restless -- at least not enough to disturb county supervisors who, in a county enjoying a \$13.3 billion boom from agri-business, appear untroubled by excessive traffic, tourism, or water depletion.

So the rush to make coveted Napa wine proceeds apace. And though the valley floor is planted out, you might still snatch a piece of the Napa name in the hills.

Hence, the Walt Ranch proposal: 209 more acres of vines replacing woodlands

and chaparral. Though its EIR on Friday (Nov. 18) was subject to scathing professional criticism, Walt Ranch promises “environmental responsibility,” “sustainable stewardship,” and “commitment to the greater Napa Valley ecosystem.”

But besides threatened trees and water, that ecosystem also includes, inconveniently: neighbors. And many, including the adjacent homeowners association and water district, as well as the Napa Sierra Club and Oakland’s Center for Biological Diversity, are not persuaded by the marketing.

In any neighborhood -- your local ecosystem -- the measure of success is cooperation (not affluence). Which begs the question -- why stubbornly develop a vineyard when so many people in the ecosystem object? Why answer their worries about wildlife and watershed with dogged obstinacy?

Because it’s legal? Because the owner has a dream? Or suffers the competitive urge to make the best cabernet? Those reasons neither build neighborliness nor foster community. It’s difficult to conceive that a project as supposedly solicitous of the environment as Walt Ranch would exclude that crucial part of the ecosystem -- its neighbors -- from their concern.

Insouciant remarks like “What else should be done with that land?” or “Well, that’s business,” disrespectfully dismiss the fertile idealism that may be the bane of business but the salvation of Napa County. If economic interests continue to trump aesthetic values, and the countryside vanishes, little time will pass before the great Bay Area awakening that wonders, belatedly: “How could they have let this happen to Napa County?”

Don Williams

Calistoga

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MARCH 1981

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Julia Child
toasts the premiere issue
of WINE COUNTRY



The Sublime, Beautiful and Picturesque Napa Valley

BY DONALD WILLIAMS
PHOTOGRAPHY BY WES THOLLANDER

Frustrated by congested streets, harried by unfriendly crowds, offended by smog and the visual pollution of suburban TV aerials, the visitor to Napa County eagerly drives through the city of Napa and heads up-valley. His tensions start to ease and his pulse diminishes involuntarily as he takes in the sight of the valley unfolding. The vineyards expand in orderly progression to the gracious hillsides. The hills themselves enclose the valley securely. In the distance, the great peak of Mt. St. Helena looms among the majestic palisades.

For the visitor, the peaceful, orderly landscape is a source of calm; it affords a sense of natural security. But the landscape isn't the panacea for the visitor. Absence of pollution, a relaxed way of life, a small population, distance from cities' hustle and vice—all put the visitor at ease when he travels the Napa Valley.

But what if the county were a desert? Would the visitor still feel the same? Probably not. In the sense of calm and security derived from experiencing this valley, the landscape itself is the controlling factor.

One explanation of the significance of the landscape in Napa County draws on a theory of art, developed in the eighteenth century, that attempted to discern order in nature by categorizing landscapes as either sublime, beautiful, or picturesque. It's a theory born of the Age of Romanticism.

The development of the theory can be traced back at least as far as 1712, when the Englishman Joseph Addison in *The Spectator*, was writing of the "great, uncommon, and the beautiful." In 1753, in *The Analysis of Beauty*, William Hogarth went a step further by expressing the crucial "line of beauty" idea: simply, that curves are beautiful. But in 1756 the distinguished English statesman Edmund Burke published a major advance in aesthetics, *The Sublime and the Beautiful*.

In this important book, Burke first discussed the "sublime". He called it that part of landscape that suggested awe and grandeur; that was elevated, lofty, vast, powerful, perhaps vague in outline. Distant, lofty mountains, or powerful, indistinctly massive cumulus clouds are sublime. The beholder feels, as Burke

said, "admiration, reverence, respect." (The sublime landscape and its effects suggest the Creator—powerful, exalted, rather indistinct—an important coincidence of ideas not lost on the eighteenth century theorists anxious to reaffirm the existence of God in the face of growing Rationalist skepticism.)

