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Napa panel backs easing winery visitor rules to help revive sales

The proposal would end appointment-only tastings if supervisors approve, giving wineries more leeway during a glut-driven downturn

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Napa Valley wineries could soon face fewer restrictions on how they welcome visitors and promote their businesses, after Napa County’s Planning Commission backed a broad set of rule changes aimed at helping a wine region struggling with weak sales and too much unsold product.

On Nov. 4, the commission unanimously endorsed regulatory amendments that would end the requirement that winery tours and tastings be by appointment only. The proposal would also loosen limits on marketing events and double production caps for micro-wineries. The changes still need final approval from the Napa County Board of Supervisors.

The proposed rollback would mark a significant shift for a region where appointment-only visits have long shaped the tasting room business. If county supervisors approve the package, wineries would have more flexibility to attract walk-in traffic and host events that can bring in consumers without a reservation.

The commission’s action comes as the U.S. wine business continues to deal with a supply imbalance. According to the 2026 State of the U.S. Wine Industry Report, industry revenue fell to $74.3 billion in 2025 from $75.5 billion in 2024. Sales volume also declined, to about 329 million cases from 335.9 million cases a year earlier.

The same report said oversupply remained a major problem, with inventory levels still high across the wine supply chain. Rob McMillan, the report’s longtime author, said premium wineries are under pressure as they decide whether to hold back a coming release or cut prices on a slow-moving vintage.

That backdrop has raised the stakes for counties such as Napa, where local rules can directly affect how quickly wineries turn visitors into sales. Easier access for tastings and broader event rules could give producers more ways to move inventory through direct-to-consumer channels, especially in a market where traditional demand has softened. For the broader beverage sector, the debate is notable because it shows how a leading wine region may adjust long-standing tourism and production rules to respond to excess stock and slower sales.

Inc., which first reported the development, said the proposed amendments are intended to help revive Napa Valley’s flagging wine industry. The package goes beyond visitor access. By allowing micro-wineries to produce more wine, county officials are also signaling a willingness to revisit limits that may have made sense under different market conditions.

The board of supervisors will now decide whether to adopt the changes. If it does, Napa wineries would gain a wider range of tools to bring in customers and market their wines at a time when the industry remains under financial and operational strain.