



County of Monterey

Item No.2

Zoning Administrator

Legistar File Number: ZA 25-046

September 11, 2025

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Current Status: Agenda Ready

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Matter Type: Zoning Administrator

PLN230294 - OFFICER MICHAEL B SR & BARBARA A TRS

Public hearing to consider the conversion of uncultivated land to a cultivated agricultural use (vineyard) on slopes between 15% and 25%.

Project Location: 34555 Cachagua Road, Carmel Valley, CA

Proposed CEQA action: Find the project Categorically Exempt pursuant to CEQA Guidelines section 15304, and there are no exceptions pursuant to Section 15300.2.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Zoning Administrator adopt a resolution to:

- a. Find the project qualifies for a Class 4 Categorical Exemption from CEQA Guidelines Section 15304, and that none of the exceptions from Section 15300.2 apply to the project; and
- b. Approve a Use Permit to allow conversion of uncultivated land to a cultivated agricultural use (vineyard) on slopes between 15% and 25%.

The attached draft resolution includes findings and evidence for consideration (**Exhibit A**). Staff recommends approval subject to 5 conditions of approval.

PROJECT INFORMATION

Agent: Robert Officer

Property Owner: Michael and Barbara Officer

APN: 417-211-001-000

Parcel Size: 62.5 acres

Zoning: Rural Density Residential, 20 acres per unit with a design control, and Rural Density Residential, 20 acres per unit, or "RDR/20-D/RDR/20"

Plan Area: Cachagua Area Plan

Flagged and Staked: N/A

Project Planner: Jordan Evans-Pollockow, Assistant Planner

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SUMMARY/DISCUSSION

The project site is located at 34555 Cachagua Road in Carmel Valley, within the Cachagua Area Plan. The proposed project includes the establishment of a 7-acre vineyard. No agricultural processing activities, including processing, wine making, or storage of wine onsite, would occur. Establishment of the proposed vineyard would involve converting approximately 3.72 acres of uncultivated land with slopes ranging from 15% to 25% to cultivated land. This conversion of moderately sloped land requires the granting of a Use Permit. The remaining 3.31 acres of land converted to an agricultural use

(vineyard) would contain slopes less than 15%. The property is undeveloped, except for a permitted private well that will be used for irrigation. This project does not include an increase in wastewater generation or installation, upgrade, or repairs to any onsite wastewater treatment system components. The proposed development will not be visible from a scenic corridor or major common public viewing area due to location, topography, and intervening development and vegetation.

Based on staff's analysis, the proposed project is consistent with the policies and regulations pertaining to zoning uses and any other applicable provisions of the 2010 Monterey County General Plan (General Plan), Cachagua Area Plan (CAP) and applicable sections of the Monterey County Inland zoning ordinance (Title 21).

Land Use

The subject parcel is split zoned as a Rural Density Residential with 20 acres per unit and a Design Control Overlay ("RDR/20-D") and Rural Density Residential with 20 acres per unit ("RDR/20"). The proposed vineyard is to occur solely within the "RDR/20" portion of the project. Title 21, section 21.16.050.M allows for conversion of uncultivated land to a cultivated agricultural use on land with 15 to 25 percent slopes within select Area Plans, including the CAP, subject to a Use Permit. The proposed cultivated agricultural use is a vineyard, where cultivation of 20 planting blocks utilizes an organic dry farming method with regenerative viticulture. Grape vine trellis systems, irrigation lines, and associated improvements would also be installed. The subject property is 64.46 acres, and the proposed planting area would be approximately 7.03 acres.

Conversion of Uncultivated Land

The Operational Plan, which serves as an Agricultural Management Plan, proposes the establishment of organic dry farming through regenerative viticulture, with extremely low water usage sourced from an on-site private well. As illustrated in the attached plans (**Exhibit A**), the conversion of uncultivated land to cultivated land (vineyard) would occur in areas containing slopes between 5% to 24%. General Plan Policy OS-3.5.2 states that such a discretionary permit shall better meet the goals and policies, minimize erosion and drainage, and minimize any risk to the public health and safety. Additionally, standards for agricultural uses are outlined in Title 21.66.030, which are intended to support the preservation of agricultural soils and to protect productive farmland not on prime soils.

