

Solano County Board of Supervisors  
675 Texas St. #6500  
Fairfield, CA 94533

RE: Mankas Corner Improvement Project;  
Suisun Valley Strategic Plan

Dear Members of the Board of Supervisors,

I wish to go on record with my opinions of why the Suisun Valley Strategic Plan is not reasonable or suitable now.

*The vision stated: Suisun Valley is a unique farming region that supports profitable family farms and quality of life for all its residents. It is a destination for tourists seeking world class wine, identifiable Suisun Valley farm products and a beautiful agricultural landscape with no fallow land. The Suisun Valley appellation is so famous that it creates new markets and increases demand for Suisun Valley wine and other farm products outside of the region.*

The vision as quoted above is not obtainable. And so much has changed since this plan was created. Here are some hard facts from the U.S. Census Bureau and the U.S. Dept. of Agriculture's National Agricultural Statistics Service to more accurately describe America's farmers.

*In our society as a whole, the wealthiest control the largest amount of our wealth. In farming, the large corporate farms far outweigh the income, the land, the revenue and the profits of American agriculture. In 2009, the net earnings from farming activities on 90.5 percent of all farms in American (with sales less than \$249,000) was on average \$2,615.*

*- 73.5 percent of all farm income comes from the top 5.3 percent of all farms (those bringing in \$500,000 or above annually) in terms of gross revenue.*

*- Only 10.8 percent of American farms have gross sales of \$250,000. This upper ten percent own 49.4 percent of American farmland and each of their farms averages more than 2000 acres. The family farms we are most likely to see anywhere in the country are of the bottom 90.5 percent, bringing in an average net income of \$2,615.*

The idea to create new markets for local wine and other farm products outside of the region is hardly a necessity. Maintaining agricultural character, improving farm production and income, expanding use of Suisun Valley, and enabling value-added agriculture is now up to two or more wine corporations from Napa. Joe and Chuck Wagner (Wagner Family of Wine), and E&J Gallo have secured their dominance in the valley. Craig Hall (Hall Wines) is not far behind them. All of these corporations are well known for their unlawful business practices. The wine industry wields inordinate political power, not only on the North Coast, but at the state-wide level also. Whether

they're fighting to prevent regulation of their enormous appetite for water, or greasing the political gears for big forest-to-vineyard conversion (Gallo), the wine industry's major players are deeply involved in politics. As case after case has shown, the wine industry tends to get its way with respect to water, zoning, labor laws, subsidies, and more. California's ruling class includes most of its elected officials and many of its would-be regulators. The wine business has become a juggernaut of free market capitalism. The California wine industry annually reaps about \$20 billion in revenue, much of it through exports to Europe, Canada, and Asia. The industry has become so profitable that most of the North Coast's officials, from county supervisors to members of Congress have internalized the notion that their role is to do virtually everything they can to facilitate the industry's continued growth.

In fact, 90 percent of the wine produced in California is exported. That's exporting a lot of water, considering it takes about 15 gallons of water to produce one glass of wine.

Chuck Wagner's plan for the Suisun Valley is to "control the land and you control your destiny as a wine maker". His "team" has been busy buying and leasing anything over 9 acres, on my road and elsewhere in the valley. Many of my wealthy neighbors have leased their land to Wagner, and they were not struggling to keep their land.

I believe E&J Gallo is the largest winery and vineyard corporation in Northern California. Chuck Wagner wants to be even bigger. He has purchased 175-acres of land on Cordelia Road, south of I-80, and plans to build the largest distillery in California, as soon as the last details of his \$1 million lawsuit in Napa are finalized. At capacity, the distillery is expected to use 4 billion gallons of water annually.

So the majority of Suisun Valley's farmland will eventually be controlled by Big Wine. Citizens of Sonoma County have rallied to stop fast-growing 'Napaification', while our Supervisors are pushing for it. The cumulative impact of wineries, event centers and tasting rooms have many riled about traffic, people driving after consuming alcohol, and the rising number of tasting rooms. The impacts are being seen everywhere in California where wine grapes are grown. Places such as the Suisun Valley have lost their "rural character". Sonoma County used to grow 90 percent of its fruits and vegetables on small family farms. Now, they only grow 10 percent and import the rest.

The Strategic Plan was approved without thorough planning, and it lacks the extensive definitions needed. It opens the door to urban commercial uses that are not compatible with preserving quality of life for all its residents.

Some of the actions recommended in the plan affect landowners with parcels under Williamson Act contract. In fact, the first bed & breakfast inn, the Suisun Valley Inn which opened in the spring 2016, was under the Williamson Act. Charles Lomeli, our tax collector, was not aware of that new land use and instigated a meeting with county planners at the end of August 2016 after my inquiry. The county did not have a method in place for collection of TOT money in the unincorporated county. The issue of non-collected hotel tax persists now with over 300 unregulated short-term vacation rentals

that have sprung up in recent years on Airbnb. This category was never included in the general plan. I understand county council has been writing language for an ordinance for about one year. I want to go on record early in this process saying non-owner occupied residences should be prohibited from becoming permitted vacation rentals, as this opens up even more unintended negative impacts to quality of life for valley residents, and takes away permanent housing. If anything, only primary residences should never be considered, and then for only a limited small number of permits, and with a lot of restrictions attached. With public notice and public input, something that has been denied us residents with all of the newly allowed uses. Also, public notice should extend a distance of one mile minimum. The 500 ft. distance for public notice is not applicable in the unincorporated county where there are greater distances between property owners.

As for becoming a tourist destination, the Suisun Valley has little to offer if it loses its rural character. Tourism is so heavy in Napa, that we might experience their overflow. The perceived vision of 15 or so small wineries and numbers of fruit and vegetable stands will likely never be realized. Gallo bought out two of our local wineries, Ledgewood Creek and Winterhawk. Chuck Wagner (Cordelia Winery LLC) purchased the 13-acre site of Larry's Produce last January for \$2.6 million. Wagner will not invest that much money to keep it as a produce stand. It will likely become a winery/event center. Larry was given a 5-year lease. These were three main local attractions for the valley. Ledgewood Creek and Winterhawk already had established event centers in ideal locations away from residents. They are permanently closed to the public. Larry may relocate, but many people I've spoken with believe he will just retire. No one can easily replace that popular produce stand. Times had even changed for Larry's with the majority of his produce coming from far away locations in recent years.

In the best case scenario, all that will remain is alcohol tourism and urban encroachment.

We don't need hotels to be allowed in the valley. There are at least 800 motel rooms already in existence within just a few minutes of the valley.

Finally, the Mankas Corner Improvement Project is a waste of grant money at this time and in that location. It would have been better planning to improve Rockville Corners, another planned ATC, before any other ATC's, due to its proximity to a variety of commercial businesses and its obvious need for road improvements. That location was not given priority, due to a conflicting PG & E project that is going to involve road work. Improvements to Mankas Corner Road will benefit only one restaurant now and well into the future, as acquisition of nearby lands won't be happening anytime soon. Mankas Corner Road improvements are intended to slow traffic in an area that has periods of high traffic congestion whenever there is a traffic event on I-80. We must travel through this intersection on a daily basis. Adding bicycle lanes will not reduce the chances of a bicyclist vs. vehicle injury or death. Napa's own Bicyclist-of-the-Year (for multiple years) was stuck and killed by a motorcycle on his route to work just a year or two ago. Combining distracted drivers and tourists consuming alcohol driving country roads, along with bicyclists, is creating a greater public danger.

Respectfully submitted,

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