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FOLLOW-UP: VABC Use "Events" and "Ag Structures"

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Mon, Jun 9, 2025 at 2:00 PM

Draft To: Laura TeKrony <laura.tekrony@loudoun.gov>

Cc: Cheryl <Cheryl.Hutchison@loudoun.gov>, "Bartok, Robin" <Robin.W.Bartok@loudoun.gov>, "bitmapper41@live.com" <bitmapper41@live.com>

Bcc: Maura Walsh-Copeland <mwalshcopeland@gmail.com>

RESPONSES to your question from today are included in the attached document and are posted on the Resource web page.

Laura,

Thanks again for your time on Friday and additional questions today. I believe we addressed almost all of the questions you had to prepare for the WLRUS meetings this month, except for a better review of what constitutes an "EVENT" for a VABC Use and how it relates to "AG STRUCTURES."

The WSJ article below is actually a quite timely description of the difference between Marketing and Zoning, and what other county regulations call "**by-right events**" versus "**agritourism and special events**" as shown in the [Comparative Summary of County Zoning Ordinances](#) I prepared.

- "**By-right**" VABC Use events are those allowed via Code of VA, and directly related to "reasonable and customary" tasting (sampling) and sale of their VABC agricultural product in their wine, beer, or spirits.
- "**Agritourism Events.**" As the article below highlights, the days of just "sampling and sale" are over for those younger than boomers or Gen X.
 - For Millennials and Gen Z a VABC Operation needs to have more than its "product" to MARKET to customers, as they are looking for venues to "relax and recreate."
 - That MARKETING now includes the agritourism hooks (farm tours, donkeys, farm to table dinners, etc).
 - SALES & MARKETING must also now include promotion of food trucks and music, which have no relation to the VABC "sample and sale" of a VABC ag product (wine, beer, spirits).
 - In the Comparison Summary of County Zoning Ordinances matrix this would be the row called "Agritourism Events" by several counties. These are generally PUBLIC EVENTS, promoted and Marketed for the general public to attend, some with ticket sales, some without.
- "**Special Events.**" The last category are, in general, the larger "Private Events" held at a VABC venue, such as a wedding, private party, reception, etc. that is not promoted or marketed to the general public, the same as special events at B&B and other Rural Uses. They can also be larger public events with ticket sales.
 - As shown in the comparative summary matrix, other counties have stipulated the quantity of these events allowed per year, the acres required, and maximum number of attendees.
 - These regulations are similar to how Banquet/Event Center Use-Specific Standards in Loudoun are determined during SPEX review, and the "tiers/levels" as allowed for similar Special Events at a B&B.

In a nutshell --

- The only Events that are UNIQUE for VABC Uses are the "by-right" events allowed per Code of VA.
- Ag Tourism and Special Events are regulated by other counties consistently across more than just VABC Uses, and are required to be "farm" or "Ag Operation" based.
- This is consistent with how Staff is thinking of using "Agricultural Operations" in Loudoun County and must be viewed as an "overlapping" issue for WLRUS, not just VABC Use specific.

Separate from the **MARKETING** of events, the **ZONING REGULATIONS** provide the *parameters for each of the above types of "events"* through;

- Location regulations (e.g., setbacks, hours, parking, noise, lighting, etc. etc. etc.)
- Quantity per year, number of attendees (etc. etc. etc) AND
- USBC Code requirements, (i.e., based on the quantity of patrons, assembly) for health, safety and welfare.

The above is in line with [Judi Birkitt's April 2023 letter to industry](#).

As Loudoun has seen over the past decade, until a VABC Use has been first established to determine its actual business ag operation/use, the USBC requirements for a structure will not be known.

- Loudoun will need to first establish the business's compliance as an "Agricultural Operation" to address your primary concern about the construction of an "Ag Barn" or Ag Structure" that is used by a VABC Use beyond "by-right events" (sampling and sale).
- A structure used for a larger (agritourism or special) event venue (i.e., more than 50 people on a regular basis) will need a requirement similar to that discussed at the April TLUC meeting for B&B Use to be applied in WLRUS for VABC Uses.
- The April Staff statement for B&B's that can also be considered for VABC Uses is:

Establishment of [Lodging/Ag Operation] Uses Prior to Operating Private Parties and Special Events:

- *Draft language to ensure proof of operation as approved prior to conducting events;*

I hope this better explains the inter-relationship of "events" and "structures" from our Friday discussion. Although to be confirmed with the WLRUS packet, from my conversation with Mr. Hobbie the information above also appears to be in line with general Staff/CAO Ag Operation implementation proposals.

