

Planners back winery plan

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Special events would be limited, however

wineries
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Robin and Bill Cunningham received the green light Wednesday to build a 100,000-gallon winery at Redwood Meadows Ranch.

However, the couple doesn't plan to break out the bubbly. The **BONNY DOON** Santa Cruz County Planning Commission, after nearly eight hours of discussion and public comment, voted in favor of the plan but with numerous limitations.

The county planners approved a vineyard, three buildings, a parking lot and numerous other land and road improvements. But they also scaled back the couple's plan to hold 60 special events per year, such as weddings and cor-

porate retreats. They had sought an OK for up to 195 people per event and 8,340 people annually, not including wine-tasting visitors.

The commission voted to allow the 60 events, but with a maximum of 50 people at each. Commissioners also cut the number of night-time events at the Bonny Doon Road facility to two per month. They had sought an unlimited number.

The decision pleased the Rural Bonny Doon Association, which for months has complained the project, as proposed, would overwhelm the rural community.

"They agreed with our position," said Ted Benhari, association chair. "We were never opposed to the small-scale sale of wine. I thought the decision was fair and reasonable."

The Cunninghams were disappointed.

"I was a bit surprised by the decision, especially after the amount of support we received from people today," said Robin Cunningham.

About 30 of the 40 people spoke in favor of the project.

Commissioner Denise Holbert said a major problem with the project is that there are no stipulations for special events in the county's existing winery regulations.

"When these ordinances were developed, I don't think there was anyone who envisioned events would become such an integral part of such an operation," Holbert said.

Commissioner Dennis Osmer said land uses allowed by different zoning designations typically are general and fail to adequately deal

with changes in an industry.

"We really need to be flexible as time passes, and things change over time," he said.

Commissioner Teall Messer said that while he understands the economic role special events play for wineries, "such events were in direct violation of the open-space easement and agricultural zone designated for this specific property and therefore should be limited."

Special events — specifically the noise and traffic they create — has been a major concern for many Bonny Doon residents.

However, a report by Cathleen Carr, the county planner assigned to the project, said studies found that those impacts would be "insignificant."

Robin Cunningham said she's unsure whether she will appeal the commission vote to the Board of Supervisors.

"We've really got a lot to consider at this point," she said.