

Coastal Commission Delays Bonny Doon Vineyard Decision

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SAN FRANCISCO — A busload of people who came to the state Coastal Commission meeting here Thursday in support of a Bonny Doon vineyard proposal left a bit disappointed.

Coastal commissioners took only testimony on Jim Beauregard's proposal to plant a 300-acre vineyard and then continued the matter until February.

Some 46 people on the bus signed a petition favoring the project. Beauregard's attorney, Zan Henson, and Bonny Doon resident Gary Mehan spoke to commissioners in support of the vineyard.

The Sierra Club's David Bockman and Bonny Doon residents Marilyn Hummel and Reed Flocks spoke against the proposal.

Beauregard hopes to plant the vineyard on a undeveloped 525-acre site located on both sides of Martin Road. The coastal permit is the last permit he needs to establish the vineyard.

Beauregard, who chartered the bus to bring his supporters here, originally planned to ask commission to make its decision Thursday.

But he dropped his plan after learning commissioners had just received the voluminous amount of information on the proposal Thursday morning.

The commission not only continued the matter in order to study the information submitted, but also to give its staff time to prepare a recommendation.

Commission Chairman Naomi Schwartz welcomed proponents and opponents of the project to submit more information to

the commission before the next hearing, which will be either in San Francisco or Eureka the first week in February.

However, there is a chance the commission may take up the matter when it meets in late January in Southern California.

Henson made the request for this earlier date and commissioners indicated they would consider it if there isn't any problem with people interested in the matter getting to Southern California.

Beauregard told The Sentinel he desires quick action since it costs him approximately \$70,000 each time he must continue escrow.

The property is owned by Teachers Management Investments and the present escrow expires March 30.

At this point, the cost of the 525-acre site is \$2.72 million and will go up with another escrow extension, Beauregard said.

And there's always the chance that the property owners won't renew the escrow, he added.

But from the comments and questions raised by commissioners about the project Thursday, it appears that it might take some time for a decision.

Schwartz, for instance, was perplexed as to why the county Board of Supervisors hadn't required an environmental impact report, since several rare or endangered plant and animal species exist on the site.

The county required a biotic assessment on the site and supervisors, in unanimously approving Beauregard's request, included a list of conditions designed to protect the plants and animals.

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Commissioner Marshall Grossman questioned just how much of the 525-acre site proposed for the 300-acre vineyard had been used in the past for agricultural purposes.

Henson contended that the use of fertilizers for the vineyard won't change the soil and harm the natural environment since the site had been used for farming in the past with no deleterious effects.

But Hummel, who with Flocks as her attorney unsuccessfully challenged in Superior Court the lack of an environmental impact report, contended that only small portions of the site ever had been farmed.

She presented the commission with old aerial photos attempting to show a 50-acre vineyard and a 40-acre orchard may have existed on the site in the early 1800s and that 50 to 60 acres may have been cleared in the 1950s for a Christmas tree farm.

But Beauregard, she pointed out, is proposing to clear another 150 acres that have never been cleared before.

In response to these arguments, Grossman said, "So, you (Beauregard) have proposed a reclearing of an area that was cleared and has grown back and have proposed to clear an area that's never been cleared before."

He asked the commission staff for quantitative information on how much land will be cleared for the first time under the vineyard proposal.

Commissioner Michael Wornum expressed concern about Hummel's contention that Beauregard will waste all the timber he clears from the land rather than risk denial from the state Department of

Forestry to log the land for commercial purposes.

Henson responded that Beauregard plans to use all the timber cleared from the land for fencing and for propping up the vines.

"Nothing will be wasted," Henson stated.

But Wornum found this hard to believe. "A 30- to 40-inch tree is a little big for fence posts," he said.

Commissioner C. Ervin Renner asked if Beauregard plans to clear the entire 300 acres all at once. Henson responded that the land will be cleared in phases which will be determined once the erosion control plan is completed.

Commissioner John Flynn appeared concerned about the viability of the project, asking the staff for more information on whether the land will support grapes.

And Commissioner Grossman expressed deep concern over a claim made by Henson and other project supporters that Hummel would prefer a housing development to a vineyard.

"My contention at one point was that a few houses might not be as damaging as a clearcut (for a vineyard)," Hummel explained.

She said if houses were built there, 20-acre parcels would be required and only a quarter acre of clearing per home would be allowed by the county.