



New York Farm Bureau • 159 Wolf Road P.O. Box 5330 • Albany, New York 12205 • (518) 436-8495 Fax: (518) 431-5656

October 15, 2007

Honorable Linda Donovan, Chair  
Zoning Board of Appeals  
Town of New Paltz  
PO Box 550  
1 Veteran Drive  
New Paltz, NY 12561  
*Transmitted via fax to 845-255-4084*

**RE: Rivendell Winery**

Dear Chairwoman Donovan,

New York Farm Bureau, the state's largest general farm organization, recently became aware of the Zoning Board's consideration of an appeal by Rivendell Winery for the usage of their property as a farm winery. We are generally aware of the issues surrounding this appeal and value the Zoning Board's careful consideration of the Rivendell position. It is our belief that the expansion of the winery is an agricultural enterprise and we would greatly appreciate the Zoning Board's recognition that agriculture does indeed include farm wineries.

It is our experience that farms in New York continually undergo change to maintain long-term sustainability. Today, New York agriculture is experiencing a dramatic renaissance, as consumers have become more aware of the origins of their food and are now recognizing the tremendous quality of products produced in New York State. In order to meet this growing market demand, farmers are increasingly including value added aspects into their business model. In many cases, this has dramatically increased farm viability.

Leading this exciting trend is the New York wine industry. While the Hudson Valley has been home to wineries for centuries, recent expansions have resulted in over two hundred farm wineries across New York State. These farms serve as integral components of the community by maintaining large areas of open space that create aesthetic and environmental benefits. As a tourist destination, they also serve as a foundation business in the community, bringing in outside dollars to many additional local businesses.

While farms are continually evolving to better meet market demand, the local rules that govern agriculture don't always evolve as quickly. It appears that the issue before the Zoning Board at this point, is fitting modern farming into a local code that does not contemplate the broad range of New York agriculture. As an organization, we strongly believe that farms should be provided the flexibility to meet emerging markets and thereby be strong supporters of their local community. The creation of a winery and tasting room location is vitally important to Rivendell Winery as they grow their farm winery business. With a central location and established market, the farm will be able to utilize their grape production as it comes on-line and more quickly expand the number of vineyards in the local area.

While certainly the Town generally has the ability to determine local land use issues as a provision of home-rule, it is also important to recognize that the people of New York State have instilled in the constitution a provision that agricultural lands are a preferred land use. We strongly believe the New York State Agricultural Districts Law provides the best mechanism to achieve a balance between these two, sometimes conflicting, public policies. It is our understanding that the Rivendell property was at one time being considered for inclusion into an agricultural district. It is unfortunate that the process was interrupted prior to the finalization of the inclusion.

Even though the property is not in an agricultural district, we would encourage the Zoning Board, in considering the Rivendell appeal, to utilize the guidance provided by the Department of Agriculture & Markets indicating local land use policies that are generally restrictive to agriculture. This will help ensure that the Town of New Paltz is working in the best possible way to promote working landscapes and open space, a resource highlighted by the town as a building block on which the quality of the community depends. These guidance documents are available on-line at:  
<http://www.agmkt.state.ny.us/AP/agservices/agdistricts.html>.

The Zoning Board's support for Rivendell Winery will allow a farm business to move forward in meeting market demand. We believe this will enhance the environment and sustainability of the community and will further the viability of New York agriculture. We again appreciate the consideration of the appeal and urge the Zoning Board's support for this farm.

Sincerely,

Julie C. Suarez  
Director of Public Policy