

Livermore council postpones final vote on wine heritage district

Westover Winery owner raises concerns about boundaries, excluded cities

by [Cierra Bailey](#) / Livermore Vine

Tue, Nov 16, 2021



Vineyards in Livermore, like these along Tesla Road, as well as other areas of the Tri-Valley would be covered by the proposed Livermore Valley Wine Heritage District. The Livermore City Council is set to revisit the matter on Monday. (Photo courtesy of Cierra Bailey)

The Livermore City Council held off on its vote on the establishment of a Livermore Valley Wine Heritage District (LVWHD), continuing the matter to next Monday to allow more time for staff to clarify the district's boundaries and compile answers to other various questions.

The Nov. 8 council meeting marked the third public hearing on the proposed new benefit assessment district but the first time that opposition was shared during public comment.

The formation of the LVWHD is sponsored by the Livermore Valley Winegrowers Association and, if approved, will include 51 wineries located within the boundaries of Alameda and Contra Costa counties and the cities of Livermore and Dublin, and the town of Danville.

The city of Livermore would act as the lead agency for the district, collecting an annual assessment of 2% of winery sales made in the state of California over a five-year term that would begin retroactively on July 1, 2021 with the collection of assessments set to begin on Jan. 1, 2022. In its first year, the district is projected to generate \$693,000.

During the hearing, William Smyth of Westover Winery in Castro Valley objected to both the formation of the district overall and specifically, the inclusion of his winery in it. He asked the council to delay its vote on the resolution to form the district, citing several of his own concerns, including his belief that the LVWHD would be duplicating the efforts of the Livermore Valley Winegrowers Association.

What's local journalism worth to you?

Support PleasantonWeekly.com for as little as \$5/month.

Another issue he raised is that the borders that indicate which wineries would be impacted "are not well defined."

"For example, is this only to include wineries within the Livermore AVA (American Viticultural Area)? What are the well-defined borders and boundaries?" Smyth asked, adding that the map that city staff included in its agenda report is "very vague."

He also asked why Ruby Hill and Rubino Estates wineries -- both located in Pleasanton -- were not included among the wineries that would be impacted by the district.

The proposed assessment area currently excludes Pleasanton and San Ramon. While neither Livermore city staff nor the winegrowers association provided an explanation at the meeting for why the two cities are excluded, San Ramon officials told Livermore Vine that they are not included because there are no wineries located within San Ramon's city limits.

Pleasanton officials said the wineries within its city limits chose not to participate but the city could not confirm the details of that process.

Despite the questions that had been raised, Councilmember Bob Carling made a motion during the meeting to simply exclude Westover Winery from the proposal and move forward with a vote but the motion failed as it did not receive a second.

City staff confirmed that the council was within its legal bounds to take the final vote, however, Mayor Bob Woerner proposed continuing the item to a later date to allow staff to get more clarity on which wineries fall within the district's boundaries as well as why Pleasanton wineries are not included, among other clarifying questions.

"I think there's the question of our legal power to do something and then there's the question of whether we should," Woerner said. "I'm frankly inclined at this point to think we may have to come back at this one," he added. The council ultimately unanimously decided to push the vote to Monday (Nov. 22).

Although Smyth was the only speaker to verbally oppose the formation of the LVWHD at the meeting, he is not the proposal's only challenger.

Alameda County Taxpayers' Association and San Rafael-based nonprofit [Alcohol Justice](#) each provided letters to Livermore Vine and to the city of Livermore expressing opposition to the district and urging Livermore City Council to reject it altogether.

Each letter addresses specific concerns from the respective organizations but both letters call for revenues from the district to be dedicated to alcohol abuse awareness, treatment and enforcement, should the LVWHD be approved.