County of Monterey
Planning Commission

Agenda Item No.2

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Item No.2

Board of Supervisors
Chambers
168 W. Alisal St., 1st Floor
Salinas, CA 93901

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REF250009 - IMPLEMENTATION ORDINANCE FOR THE AGRICULTURAL AND WINERY CORRIDOR PLAN (2010 MONTEREY COUNTY GENERAL PLAN CHAPTER 9.J)

Public hearing to consider recommending the Board of Supervisors adopt an ordinance to amend Chapter 21.06 (Definitions), Chapter 21.08 (Establishment of Zoning Districts) to add an Agricultural and Winery Corridor Plan (AWCP) Zoning District designation, amend the Zoning Sectional District Maps to add the AWCP Combining District to associated properties, add Chapter 21.51 (Regulations for the Agricultural and Winery Corridor District), and add Chapter 21.71(Regulations for Zoning Clearances) to the Monterey County Code, to implement the Agricultural and Winery Corridor Plan.

Planning Area: Inland (non-coastal) unincorporated areas

Proposed CEQA action: Pursuant to Section 15162 of the California Environmental Quality Act Guidelines, no subsequent environmental review is required.

RECOMMENDATION:

It is recommended that the Planning Commission adopt a resolution recommending that the Board of Supervisors:

1. Find the project is consistent with the scope of the previously certified Final Environmental Impact Report (FEIR) for the 2010 General Plan, pursuant to California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines Section 15162;
2. Adopt a draft ordinance amending and adding the following sections to the Monterey County Code (MCC) to implement the Agricultural and Winery Corridor Plan of the 2010 General Plan which includes the following:
    a. Amend Chapter 21.06 of the MCC (Definitions);
    b. Amend Chapter 21.08 of the MCC (Establishment and Designation of Zoning Districts);
    c. Amend associated Zoning Sectional District Maps to add the AWCP Combining District to associated properties;
    d. Add Chapter 21.51 to the MCC (Regulations of the Agricultural Winery Corridor Plan Zoning District or "AWCP" District) as a Combining District to Title 21; and
    e. Add Chapter 21.71 to the MCC (Regulations for Zoning Clearances).

SUMMARY:

On October 26, 2010, pursuant to California Government Code Section 65350 *et seq*., the Board of Supervisors of the County of Monterey adopted a comprehensive update to the County General Plan, referred to as the 2010 Monterey County General Plan, for the unincorporated non-coastal area of the County ("2010 General Plan") (Board of Supervisors Resolution No. 10-291).

The Agricultural and Winery Corridor Plan (AWCP) was envisioned to encourage the development of agricultural and winery-related uses within specifically designated areas of unincorporated Monterey County. The AWCP Area is intended to address viticulture-related uses in three specific planning areas (Toro, Central Salinas Valley, and South County). The AWCP is divided into three segments that make up the broader AWCP: River Road, Jolon Road, and Metz Road. The AWCP is intended to provide additional detail for project approvals in these areas and, in certain instances, provide for simplified project approvals and environmental review. These simplified project approvals and environmental reviews were identified and analyzed as a part of the 2010 General Plan FEIR. https://www.countyofmonterey.gov/government/departments-a-h/housing-community-development/planning-services/current-planning/general-info/2010-monterey-county-general-plan-adopted-october-26-2010/final-environmental-impact-report-feir

A significant portion of unincorporated Monterey County's agricultural land was utilized for grape production at the time the 2010 General Plan was adopted. Wine grapes were one of the top crops by value in the County and continue to be an important contributor to the County's agricultural economy. Recent trends in the wine industry have shown a decline in grape production in recent years, but other crops remain of economic value. Adoption of implementing regulations for the AWCP would allow for streamlined approval of certain agricultural and winery related uses and result in implementation of Chapter 9.J of the 2010 General Plan.

