



Planning Department <planning@amadorgov.org>

***Amended* Use Permit UP-19;12-1 La Mesa Vineyards**

1 message

Daniel D'Agostini <daniel@dagostini.com>

Sat, Sep 4, 2021 at 8:07 PM

To: Amador County Planning Department <planning@amadorgov.org>

To members of the Technical Advisory Committee.

My name is Daniel D'Agostini and I share a fence line and gate with Côme Lague/ La Mesa Vineyards. I have concerns and objection to his request to amend his use permit. I first learned of his request on 8/27/21, and was quite shocked. Côme and I are friends. He purchased land my family owned in 2009. In 2017, he decided to enter the winery business and I had no choice but to adjust to changes.

If you do not know who I am, a brief introduction: My family settled here in 1909 and I am living in the house I was raised. I am one of the older and most knowledgeable people in the Shenandoah Valley about this valley. All this land here in this area was once part of my family's property and I know it more deeply than anyone in this valley. I founded Abbondanzafarms in 2008, after my mother died and I became owner of this land with my sister. I am also a documenter of this valley and its people as a photographer and writer. I am also the president of Farms of Amador. So I wrote a letter the following letter to my neighbor Côme once I received your notice. Please read:

He replied back "

First I'm very sorry for the way this all got to you. I wanted to meet with the county first and then have a conversation with you once I had more information from them, but they just went ahead and mailed out to everyone so quickly that I did not even have a chance to do either. Without context, I can understand your reaction.

It was very painful for me to read the letter as I do value our relationship very much. I am sure it was also painful for you to write it. I want you to be heard, respected and try as I have before to accommodate your wishes best we can.

I would very much like to sit down with you and go through your letter. There are certainly some things that are on your mind that I wish I had known about sooner and we may address immediately with some creative thinking and action, that are not part of this use permit process. I would also like to explain my rationale for applying for the use permit changes and how I think we can co-exist in a way that works for both of us."

And I wish to say, he has been very positive and willing through the past three years to help make this easier for me. However this recent request is not acceptable to me. Again, I urge each of you to Read My Letter Côme carefully.

He has assured me he has no intention of being open seven days a week or doing events at night but as I said to him last night, what happens if you pass away or you finally give this venture up and sell, then I am stuck with what left. He wants flexibility to compete. Sorry, it is not the county's responsibility to get involved in wealthy entrepreneurs competing goals. These are smart people who know their rights when they purchase property and who feel they have the right to bend the rules later.

I will be unable to attend to meeting Tuesday as I am involved in picking my dry farmed Organic (CCOF) grapes this week.

Sincerely,

Daniel D'Agostini

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President: FARMS of AMADOR. <https://amadorfarmersmarket.com>



Here goes the neighborhood.docx

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Dear Côme and Charlene,

last week I received from the planning commission the notice of your request for changing your use permit. I have to tell you I was shocked and dismayed and I feel like you have forgotten where you are and who lives on the other side of the fence in your zest as an entrepreneur. I consider you friends and it saddens me deeply to have write this letter.

I will address each of your requests but first let me share a reminder of who lives next-door to you. I have spent 72 1/2 years on this piece of land I call home. And in all actuality, not only the 4.8 acres my sister and I own, but the pieces you own as well as Russ across the street and Richard to my east are deeply embedded within my very being. You should know this.

There are only a handful of people like me left in this valley who were born and raised here. I am very unique within that set. I am a naturalist, a poet, an author, a photographer, a Biodynamic farmer, and a teacher. I cherish the quietness of the country. Next door to you is a sanctuary where I create and help people reconnect to nature. I get up each morning and meditate and walk amongst my plants and creations I do this in the evenings too. People come here for that special quietness and to learn from me. During the 80s I taught junior high children just up the road and taught them the names of all the trees and shrubs and wildflowers here in our foothills. I would assign them to sit outside in the evening at a special spot of their choosing and do a 15-to-20-minute observation as I too

was doing this. I wanted them to know the locations of the moon and the stars and to get to know their area and its quietness. I wanted them to connect in that present moment. When I was a student at Davis and a teacher living down in Davis, I would drive up on weekends to visit my parents and would note the changes, the first stoplight there at Sunrise on Highway 16, then a few years later one appeared at the new development Rancho Murieta. I would notice the city encroaching slowly to the foothills now this little valley is teaming with wineries.

When I met you in 2009, you said you were interested in the local lakes and had your boat there in the barn. I remember you saying wineries were not on your mind. I thought to myself that might change and yes, a few years ago that changed and I had to face the fact that I was going to have a tasting room literally 50 feet from my fence and studio. You've got to understand that was quite a shock to me.

During the year and a half plus of construction I dealt with dust and noise. You have been kind and respectful and I certainly appreciate all the oleanders now planted along the fence line. In 3 to 4 years, they may be big enough to provide me privacy as I walk in my garden near my studio.

But let's talk about what it's like to be on the side of the fence. You are a brilliant engineer and entrepreneur who can spin out businesses and turn them into fine-tuning machines. The more cars in the parking lot probably means in your mind more

opportunities that somebody will get out of those cars and buy a bottle of wine, buy a few flights to drink, and perhaps join the wine club. Cars equal money.

