

## Historic Ojai Valley winery loses second round on land use



For the second time, Ventura County supervisors have denied an appeal over operating conditions at a historic Ojai Valley winery.

The Board of Supervisors acted after a judge ordered the panel to annul its original decision and rehear the matter.

Under both decisions, the Old Creek Ranch Winery near Casitas Springs must operate as a small-scale venue or get a conditional-use permit to expand. Such permits generally require intensive review of a project's effects on the environment and public safety.

After a new hearing lasting three hours on Sept. 21, the supervisors voted unanimously to uphold six alleged violations of county land-use and building-code rules at the winery and deny the associated appeal. The case centered mainly on allegations that the owners had violated rules restricting the size of the winery's operation.

The board also denied the owners' application for permission to install charging stations for electric vehicles and related infrastructure that had already been added in a paved parking lot at the property off Highway 33. The parking lot was built on prime agricultural soil without county approval, a management letter to the board says. It was not clear Friday how much the local government had spent to conduct the second hearing.

**Related:**

- [Old Creek Ranch Winery owners sue Ventura County over decision on land-use violations](#)
- [Ventura County board squashes appeal for Old Creek Ranch Winery in Ojai Valley](#)

Two supervisors who were on the five-member board at the time of the first vote in September 2019 have stepped down under term limits. But the replacements for Steve Bennett and John Zaragoza — Matt LaVere and Carmen Ramirez — took the same position as their predecessors in the vote Tuesday. Supervisors Linda Parks, Kelly Long and Bob Huber also voted in support of the county's position and against the winery, just as they had two years ago.

LaVere and Ramirez both said they hoped a compromise could be reached, but agreed with the others that they had to uphold the county's land-use regulations. "There is a lot of potential to this property, a lot of history," LaVere said. "But I think the staff has provided the evidence to support the recommendations. Let's see if we can't figure this out without having to go to litigation."

That's where the issue lies now, though.

The owners of the winery sued a few months after the board's first decision two years ago, alleging that the expansion of business at the site was allowed. They argued that they could hold outdoor events with hundreds of people and were not bound by a 2008 letter to the former owners that capped attendance at weekend events at 25. The property lies at the end of a narrow road and by a small residential neighborhood, where homeowners have complained about the traffic and disruption to their lives. Ventura County Superior Court Judge Mark Borrell ordered the board to render a new decision after finding the panel had failed to cite findings to support its first vote. That's required under a decades-old decision by the California Supreme Court in a separate land-use case, Borrell said.

The board complied Tuesday by adopting a 26-page resolution that sets forth findings of fact and conclusions of law. County Executive Officer Mike Powers said he understands the court will require no further action by the county.

Borrell did not rule on the merits of the winery owners' lawsuit against the county. Winery owner Andrew Holguin said he had expected the board to vote against him for a second time.

Holguin said he is willing to pursue a conditional-use permit but that the onerous conditions proposed by county planners would cause him to go broke.

He said he expected to file a new lawsuit against the county, but his attorney could not be reached Friday for confirmation.

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