Staff requests that the Planning Commission provide direction on how "agricultural/winery visitor serving uses" should be addressed in the draft regulations. Staff also requests that the Planning Commission recommend that the Board of Supervisors adopt a resolution to amend various chapters of Title 21 Zoning, add Chapters 21.51 - Regulations for Agricultural Winery Corridor Plan and Chapter 21.71 - Regulations for Zoning Clearances, and amend the Zoning Sectional District Maps for specific parcels to implement Chapter 9.J AWCP of the 2010 General Plan.

DISCUSSION:

Background

In April of 2001, the Monterey County Vintners and Growers Association (now dissolved) made a presentation to the Board of Supervisors ("Board") on problems facing the wine industry in Monterey County. The Board then appointed a committee that developed a "Winery Corridor Plan" to help keep the wine industry economically viable.

At the time of adoption of the 2010 General Plan, a significant portion of unincorporated Monterey County's agricultural land was utilized for grape production. Wine grapes were one of the top crops by value in the County and continue to be an important contributor to the County's agricultural economy. The AWCP was designed to provide a long-range plan for development of agricultural and winery related uses within specific areas of the County and provide a framework for the assessment of environmental impacts associated with such a plan. The AWCP encourages the development of grape production and appropriately manages the growth of the winery-related industry in Monterey County. Trends over the last ten years, however, show a decline in wine grape production in the County. The 2025 Monterey County Crop and Livestock Report wine grapes have continued to decline for a

second year in a row and experienced a 25% decline in gross value caused by oversupply and reduced demand reflecting changing consumer preferences. According to the 2025 Monterey County Crop and Livestock Report top crops such as strawberries, leaf lettuce, head lettuce continues to be valuable crops. Monterey County is again the fourth highest ag producing county in California.

In response to these on-going challenges, the Monterey County Vintners and Growers Association ("Association") announced in August 2025 that they would dissolve. There has been a significant shift throughout the industry such as winery mergers, acquisitions, and ongoing economic challenges to the wine sector. Although the Association has dissolved, local growers in Monterey County remain active with the Monterey County agricultural industry. Notably, the Monterey County Farm Bureau remains a unified voice for farmers and ranchers within the County. The implementation of the AWCP could provide further support for the struggling winery industry and bolster the overall agricultural industry as discussed below.

Components of the AWCP

The Agricultural and Winery Corridor Plan is broken down into four sections:

1. Introduction: identifies regional setting for AWCP, project background and plan objectives
2. Project Description: discusses purpose and intent of the corridor, a description of the geographic extent of the winery corridor, development potential and circulation constraints.
3. Development Standards/Design Guidelines: Section of the AWCP that defines allowable number of facilities, allowed uses, uses requiring a ministerial approval, uses requiring an administrative permit, development standards, regulations for special winery related events for 500 or more people, and design criteria for development within the corridor.
4. Implementation: Section that provides information on general administration, review and approval of projects within the corridor, environmental review for projects that are consistent with the AWCP, and financing options for the AWCP.

For additional information on any of these sections, please see **Exhibit D.**

Role of Base Zoning District and Combining District

Properties within the AWCP have a base zoning district such as "Farmlands" zoning district that permit agricultural related uses. The Farmlands zoning district is the base zoning district for most properties within the AWCP. This base zoning district and any existing agricultural uses allowed on properties located within the AWCP would not change due to adoption of implementing regulations for the AWCP. Rather, in addition to the existing zoning districts, the AWCP Combining District would enact as an overlay to the properties within the corridor. The intention of the combining district is to help streamline permit processes associated with certain agricultural and winery uses within the corridor and works in conjunction with allowed uses through the base zoning district (i.e. Farmlands).

The AWCP provides procedures and a framework for the corridor where certain uses qualify for a more streamlined approval process than may otherwise be allowed by the base zoning district to incentivize development that furthers the development of viticultural and agricultural related uses.