Maura

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What Does It Take to Sell Wine to Millennials and Gen Z? Donkeys, for One.

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Will wine drinking end when Boomers and Gen Xers no longer raise their glasses? If you've been reading the same headlines I have, you might think this could happen.

Here, a small sample of the bad news: "Dour Grapes: Why Wine Makers Are Struggling to Attract Gen Z and Millennial Drinkers" (Fast Company); "Boomer-Centric Wine Industry at a Crossroads as Gen Z Turns Away From Alcohol" (Fortune). But do these headlines tell the whole story? Do younger drinkers truly lack interest in wine, or have winery owners failed to figure out what they want? I talked with vintners all over the country and found a number getting quite creative to draw in millennial and Gen Z drinkers as well as boomers and Gen X.

When I first began visiting wineries a few decades ago, the proposition was pretty straightforward: You showed up at the tasting room, with or without a reservation, and sampled some wines poured by the proprietor or the proprietor's spouse, for a nominal price or none at all. Your host explained, in detail, how the wine was produced and perhaps offered a brief tour. You bought a few bottles of a wine because you liked it or just because the owner was nice. You might have told a few friends about the winery and its wines, but you had no need—and no platform—to tell the whole world.

A few decades later, so much has changed. Wineries are looking for new ways to attract a younger generation as their core demographic begins to age out. The added attractions often come in the form of "experiences"—opportunities to drink wine in a mirror-lined cellar, or after performing yoga with goats—all meticulously documented on social media by winery visitors or personnel.

While some oenophiles might roll their eyes, I can see that yoga goats might attract a new group of fans—or at least treat older drinkers to a bit of fun. I happily count myself among the Instagram followers of the four miniature donkeys who live at Ravines Wine Cellars in Geneva, N.Y. Long a fan of this Finger Lakes winery's excellent Rieslings and Cabernet Francs, I'm now invested in its donkeys as well.

Benny, Jewel, Copper Penny and little Cotton are the official mascots of the new "plant-based division" of the winery's food and wine club, said Ravines co-founder Lisa Hallgren. The winery created this division of the club, she explained, specifically to appeal to millennials "concerned about where and how their food and wine are grown."

The Hallgrens aren't the only Finger Lakes wine producers wise to the appeal of cute farm animals. Their neighbors at Hermann J. Wiemer Vineyard offer visitors a \$30 farm tour that includes a look around the vineyards and a sheep photo op.

"Many people (not just millennials) are thrilled to see the agricultural aspects of the farm," noted winery co-owner Oskar Bynke.

Grape Adventures

It takes more than donkeys and sheep, however. Younger wine lovers also seek interesting wines, preferably made from uncommon grapes. According to Liz Thach, president of the California-based Wine Market Council, a report it published earlier this year indicates that millennial drinkers are taking an interest in a broad range of grape varieties while boomers remain "camped out in Chardonnay and Cabernet country."

Many successful producers are adding more-obscure grapes to their wineries' portfolios. In addition to Riesling and Cabernet Franc, the Hallgrens produce wines from grapes such as Savagnin, Noiret and Muscat Ottonel. Bryan Ulbrich, winemaker and owner of Left Foot Charley winery in Traverse City, Mich., makes Riesling as well as wines from Auxerrois, Saperavi and Kerner—all big hits among his millennial customers.

The price of Ulbrich's wines further lures the younger crowd to his winery, he said. Flights of wine (four 2- to 3-ounce pours) cost \$16; complimentary tastings are offered on the weekends. Left Foot Charley's staff—"nearly all millennials," according to Ulbrich—has also shaped the winery's success with younger visitors. "They've helped guide this old Gen Xer," he said.

At Slater Run Vineyards in Upperville, Va., co-proprietor Kiernan Slater Patusky courts millennial visitors with live music and food trucks as well as wines like pét-nat (naturally sparkling wines) and skin-contact amber Viognier. "We've kept our prices reasonable for our region," she said. Bottles range between \$28 and \$78, and tastings of three wines start at \$16. Visitors are also allowed to bring their own food.