On my side of the fence those cars, actually it's a combination of cars, large pick-ups, and SUVs most still running with the petroleum products either diesel or gas are a far cry from what one normally sees on the other side of the fence here in the country - livestock. As they sit there idling, I get to smell and listen to that. Then the engines get shut off, the locks chirp, and people go up to drink wine. When they get to going sometimes the engine start up but, oh, a conversation starts up and the engines idle and then maybe shut off and then start up again before they leave. The crunch of the gravel, the driver's uncertain backing up skills, gravel spins dust rises.

When I saw recently the parking lot being extended the entire fence-line to the road, Joni Mitchell's famous song, Yellow Taxi, with that chorus line, "*Don't it always seem to go That you don't know what you've got till it's gone They paved paradise, put up a parking lot.....*" has never stopped ringing in my ears.

Aside from the vehicles I'm still shocked fairly regularly when I look up and realize somebody is watching me from the parking lot as they smoke a cigarette or a Vape since they can't do that up on the terrace. I don't smoke cigarettes and the smell of the tobacco is an intrusion. Many people pack their dogs along wherever they go and barking dogs is also something new for

me to get used to. In parks I've noticed people are pretty good about picking up the excrement deposited by their pets. This does not seem to be as true in gravel parking lots and the fence-line is a great place to walk the dog. In time the Oleanders should help eliminate these visual intrusions.

For the first time in my life from 10 o'clock a.m. when the girls arrive until closing time four days a week, Thursdays, Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays there's the ambient music soft rock playing in my back yard. Don't get me wrong, I don't mind music, however, I don't listen to it outside while I'm working. Remember, I am very much a naturalist. How disconnected people have become. Do people carry music with them when they're taking a hike? It seems that they can't sit and drink wine and look at the view of the country without some background music to set the mood. My ears are sharp I am used to silence. Of course, on Saturdays it is a whole different thing. Live music, much louder. People tell me "oh, you're so lucky you get a concert every Saturday". Maybe I don't want a concert every Saturday but I have no choice. There have been a few very good musicians and that has been a pleasant surprise but for the most part the musicians are what I call an event/wedding band who play cover not original music. I like Eric Clapton but do I have to hear everybody sing his songs and believe me if I hear "brown eyed girl" one more time I'm going to consider starting a Trap shoot at that hour! Just kidding but really there's a couple of guys you've had that seem to have a very small selection of music and every hour they pull their version of Brown Eyed Girl. By the end of the afternoon when

people are slightly inebriated, sometimes dancing and hooting, I am so ready for it to end I am surprised you cannot hear me letting out a loud ahhhhhh when the music stops and I hear nothing but the silence and the breeze blowing through the trees. Relief!

And now in your new proposal you're talking about "leveling the playing field". Well quite frankly, everybody who's come up here in the last 10 years has, I think, decimated the playing fields of my youth but aside from that, this notion of competing doesn't resonate with me as a farmer or a grower.

My friend Molly Chappellet used to share with me that in the early days of the Napa Valley everybody was helpful to each other there was no sense of competition. And in the Shenandoah Valley that has been true also. That is why old friend Dick Cooper was so loved. His generosity was for everyone in the farming business. As farmers we tend to the soil and we don't compete with one another we compete with our self to create the best product in the finest way. I feel the product itself that each of us create is what should be the attraction.

I have the greatest respect for those wine makers who are not open to the public only private appointment as the product sells itself. Events, fancy buildings are just gimmicks leading to Disneyland like situations.

You want the county to change the rules to “level the playing field.” Are you thinking of it as a game, this business of winery ownership? Well, then the most powerful “piece” on the board in this county is direct access to the Shenandoah Valley Road. You have that as does Russ across the street. Not everyone has that piece. As far as exposure your exposure blows him away, one cannot miss your facility going either direction. His is pretty invisible over there and to hard spot when one is driving by that little slight twist at my driveway – cars will fly right by his but they’re looking at yours.

And, to top it all off, you are requesting the right to stay open all seven days of the week until ten p.m. with no limitation on indoor or outdoor amplified music with crowds up to 125 with no limitation as well as up to 12 events with 450 people!

Hello?

I believe you have forgotten your neighbor, a highly respected lifelong resident of this valley who cherishes the silence and the feel of the country. I feel insulted and thrown under a gutter. I see this action as extreme insensitivity to the specialness of these rural foothills we are blessed to call home.

You really should be thinking seriously about all that light intrusion and sound intrusion to our special place as well as the addition of more cars on the highway. Disappointing.

It appears my friend, from my side of the fence, the blinders are

on the entrepreneurial race horse and you're not realizing you are trampling on the spirit of the countryside and your neighbor particularly. Do you really want to subject me to this, seven days a week open till 10 o'clock at night?

I think the focus should not be competition, luring people in, but it should be what's being poured out of the bottle. It's easy to create spin and illusion but our quiet Shenandoah Valley was pretty nice before all this Disneyland idea of wineries have emerged. From the original a winemaking family and from my long relationships with the wine industry, I've seen it all.

I respectfully encourage you to withdraw your request from the planning commission. If it goes before them, I will strongly voice my opposition and petition all my many friends in the valley to join me in supporting my privacy and the spirit of the valley so it doesn't get one step further into desecration by competing millionaires who seem to view business as sport or a game. I will use my forum as the President of the Farms of Amador to send my message and share this message. I do not want to strain our friendship but this would strain it considerably.

Please do not go down this road.

Have gratitude for what you have. How much really is enough?

Sincerely,

Your neighbor,

Daniel D'Agostini