Overview of Zoning Code Amendments

As outlined in the 2010 General Plan, the AWCP was envisioned as a Combining District. As

discussed above, the AWCP combining district would overlay on all existing zoning districts in the AWCP Area. The AWCP combining district already exists and is in effect as of 2010 General Plan adoption, but this action will codify the AWCP zoning district in Title 21 (proposed Chapter 21.51) and on the County's zoning maps. Additionally, development of a new section of Title 21 (proposed Chapter 21.71) related to granting of a zoning clearance for AWCP uses requiring issuance of a ministerial approval.

A summary of the revisions to Title 21 to implement the AWCP include:

- Establishment of a new Chapter of Title 21 (Chapter 21.51), regulations for the AWCP Zoning District that codify Chapter 9.J. of the 2010 General Plan (**Exhibit D**) into the MCC. Staff recommends incorporation of various components of the Chapter with reference to the 2010 General Plan, with other sections requiring more specificity be detailed in the ordinance.
- Adding and amending various definitions in Title 21 for agricultural and winery-related items to ensure Title 21 compliance with the 2010 General Plan and Chapter 9.J (Agricultural and Winery Corridor Plan).
- Carry forward the applicability where the AWCP governs if it conflicts with other portions of the MCC, the 2010 General Plan, or associated Area Plans. (Section 21.51.030).
- Establish uses allowed with ministerial process in the AWCP. MCC does not currently have a codified ministerial approval process. Chapter 21.51 includes new regulations that govern the granting of a "zoning clearance" for uses in the AWCP that qualify for a ministerial process (see Chapter 21.71). The proposed ministerial process was modeled after other jurisdictions and formatted to be consistent with the structure of existing County regulations. (Section 21.51.060).
- Establish objective design standards for uses requiring ministerial approval where Chapter 9.J. is silent (Section 21.51.080)
- Establish uses allowed with an administrative permit, which uses the existing administrative permit process established by Chapter 21.70. (Section 21.51.070).
- Establish site development standards for development in the Agricultural and Winery Corridor that were vetted as a part of the 2010 General Plan public process and FEIR. (Section 21.51.080).
- Establish the Special Winery Related Event Permit to create a clear approval process and standards for special events with 500 or more people. This permitting process was previously contemplated as a part of the 2010 General Plan public engagement process and FEIR. (Section 21.51.100).
- Updating the zoning sectional district maps to reflect the creation of the AWCP Combining District for parcels located within the AWCP Area (Section 21.08.060)
- Establishment of a new Chapter of Title 21 (Chapter 21.71), regulations for zoning clearances to allow for issuance of ministerial approval.

Zoning Clearance Process

The AWCP includes specific uses that are allowed subject to a ministerial approval subject to being consistent with the requirements of the AWCP. The MCC does not include procedures for processing ministerial approval, prompting the creation of Chapter 21.71 Regulations for Zoning Clearance. The 2010 General Plan FEIR contemplated specific uses that are allowed subject to a ministerial approval.

Uses requiring an administrative permit or other discretionary approval as identified in the plan may require additional environmental review depending on the characteristics of the project and if it exceeds what was contemplated in the FEIR.

Projects requesting a ministerial approval would be reviewed for consistency with the criteria in the AWCP, including compliance with various development and design standards, for the Chief of Planning to approve the establishment of the use. Ministerial approvals are not subject to any other zoning review by the County. Staff have reviewed other jurisdictions procedures for processing ministerial approvals and informed development of the draft ordinance before the Planning Commission. Objective design standards have been included in Chapter 21.51.080 to ensure that projects that qualify for ministerial approval have clear standards that need to be met for processing. These standards include those listed in the AWCP and additional standards listed in the chapter where the AWCP was silent (i.e. landscaping and lighting requirements).