In Pour Form

John Cifelli, general manager of Unionville Vineyards in Ringoes, N.J., used to call the addition of music and food trucks at wineries the "beerification" of his state's wine industry, noting that craft breweries first tested such bonus attractions. As Cifelli put it, "people are going to wineries today for a different reason than they did 10 years ago," viewing them as "a place to relax and recreate, rather than to hear a story and buy to take home."

Plenty of wineries are succeeding without food trucks or pickleball. Michael Shaps of Michael Shaps Winery in Charlottesville, Va., and Shenandoah Vineyards in Edinburg, Va., said he offers "a setting without the noise that other wineries tend to have." He charges a reasonable \$20 for a tasting of five wines and \$10 more for a premium tasting with two more wines—high-end ones, including one of his Burgundies.

The well-established, family-owned winery Frog's Leap in Rutherford, Calif., has also managed to keep its tastings affordable, starting at \$45 a person for four (2-ounce) wines. And the tasting room remains entirely focused on wine—well-known varieties like Cabernet Sauvignon, Sauvignon Blanc, Merlot and Chardonnay, as well as some smaller "winery only" offerings. While the winery does a brisk business with boomers and millennials alike, according to Tori Williams, VP of creative and brand strategy, it hasn't made a "concerted" effort to do so; rather, they seek to educate "curious people of all ages."

At Frog's Leap, Williams explained, the chief focus is educating visitors about the wines, the farm and the family's 40-plus-year history. "I think we need to be very clear about what our purpose is," she said. "I don't want to be known as the winery that's dog-friendly and has the best snacks."

What formula will win the hearts of young drinkers and assure the viability of wineries? I'm glad visiting wineries has become a more multidimensional experience than it was when I was starting out, but I hope that the "purpose" Williams noted doesn't get lost. The wine is what matters most. So here's to the right combination of offerings that will foster a deep love of it in future generations.

----- Forwarded message -----

From: **Maura Walsh-Copeland** <Maura@walsh-copelandconsulting.com>

Date: Wed, Jun 4, 2025 at 3:54 PM

Subject: Marketing vs. Zoning: DRAFT TLUC WLRUS Prep Material for June 18, 2025

To: Laura Tekrony

Cc: Robin Bartok

Laura,

I had a timely conversation yesterday with a wine grape grower, which prompted me to give them a description of the difference between "marketing" and "zoning." As you know, they are very different. However, during the discussion of VABC Uses over the past 5 to 8 years the "industry" and VL comments on ZOAMs have blurred the distinction.

I thought it might be helpful for you to have some short statements to highlight the differences during the June and July TLUC meetings, perhaps as a preamble or as a way to redirect conversation back to the topic of "zoning."

Rather than use my words, here is an [AI generated comparison](#) of the two terms and types of issues (that you can look up directly):

Marketing and zoning are both crucial aspects of running a business, but they address different challenges. Here's a comparison:

Marketing Issues:

- Focus: Attracting and retaining customers, promoting products or services, and building brand awareness.
- Examples: Identifying target markets, creating effective advertising campaigns, managing online presence, and building customer relationships.
- Impact: Directly affects sales, revenue, market share, and overall business growth.
- Solutions: Developing a strong marketing strategy, utilizing various marketing channels (e.g., social media, content marketing, advertising), and analyzing market trends.

Zoning Issues:

- Focus: Land use regulations, property development restrictions, and community impact.
- Examples: Permitted uses, building height limits, setback requirements, parking regulations, and signage restrictions.
- Impact: Affects business location, operations, expansion possibilities, and property value.
- Solutions: Researching local zoning laws, obtaining necessary permits, and seeking variances when necessary.

In Essence:

- **Marketing** is about attracting customers to your business.
- **Zoning** is about making sure your business can legally operate in a given location and doesn't negatively affect the surrounding community.

While distinct, marketing and zoning are interconnected.

- For instance, zoning laws can influence your marketing strategy by restricting signage or limiting the types of businesses allowed in a specific area.
- Furthermore, understanding zoning can be a marketing advantage, allowing businesses to position themselves effectively within their community.

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