

Meeting Unites on One S. Livermore Point ~ (The 10% Rule)

By The Independent ~ Thurs, November 19,2009

Although opinions were divided about whether more intense commercial uses should be allowed in South Livermore, people at a meeting Nov. 10 agreed that a 10 percent rule sounded good to them, when there is new development.

The 10 percent rule would apportion a development on a parcel so that it covered only 10 percent of the acreage. The remaining 90 percent would be devoted to cultivated agriculture.

Sponsored by the Alameda County Planning Department, the workshop at the Martinelli Events Center was designed to provide planning staff direction regarding what might be written into the South Livermore Valley Area Plan.

Winery owners have wanted to bring in a destination resort and larger restaurants than the 49-seat places now permitted in wine country.

Winery owners said that the area has been growing, and now has a chance to take the next step up. They talked about how wedding guests have to use motels and restaurants along Interstate 580, instead of having a place like the Sonoma Valley Inn nestled right in the heart of wine country.

One speaker said that such an inn could be "hidden among the trees" and not be obtrusive.

However, others, mostly residents on the rural roads, said that a drive of three or four miles to the freeway is not a burden for people coming to the weddings at wineries. It is more important to keep the current, relatively low activity of commercial attractions, and not accelerate.

There was a clear split between the two camps, as planners counted raised hands about potential expansion of uses. There were about a dozen hands raised that signaled "don't change things," and about 20 indicated they wanted the changes.

However, the vote won't translate into any action on the whole issue, said County Director of Community Development Chris Bazar, who chaired the meeting.

Although one group didn't want any changes, one person who voted on that side said that if the 10 percent rule were installed and followed, it would go a long way to control the type of development coming in. Later, when Bazar asked whether everyone did favor the 10 percent rule, no one objected.

Also discussed were institutional uses that might be permitted in South Livermore. Most thought a child care center would not be needed. However, one person pointed out that children of workers at wineries might be able to use such a facility.

More controversial was the topic of churches. One Livermore church was rebuffed in its earlier proposal to the county to relocate to Tesla Road, near the Wine Group, which is the owner of Concannon Vineyard. That congregation is still looking at alternatives.

Bazar cited a federal law that makes it more difficult to reject church development applications. However, the county did win in a suit filed against it by a church that wanted to build a school in Palomares Canyon with more students than zoning law would allow. The county's rejection stood, because the county treated the church like any other applicant that could not meet zoning ordinance standards.

The planning department will schedule another meeting to continue the dialogue about potential changes in South Livermore