Agricultural Advisory Committee Review
On April 24, 2025, the AWCP went before the Agricultural Advisory Committee ("AAC"). Staff received a recommendation from the AAC to bring the draft ordinance to the Planning Commission with minor edits and recommendations. Some of the edits and recommendations the AAC had were:

- Concerns were raised by the AAC regarding the number of units that an "Inn" could have. Members of the AAC that were present during the adoption of the 2010 General Plan recalled the intention of an "Inn" to be small and quaint. Some members of the AAC recommended a 10-room limitation.
- AAC recommended adding boutique cheese factories and small olive oil processing facilities as a visitor-serving use.
- AAC was concerned about the square footage not having a limitation on grocery stores.

The recommendations and edits from the AAC were included in the draft ordinance as shown in **Exhibit B**.

AWCP Informational Presentation and Follow Up
The AWCP implementing ordinance was scheduled for June 25, 2026. Staff requested a continuance to continue the draft ordinance to a date certain of August 12, 2026, to allow for enough time to finalize the draft regulations. During June 25, 2026, Planning Commission hearing, the planning commission requested an informational presentation on the AWCP. On July 8, 2026, staff presented an informational presentation to the Planning Commission to provide an overview of Chapter 9.J Agricultural and Winery Corridor Plan of the 2010 General Plan.

During the presentation staff received questions and comments from the Planning Commission as well as public comment from the Monterey County Farm Bureau (MCFB). The Planning Commission expressed specific interest in understanding the overarching purpose and goals of the AWCP and how provisions of the AWCP may be applicable to other uses outside of wine and viticulture.

Staff reviewed the AWCP with these questions in mind. Overall, the main emphasis of the AWCP as

noted in the Project Background and Plan Objectives (Sections 1.2 and 1.3 of AWCP) is to provide a long-range program in the 2010 General Plan that provides a planned approach to how the wine industry develops and encourages wine related economic growth in the Salinas Valley. While the primary intent was to broadly support the wine industry, there are a number of provisions in the AWCP clearly intended to benefit the agricultural industry as a whole. Due to a lack of clarity, staff want to provide further explanation on areas that allow for development of agricultural uses in the corridor where viticulture and wine are not the primary focus.

Staff also wanted to provide some clarification on the following definitions and uses as defined in the AWCP and how these definitions encourage different types of agricultural uses:

- *"Winer*y": Title 21.06.1400 of the Monterey County Code define a Winery to mean "an agricultural processing plant used for the commercial purpose of processing grapes, other fruit products, or vegetables to produce wine or similar spirits. Processing includes wholesale sales, crushing, fermenting, blending, aging, storage, bottling, administrative office functions for the winery and warehousing. Retail sales and tasting facilities of wine and related promotional items may be permitted as part of the winery operations." However, staff proposes to edit the definition of Winery to mean "an agricultural processing plant used for the commercial purpose of processing grapes, other fruit products, or vegetables to produce wine or similar spirits. Processing includes wholesale sales, crushing, fermenting, blending, aging, storage, bottling, warehousing, wine tasting facility, administrative office functions including wholesale and retail sales of associated wine and wine related items, and events."
    - Staff believes that the proposed definition of Winery would allow for the distillation of other types of spirits outside of wine grapes. The definition would then encompass uses such as producing hard ciders and various other spirits.
- *Industry-Wide (Winery) Events:* The 2010 General Plan and draft ordinance define Industry-Wide (Winery) Events to mean "…are special events, festivals and programs sponsored by vintner(s) or the Monterey County Vintners and Growers Association or its successor to feature Monterey County wineries and wine, educate the public on viticulture or generally promote the Agricultural and Winery Corridor."
    - Staff interpret this definition to allow for events that generally promote the wider Agricultural Winery Corridor, in addition to the wine industry
- *Agricultural/Winery Related Visitor-Serving Uses*: The 2010 General Plan allows for these uses but is silent on providing a definition. As part of the draft ordinance, Agricultural/Winery Related Visitor-Serving Uses are defined to mean "…visitor serving activities that are principally established to serve the on-site winery activities, and which rely on the on-site winery as its major means of support. Agricultural/Winery related visitor-serving uses include but are not limited to produce stands, gift shops, boutique cheese factories and processing facilities, boutique olive oil processing facilities, and boutique grocery stores."
    - As noted in the AWCP, agricultural/winery related visitor serving uses are allowed ministerially but are not clearly defined. Staff brought this definition to the AAC at its meeting on April 24, 2025 for input and guidance, which informed this definition. The

proposed definition attempts to add clarity and include other suggested examples beyond just "produce stand" as noted in the AWCP. This definition was also modeled off how the AWCP treats ministerially approved uses, which require that these uses be developed in conjunction with a winery.