Burke described the "beautiful" in landscape as being smaller than the sublime. If the sublime asserted God's beneficence for man in mighty objects, the beautiful recalled not divine, but human love. Soft, smooth, curvaceous lines in landscape, said Burke, are beautiful. The beautiful is delicate, fertile, sweet; not obscure in form nor dark in color, but well-defined, and gaily colored. A gently winding river; smooth, luscious hillocks; or an inviting depression, like a valley, manifest beauty in landscape as Burke describes it.

E. Price in *Essays on the Picturesque*, 1792, discussed the last term in the triad, the "picturesque". In the landscape it is the unusual, the broken, the irregular or jagged objects, usually in the fore. Jagged rocks, irregular shrubbery and vines, occasional fences and houses, are ex-



This photograph illustrates an eighteenth century concept of art as follows: the mountain and high clouds in the distance are the sublime, the gently curved line of the trees in the middle is the beautiful, the barn and the orchard in the fore are the picturesque.

world."

The visitor to the Napa Valley experiences the same calm satisfaction from the landscape that the eighteenth century theoreticians describe, 'because the valley reflects so well the theory of the sublime, beautiful, and picturesque. Looming Mt. St. Helena, dark and awesome, provides the sense of the sublime. The valley itself, defined by wooded, rounded hills, and curving gently with the graceful turns of the Napa River, is the beautiful. And the picturesque element is supplied by the grapevines and occasional oaks and buildings that dot the valley. This sweeping, aesthetic panorama of the Napa Valley offers its beholder, unconsciously perhaps, a subtle but comfortable feeling of security. Thus we have the great influx of visitors from the cities, people in relatively disordered communities seeking a calm, well-ordered respite from the anxiety of urban confusion and debris.

The irony is that the attractive landscape may be its own destruction. Visitors in growing numbers, wishing to experience the natural security the landscape provides, come to settle in Napa

County. The threat is that, in seeking the ambience, they will destroy it.

The connection between the Napa landscape and the eighteenth century theory is not merely ingenious speculation. Some Napa poets, in their romantic verses about the local landscape, have expressed ideas consonant with the theory of the sublime, beautiful, and picturesque.

W.W. Lyman's expression of the theory is enjoyably subtle.

*The Napa hills are green-gold flames
That reach to meet the sky;*

*The valley is an emerald sea
Where flower islands lie.*

*And earth and air fair lovers are
Meeting with happy sigh.**

Lyman's "hills" and "valley" meet as lovers; an image that conforms both to modern psychology and the eighteenth century aesthetic theory. In Jungian psychology, flame and sky are paternal principles; earth and sea, maternal. The eighteenth century theory fits in that the sublime is the high hills and intangible flames; the beautiful is the valley—characteristically feminine with its "jewelry" of emeralds and flowers.

amples of the picturesque.

By 1800, and the beginning of Romanticism, the theory of the sublime, beautiful, and picturesque had been thoroughly expounded. It was used by European painters and writers, and also by American artists, especially those in the Hudson River School. The theory was comforting because there were no uncertainties: to all elements of natural landscape it assigned a place—in one of the three categories. Moreover, it still had room for God. What a consoling, romantic notion in a scientific, skeptical age! With this theory a man could look on the landscape with security, knowing that if something wasn't either beautiful or picturesque, it was sublime. With this theory, as Robert Browning said, "God's in his heaven / All's right with the

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The Sublime, Beautiful and Picturesque Napa Valley

continued from page 31

Walter Barnes, in "A Private Ikon", writes more specifically of the sublime and the beautiful. He associates the sublime (Mt. St. Helena) with the Creator—quite according to the theory—and refers to the beautiful (the valley's hills and floor) in soft, gentle, erotic terms:

*Against the warm and yielding valley,
The broad shouldered mountain,
Thrusts heavy hipped,
Erect to the sky,
With arms of hills*

*Encircling strongly
The fertile earth,*

Dominating the landscape in our eye.

