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# Santa Clara County nixes rezoning on horses and wineries



by [Brandon Pho](#) November 19, 2025



The Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors are reconsidering rezoning regulations for wineries and equestrians in South County. (AP Photo/Rich Pedroncelli)

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Santa Clara County leaders have slammed the brakes on a rezoning plan that South County farmers, winery owners and equestrians warned could threaten their businesses and the future of Silicon Valley's iconic — but vanishing — rural vestige.

After hundreds of written letters of opposition, the Board of Supervisors on Tuesday unanimously voted to order major changes to a proposal to rezone the region's

farmlands — and restart the community engagement process. County officials have been trying to set [clear expectations](#) around rural development as local policymakers [fight to preserve](#) the “Valley of Heart’s Delight” and grapple with [sprawling builder’s remedy projects](#) that threaten open space. But the county’s draft zoning amendments have sparked uproar due to dramatic changes to the regulation of wineries and equestrians and a lack of public involvement.

The vote came at the request of District 1 Supervisor Sylvia Arenas.

“We will be getting this right for everyone — whether you’re a winery or selling flowers or have a farmstand or sell eggs and a myriad of different vegetables,” Arenas said at the meeting.

Under the proposed rezoning draft, winery owners questioned whether they would be forced to pay thousands of dollars for new permits and costly retrofits, facing stricter building and use regulations for areas such as tasting rooms. Equestrians, meanwhile, raised alarm the zoning draft would remove horses’ recognition as livestock — possibly gutting protections for horse breeding and boarding.

Equestrians also warned the price of running stables would surge due to lost tax exemptions and displace horses into unsafe living conditions. The rezoning draft drew sharp rebukes from the religious community, namely supporters of the Hindu American Foundation, who said it would limit churches’ ability to expand.

Dozens of local residents showed up to urge supervisors during public comment to change course.

Eight years ago, Dana De Frates said she and her husband purchased a run-down, 9 1/2-acre junkyard in Gilroy to build an equestrian boarding and training facility. Last year, she said she was so confident in her business she quit her day job at Google to provide equine therapy and lessons full time.

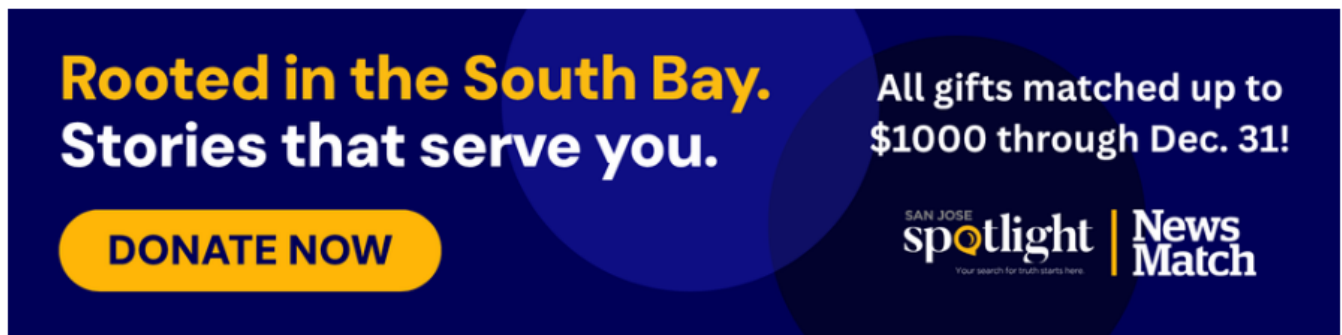
“The rural zoning amendments as proposed would put me out of business, as the majority of my client base would be driven out of the county — and I am not the only one,” De Frates said at the meeting.

Over the past 30 years, Santa Clara County has lost 21,171 acres of farmland, with an additional 28,391 acres at risk of being developed in the near future, according to a county memo.

“It’s certainly very difficult, if not impossible, for smaller farms to survive these days,” Otto Lee, president of the board of supervisors who represents District 3, said before the vote.

Arenas’ memo, approved by supervisors, suggests creating an agricultural task force or agricultural advisory committee to review future rezoning drafts and other agricultural policies. Arenas also suggested bringing in an outside consultant for public feedback.

Her memo requests that future zoning amendments continue to treat wineries as agricultural operations — not as something separate or more restricted — and protect activities such as wine tastings from onerous new permitting burdens. The board’s approval of Arenas’ memo also means the county will streamline permitting for commercial and nonprofit horse boarding and ensure that horses are considered livestock.



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The board-approved directions will be reviewed by county staff. Ultimately, they’ll either be adopted in one policy or a series of policies in a future vote.

“We’re looking to have a lot of folks come into our area next year for (the Super Bowl and World Cup),” Arenas said before the vote. “We want to make sure (South County is) a major magnet for folks who want to experience farm life and beautiful wineries and the charm we have here locally in California.”

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