Staff recommend and have added provisions to clarify approval processes for agricultural/ winery visitor serving uses to clarify procedures and applicability for other agricultural/visitor related uses where a viticultural or winery use is not present. Section 21.51.070(G) states:

- Agricultural Visitor Serving Uses allowed in Section 21.51.060 without a winery on-site and other agricultural visitor serving uses that are in keeping with the character and nature of the AWCP.

These projects would require an administrative permit, subject to review and approval by the Chief of Planning. Staff proposes this addition to allow for a wider array of agricultural tourism-related uses to be streamlined in a similar manner and treated as winery adjunct uses that are proposed without a winery component in Chapter 9J in the 2010 General Plan (allowed with an administrative permit). Projects could still qualify for streamlining under the 2010 General Plan FEIR with only focused studies as needed if cumulative impacts may occur due to establishment of the use.

Follow Up with Monterey County Farm Bureau (MCFB)
Staff met with a representative of the MCFB to discuss questions raised during July 8, 2026, informational presentation and provided further clarification on AWCP. The MCFB staff also provided additional information to staff on changes in the wine industry since adoption of the 2010 General Plan and the AWCP.

CEQA:
This ordinance implements the 2010 General Plan by establishing regulations for development in the AWCP Combining District. Pursuant to Section 15162 of the California Environmental Quality Act Guidelines, no subsequent environmental review is required for this ordinance because the effects of establishing the AWCP Combining District and various MCC amendments to implement the combing district were analyzed in the 2010 General Plan EIR and no substantial changes in project description, substantial changes in circumstances, or new information of substantial importance leading to new significant effects or a substantial increase in the severity of previously identified effects has been identified. This project is consistent with the scope of the previously certified Final Environmental Impact Report ("FEIR") for the 2010 General Plan, pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15162.

OTHER AGENCY INVOLVEMENT:
The Office of the County Counsel has reviewed and approved the ordinance as to form. The AAC reviewed and provided recommendations on the draft ordinance as discussed above.

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Prepared and Reviewed by: Sarah Wikle, Principal Planner
Approved by: Melanie Beretti, AICP, Chief of Planning

The following attachments are on file with the HCD:
Exhibit A - Agricultural and Winery Corridor Plan Resolution
Exhibit B - Agricultural and Winery Corridor Plan Implementing Ordinance (clean)
Exhibit C - Agricultural and Winery Corridor Plan Implementing Ordinance (includes amendments to Chapter 21.06 Definitions, proposed Chapter 21.51 - Regulations for Agricultural and Winery Corridor Plan, proposed Chapter 21.71 - Regulations for Zoning Clearance, and proposed Sectional Maps) (redline)
Exhibit D - Agricultural and Winery Corridor Plan (Chapter 9.J. of the 2010 General Plan)
Exhibit E - Agricultural and Winery Corridor Plan Map

cc: Katie Scariot, Assistant Planner; Sarah Wikle, Principal Planner; Melanie Beretti, AICP, Chief of Planning; Craig Spencer, HCD Director; Fionna Jensen, Principal Planner; Jacquelyn Nickerson, Principal Planner, Elizabeth Gonzales, Permit Center Manager; Front Counter Copy; Land Use Advisory, Agricultural Commissioner Office; Agricultural Advisory Committee Interested Parties, AWCP Interested Parties List; **REF250009.**