The peculiar romantic qualities of this poetry—love, escape from reality, closeness to nature—to some extent reflect the attractions that lure the visitor to Napa Valley. Photos of the valley often suggest its idyllic, romantic nature. It's not surprising, then, that the concept of the sublime, beautiful, and picturesque—a product of eighteenth century Romanticism—makes sense in this twentieth century refuge that is the Napa Valley.

*Poetry quotations are taken from the anthology *Voices of the Wineland*, Alta Napa Press, 1978.

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We need to honor Napa's true semi-rural identity

Apparently Napa County, famous tourist destination and wine brand, is the picture of prosperity.

If only wealth were a measure of health.

For profound health, the ancient maxim emphasizes identity: know thyself. Napa County's identity is agricultural and rural. Its health is predicated on farming and its natural landscape. Traffic and excessive tourism (think film festivals, races, concerts, cooking classes) subvert its identity. Cheating on identity betokens an identity crisis: a fatal malady.

But Napa is in denial about its incorruptibility. Thus its credibility also suffers. Visitors' bureaus chatter about Napa's charming small towns and lovely landscape — unbelievably as traffic grinds on 29 and chainsaws prepare to hack trees by the thousands in Calistoga.

Yet Napa's debasement of its own identity is embarrassingly well-known: In November the New York Times called Napa Valley a "very touristy wine region," and as an alternative enthused that Paso Robles is "what Napa was before it was discovered." Even the mayor of nearby Sebastopol decried encroaching "Napaification" like a plague. Meanwhile the board of supervisors can offer rosy economics.

The wine industry is impressive. But with the supervisors' blessing it's spawned rampaging tourism — an average of 9,000 visitors per day in 2014. Last year witnessed more supervisors-sponsored decline in the well-being of Napa County.

For example: After hearing scores of locals' complaints about the loss of our semi-rural character at a jam-packed day-long meeting of over 400 citizens, in 2016 the supervisors — under pressure from the wine industry — weakened its own committee's already-modest recommenda-

Letter policy

Deadline for letters to the editor is Monday at noon. We reserve the right to edit for space and clarity. Please include telephone number for verification.

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tions to mitigate encroaching urbanization. What an empty exercise in futility that day-long meeting was!

In November two new county supervisors were elected. But there's little hope of them standing up to incessant wine-tourist industry expectations of favorable treatment.

There's more. In the hills above Napa, the board's approval of Walt Ranch vineyards (with the possibility of luxury housing) and the obliteration of thousands of trees was nearly a foregone conclusion, despite highly competent criticism of the environmental impact report. The overmatched Circle Oaks neighbors hardly stood a chance.

Nor, worried about the grand expansion of the Syar operation, did neighbors there find support from their elected representatives.

Continuing the relentless indulgence, in 2016 the supervisors' Planning Commission awarded permits to wineries for approximately 270,000 more visitations by tourists. Also it approved over 20 new or expanded wineries. The environmental impact reports for these projects routinely describe them as having no significant adverse effect — oblivious of their disastrous cumulative effect, as Mr. Caloyannidis has pointed out. Cumulative effects are part of the big picture the

supervisors are charged with controlling. Instead they seem to inhabit a magical wonderland where you can build endlessly and stay forever rural.

Well over 40 projects await the Planning Commission's approval this year.

Frustrated at their county leaders' amiable acquiescence to development, volunteers on their own initiative easily gathered signatures to limit destruction of the county's oak woodland. It was opposed by special wine industry interests. A judge kept it off the ballot on a technicality: another empty exercise in public participation.

There were a few bright spots in 2016. The supervisors rezoned a small contested area in Angwin. And the citizens of St. Helena, with unexpected brio, actually replaced two incumbent councilmembers. St. Helenans also responded quite coolly to proposals for a big tourist development in the center of town — showing, unlike neighboring Calistoga, refreshing reluctance to sell their soul.