The proposed project involves approximately 3.72 acres of vineyards slopes between 15 to 25%, with the remaining 3.31 acres of vineyards on slopes below 15%. The remainder of the property contains slopes greater than 25%. General Plan Policy OS-1.8 encourages the clustering of development in agricultural areas to maximize access to infrastructure, protect prime agricultural land, and reduce impacts to designated visually sensitive and critical habitat areas. Accordingly, the 7.03 acres of vineyards will be clustered around an existing access road, therefore minimizing the need for additional access-related improvements and protecting slopes greater than 25%. Therefore, in this case, the proposed vineyard location is the most feasible and appropriate. There is no alternative cultivation location that would be served by existing access and contain moderately sloped (15-25%) lands.

The National Resource Conservation Service's "Controlling Soil Erosion" guidelines encourage keeping soil covered to combat air and water erosion. The proposed erosion mitigation includes

deeply rooted vines, as well as a permanent cover crop to build living soil. The eight feet of space between the vine rows will consist of native grasses, legumes, and wildflowers. This mixture of cover crops is specifically recommended by the NRCS. The soil would also be covered in straw with no soil exposure to reduce soil loss and damage from erosion, evaporation, and regulate soil temperature. Accordingly, the proposed conversation land would not create significant drainage or erosion issues.

The proposed site was evaluated in a Geotechnical Report (County of Monterey Library No. LIB250184), prepared by Grice Engineering, citing that no features or conditions were observed to suggest landsliding or erodible slopes have or will occur above or below the project site. The Geotechnical Report states that there are no significant geotechnical hazards at the site that would prohibit the proposed use. The general area is considered not susceptible to mass slope failure due to the medium dense to dense character of the underlain soils that are a portion of the local granite bedrock. Per the Geotech report, anticipated changes in the surface and subsurface hydrology from current and proposed development are not likely to increase the potential for future landsliding in some areas.

Finally, the GIS records show that the parcel is within a very high fire hazard zone and is noted as being impacted by a historic fire previously, damaged in the 2020 Carmel Valley fire, but the soils and land have since re-vegetated, making them suitable for proposed development while not having a negative impact on the regenerating native habitat, individual plants, or wildlife.

For the above reasons, staff believes the proposed project better achieves and is consistent with the goals, policies, and objectives of the County of Monterey General Plan and Cachagua Area Plan, minimizes erosion and drainage concerns, and minimizes any risk to the public health and safety

CEQA:

California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines Section 15304 categorically exempts minor public or private alterations in the condition of the land or vegetation that do not involve the removal of healthy, mature, and scenic trees. The proposed project involves a minor alteration of land, being the conversion of approximately 7.03 acres of uncultivated land to cultivated land (vineyard). The project does not involve the removal of trees or major vegetation. Therefore, the proposed development is consistent with the parameters of this Class 4 exemption. There are no exceptions pursuant to Section 15300.2. No evidence of significant adverse environmental effects was identified during staff review of the development application. There is no cumulative impact without any prior successive projects of the same type in the same place, over time. There is no significant effect on the environment due to unusual circumstances. The site is not included on any list compiled pursuant to Section 65962.5 of the Government Code to be considered a hazardous waste site. No known historical resources are found in the geotechnical or archaeological reports, which may cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of a historical resource. The project site is not within an officially designated highway area, as a state scenic highway. Finally, as described above, the project will not result in substantial erosion or contribute to runoff, which would alter or exceed the capacity of a drainage system.

OTHER AGENCY INVOLVEMENT

The following agencies have reviewed the project, have comments, and/or have recommended conditions:

HCD-Engineering Services
Environmental Health Bureau
HCD-Environmental Services
Cachagua Fire Protection District

Prepared by: Jordan Evans-Polockow, Assistant Planner, x7065
Reviewed and Approved by: Jacquelyn Nickerson, Principal Planner

The following attachments are on file with HCD:

Exhibit A - Draft Resolution including:

- Recommended Conditions of Approval
- Operation Plan
- Site Plans

Exhibit B - Vicinity Map

cc: Front Counter Copy; Cachagua Fire Protection District; HCD-Environmental Services;
HCD-Engineering Services; Environmental Health Bureau; Jordan Evans-Polockow, Planner;
Jacquelyn M. Nickerson, Principal Planner; Michael & Barbara Officer, Property Owner; Robert
Officer, Agent; The Open Monterey Project (Molly Erickson); Laborers International Union of North
America (Lozeau Drury LLP); Christina McGinnis, Keep Big Sur Wild; LandWatch; Planning File
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