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Carl Stiehl, Planner
Advance Planning, San Diego County DPLU
5201 Ruffin Road, Suite B
San Diego, CA 92123-1666

May 11, 2011

Re: Proposed update for equine regulations in the Zoning Ordinance

Dear Carl,

The Elfin Forest Harmony Grove Town Council appreciates the opportunity to comment on the proposed updating of the equine regulations in the County of San Diego Zoning Ordinance. Over 78% of our residents feel that keeping horses is important (results of 2005 community survey), and we believe that some limited boarding of horses may help to make this possible for more members of our community. But we feel strongly that horse owners must maintain their horse barns and pasture fencing, follow best management practices (BMPs) regarding storm water runoff and drainage, establish erosion control on slopes, practice on-site insect abatement, and properly dispose of manure and soiled bedding. In addition, the impacts of “non-resident” horses and riders on our trail system and private roads must be mitigated.

Therefore, EFHG Town Council supports the tiered option with the following restrictions:

Tier 1 - Allows horse keeping and boarding of up to 1 horse per acre

Designed to help home horse owners defray expenses of caring for their own horse with minimal impact to the community. This category would allow boarding/leasing of 1 horse per acre (\geq half acre portions rounded up) to a maximum of 4 horses per property with an over-the-counter ministerial permit and full compliance with BMPs. The permit could be revoked for non-compliance and requires personal ownership of at least 1 horse. Any boarded/leased horses must be registered yearly with the County and part of the registration fee should be returned to the local community for code enforcement and trail maintenance (see general notes). Public riding/lessons are not allowed in this tier. No signage is allowed.

Tier 2 - Allows boarding of up to 8 horses per property

Same as Tier 1, but allows boarding of more than 1 horse per acre up to a maximum of 8 boarded/leased horses per property with an approved minor-level affordable administrative permit, and notification of all adjacent property owners. As in Tier 1, full compliance with BMPs is required. Public riding/lessons are not allowed. No signage is allowed. Unlike Tier 1, personal ownership of horses is not a requirement.

Tier 3 - Allows boarding and possible riding establishment

Same as Tier 2, but it would allow public riding and lessons with an approved administrative permit, (with fee set by County but the EFHGTC requests that it be as reasonably-priced as possible.) This process should require the notification of adjacent property owners, submission of a business plan and site plan to ensure that the business will be operated in a safe and non-intrusive manner and that adequate conditions be placed on the business including but not limited to such items as no more than 4 individual riding lessons per day, and that a parking plan be provided for off street parking to limit the impact on neighbors. No group lessons or horse camps would be allowed to minimize impact on neighbors. Full compliance with BMPs is required. No advertising or signage is allowed.

Tier 4 - Allows for larger horse boarding, riding stable establishments – we request that this tier option *only be made available in Harmony Grove, not in Elfin Forest*, as it would be incompatible with existing community character.

Same as Tier 3, but allows for more than 8 boarded/leased horses. This tier would require a major use permit and again the EFHGTC requests the fee to be reasonable and notification of adjacent property owners. Minimal signage allowed.

General notes:

The EFHGTC strongly recommends that a portion of any annual registration fees and permit fees be dedicated to County Code Enforcement and Animal Services specifically for the enforcement of equine BMP's and ordinances in the community where the funds were generated. In addition, we request that the County create a reimbursement system so that a portion of the funds would also be returned to bona fide, not-for-profit representative local organizations willing and able to take on management and disbursement of these funds for local recreational trail maintenance. Where this is not possible, monies would be reserved for County Department of Parks and Recreation for equine related use in the community where funds were generated.

Offspring of boarded horses will be considered to be additional horses when they are 2 years old. Leasing a horse to more than one person will be considered a “public” use, that is, allowed only in Tier 3 and 4. All valid permits are one-time expenses. If permits have been revoked for noncompliance, they must be re-purchased when fees have been paid and enforcement issues have been resolved.

In addition, we understand that our wishes and recommendations may not work in all equestrian neighborhoods in San Diego County and if that is ultimately the situation we would urge the staff, the Planning Commission and the Board of Supervisors to consider making our recommendations specific to Elfin Forest and Harmony Grove through the Animal Use Designator system in the zoning code.

While the EFHG Town Council believes that some of the San Diego County Animal Use ordinances have placed inappropriate financial burdens on “backyard” horse owners in particular, we also believe that horse owners must be prepared to take responsibility for keeping their animals comfortable, their environment healthy, and their neighbors happy. We look forward to further discussions on these proposed updates to the equine regulations in the Zoning Ordinance.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Bonita Baumgartner". The signature is written in dark ink on a white background.

Bonita Baumgartner Chair, Equine Ordinance Committee
Elfin Forest Harmony Grove Town Council