But St. Helena alone cannot arrest the county's demise. With supervisors sympathetic to wine and tourist industry development, the prognosis for the patient looks bad. So to maintain the illusion of health, hucksters will shamelessly proclaim Napa's rural beauty — incongruously brimming with alcohol-fueled traffic. Soon what will be offered is just the relic of a rural valley, swarming with tourists and propped up like a scarecrow to fool the city folk that it's genuine.

Honoring Napa's true semi-rural identity is the path back to health (not just transitory wealth) — if only county leaders honestly walk it and don't just talk it.

Don Williams
Calistoga

Weekly Calistogan 1/26/17
Napa Register 1/23/17

St Helena Star 2/9/17

THE PROBLEM WITH PERMISSIVENESS

Sometimes change creeps gradually and we neither notice nor prevent it, until it's too late.

For example, I may not pay much attention to upvalley traffic---until one day I drive to Napa and find it takes twice as long as it used to.

Likewise: I might not mind if the county approves more visitors to some winery---until I learn the winery is just a hundred busy yards away.

Or: More tourism might seem like an easy fix for a city budget---until we learn we're hooked on it (positively cannot do without it!), and like an addict crave even more of it.

Small changes accumulate till we realize: cumulatively they are large. Increasingly, Napa's have awoken to the gradual transformations permitted by government---through perhaps indifference, ignorance, or, let us not think, avarice. Historically, the accelerated changes were birthed in 2008 when agriculture was redefined to mean not only growing food but also marketing (food-and-wine pairings, etc.). Then the door was opened to the aggressive tourism that now (1) enriches the industry and (2) pleases governments; and which also crowds the valley, consumes the water, and drives the housing costs beyond the reach of the very workers who labor to sustain the glamor. The public has deplored these changes, but neither letters to editors, nor public comments at government meetings, nor sign-holding demonstrations have impressed law-makers. It takes a keen outsider like James Conoway to document the arc in the valley from superb ag to self-congratulatory sybaritism.

The public pleads for a retreat from indulgence. Yet in January the county gave Cuvaison permission to increase visitors 140%, to 65,520 per year. For Vine Cliff Winery in Oakville it approved an increase of annual tasting room visitors from 100 to 18,200. Astoundingly, this scale of change is old news. In 2012, 2.9 million visitors came to Napa; only four years later it increased 20% to 3.5 million.

Meanwhile, law-abiding vintners compete with wine-industry violators in a county whose feckless idea of rule-enforcement regarding visitors and events is---seriously---self-reporting. (Do you turn yourself in to the CHP if you speed?) County residents suffer cancer rates among the highest in the state. And it's left to the public to initiate common-sense measures like restraints on helicopters, or preservation of woodlands, when government officials will not.

When government officials will not respond to the public's pleas for protection against incursions that slither so seductively they're unnoticed till they devour the very lifestyle that attracted them, it's time for a change in government.

Right now, personally, I think the best opportunity for change is Lucio Perez, candidate for the board of supervisors. He's a native of St. Helena, a farmer, active in civic affairs, aware of the changes the county has suffered in recent years, and focused on the health of the valley. Please visit his website; ask to meet him.

If this valley is to be preserved, then paradoxically something has to change. The change to Cio will be a good start.

N. V Register 3/24/18

SH Star 3/29/18

Weekly Calistogan 3/29/18

Our county could learn a lesson from football

Sunday's Super Bowl, the premier competitive sporting event of the year, could hardly be bigger. It succeeds because of the high quality of performance, the marketing, and the public satisfaction intrinsic in experiencing a superior product (come to think of it, rather like Napa wines).

And curiously, the contest succeeds also because it is so highly regulated. Look at all its rules. No motion allowed before the snap. The guard's not an eligible receiver. The QB can't throw the ball away. Only 22 players on the gridiron at one time. The rules are strictly and fairly enforced, infractions swiftly punished. (Leniency would be ludicrous.)

