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To the Town of New Paltz Zoning Board of Appeals,

Winemaking in New York State goes back to the earliest days of our country, and the Hudson River Region in particular is home to some of the earliest vineyards and winemaking operations. Today boasting over 240 wineries in all corners of the state, New York ranks number 3 in grape production and number 2 in wine production in the US. The industry is in a rapid growth mode, due in part to the synergy between the grape growing and wine-making segments of the industry.

In the mid 1970's, New York was one of the first states to pass comprehensive legislation (The Farm Winery Act of 1976) that created a new class of winemaking enterprise - the Farm Winery. New York's Farm Winery Law has been emulated by many other states as a way to support agriculture and stimulate industry growth. The creation of the Farm Winery enabled farmers to start winemaking operations on their farms, and produce and sell wines directly to the public in tasting rooms on their premises. The concept was derived from the commonly understood view that winemaking was a natural extension of the grape growing process, and that the production of grapes into wine was a value-added process that a grower could utilize for his crop. Initially, a Farm Winery was required to produce its wine from grapes grown on the farm itself; however, two years later, in 1978, the Legislature recognized that this requirement was too restrictive so the law was expanded to allow Farm Wineries to use NY-grown grapes from any New York vineyard in the production of their wines.

In 1985 The New York Wine & Grape Foundation was formed by the New York State Legislature and the Governor to represent all segments of the wine and grape industry - from growers to winemakers to wholesalers to retailers - as a single unified trade. As President of the Foundation from the outset, I have had the opportunity to travel the country and the world representing the wine industry in New York State. In all regions of the country and world, wineries are accepted as part of the agricultural process.

Rivendell Winery has long been one of our state's standout wineries, not only for the quality of its wine (Rivendell was the recipient of the Governor's Cup - our State's highest award for wine quality at the Annual New York Wine & Food Classic in 2004), but also for its staunch support and promotion of New York wines and wineries across the state. Its business approach has always been inclusive and open, and has epitomized the Farm Winery law as it was conceived by the Legislature. To re-classify Rivendell as something other than an agricultural operation, as all other wineries in the state are classified, would be an error.

As President of the New York Wine & Grape Foundation, I support Rivendell Winery in its attempts to relocate in New Paltz and wish to again emphasize that a winery is indeed, by definition and practice, an agricultural use.

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