

Concerns about winery move

Rivendell is more about whining than wine ... can Wal-Mart be far behind?

Like many residents here in the Hudson Valley, I have much respect for what nature has endowed us - and I just LOVE to be up on the Ridge, biking, hiking, running or just hanging out. It has been a very special place for my family for decades, and it is wonderful that business ventures such as the Mountain House have worked in harmony with the Preserve and New York State Parks so as to enhance the beauty of that which we have surrounding us.

For me, it would be the ultimate injustice to have this unspoiled and pristine area cannibalized by the insidious, back-door dealings of the Wine-Ransom team. I just have to drive down the road to witness the unsightly, strictly commercialized, shabby and unkempt lands of the current Rivendell Winery on Albany Post Road. And I shudder to think that such a blemishing eyesore could ever be part of our beautiful community.

I respect the true "farmers" in this area and the imaginative appeal of places like our orchards (Dressel's, Jenkins-Lueken's) or picturesque farm stands (Wallkill View) or CSAs (Phillies Bridge, Brook Farm). I certainly do not put Rivendell in such company.

I will not even get into the myriad of problems and dangers associated with all of the DWIs and DUIs that necessarily will be the result of encouraging alcoholic drinking in this highly residential area of our town where there are many families with young children out playing near the roadways.

Will we allow an unattractive blight such as this on our pristine landscape? If so, how long before we'll be looking at the next Wal-Mart?

Dan Winfield, New Paltz

Response from Rivendell owners

We are aghast at the accusations and assumptions in Mr. Winfield's letter.

Among our reasons for moving our winery relates to the condition of the property Rivendell currently rents and our desire to return to growing grapes. Our site is not public parkland; it is private property zoned for agricultural use.

Rivendell has publicly filed its site plan and we have hired a world famous landscape architect, Mark Morrison, to help develop the aesthetic of the property. We actually have several "imaginatively appealing" features planned that anyone who cared to look at our plan for what it is instead of what they fear or are being fed would see.

The New York State Commissioner of Agriculture Patrick Hooker has clearly stated that Rivendell's use of our property for a vineyard and farm winery is agricultural. The New Paltz Comprehensive Master Plan states that the town must, among many other things:

"Adapt regulatory tools to accommodate activities on the farm that support agriculture, such as farm stands, and bed and breakfasts. Ensure that the zoning code provides adequate flexibility for farms to diversify and generate income to support farm operations."

The Wal-Mart argument is a stale one in New Paltz. Lowes is paying town and school taxes to the Town of Lloyd and other megastores are ready to follow there. The worry that megastores might invade the bucolic landscape of farms and houses west of the Wallkill is a stretch for even the NIMBY-est of neighbors to indulge in. Having lived in the immediate neighborhood for more than 38 years, we, too, love the mountains and valleys of our home, and have every intention to preserve and protect that landscape it with our farm operation.

We hope and pray that Mr. Winfield and all the other neighbors have the good sense to keep their small children from playing on Route 299, Albany Post Road or any other thoroughfare.

For our part, and as we have done at Rivendell for 20 years, we will continue to take the utmost care to ensure that our customers remain healthy, safe, wine buyers and agritourists.

Susan Wine & Robert Ransom, Rivendell Winery