The players are well-compensated for their efforts. They have talents most of us don't enjoy, and they've labored long hours and endured difficult trials to achieve their status. Most of them seem to love their work. And in the Super Bowl, they'll reach the apex of their football career, including fame, wealth, maybe even glory.

All that is so wonderful!

Perhaps, just perhaps — yes, why not? — the event should be modified so that even more — yes, even more! — players can achieve that success! How about allowing 52 players on the field at one time? An additional 30 certainly have worked just as hard as the first 22, and they, too, want to play. And then an additional 30 men will be financially handsomely rewarded, which will enhance their local economies and tax revenues, and reward their communities with a radiant halo of acclaim.

True, the football field will be more crowded accommodating the additional players; but their increased wealth will be worth it!

How far do you think proposals for such an insane change would get with the public and the owners?

Correct. They'd go nowhere, because the

game already succeeds brilliantly with present rules and limits. If the beautiful integrity of the existing game is to be maintained, the appeals of the additional 30 worthy potential players must be denied.

However, those players are not without options. They can, after all, play elsewhere — and still make money, garner fame and aspire to the Super Bowl when the present players step aside. They just can't play at the same time, because the field would be too crowded.

Alas. If only this parable were false.

For a better chance of entering the field they covet, the 30 players should try appealing to the Napa County Board of Supervisors. Rules notwithstanding, our board is famously sympathetic to requests for more activity — increased winery production, more visitors, more events. As of December its Planning Department listed 51 new proposals entailing

667,000 additional visitors to the rural Napa Valley. Though caretakers of the rules of engagement in Napa County — i.e., a General Plan that honors agriculture before tourism — the Board of Supervisors and its Planning Commission have difficulty respecting them. When for example Reverie Winery in Calistoga frankly acknowledged transgressing its legal limits, and then asked to continue operating beyond its existing permits, the board meekly consented. Imagine the NFL indulging a player that way! The game would become a laughingstock.

As Napa County becomes increasingly congested with eager, talented players, the board (apparently believing the valley is infinitely rural) continues to sympathetically hear their earnest applications to build or expand another winery, or entertain more tourists, or redefine agriculture, or allow another zoning exception, so the players can fulfill their dreams, or make more money, or work unencumbered by useful regulations.

For its own good, football respects its essential identity and rules; punishes violators; and regulates participation on its limited field. It still makes plenty of money.

Our county could learn a lesson.

Don Williams
Calistoga

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SHEPP WILL RESPECT RURAL NAPA

Dear Editor,

I want to support a candidate for supervisor who will be responsive to the concerns of the people he or she represents. I've talked to too many of us locals who address public officials at meetings and feel like they're talking to a wall.

Napa county is at a crossroads. It's renowned for its agricultural bounty, fine wines. Predictably, wealthy outsiders have rushed to exploit that fame and the beauty of our county. We have over 400 wineries in the county---or is it 500---who knows? Isn't enough enough? The definition of a winery is now unclear, and the definition of agriculture has been inflated to include not just production but also sales and marketing. That means tourists by the millions, event centers to entertain them, and money for city halls and exploitive agribusiness; traffic congestion and loss of rural Napa for the rest of us.

Public officials always pay homage to the concept of a semi-rural Napa. Soon that's all that will be left of "semi-rural Napa"---the concept. Every new commercial building, every new winery expansion, makes the county less rural. The development is subtle, relentless. When will it stop---when it's thoroughly exploited and irreversibly urbanized? Future Napans will wonder how we ever let this lovely valley destroy itself.

Right now, I'm impressed with candidates who will actually, truly, really respect the semi-rural nature of this county---today! not someday when it's too late. Those candidates hear not money talking but us locals instead. How refreshing.

Diane Shepp impresses me as that kind of candidate. Our county needs the balance of her perspective.

Sincerely,
Donald Williams
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