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## VBH BOT FYI Zoning

1 message

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### McHenry County Threat to Equine Events Unites Horsemen

County continues to look at solutions to neighbors concerns over disruptive events.

By Claudia Lenart | March 8, 2011

[PHOTO] Christy Rettger, of Barrington, rides in a clinic at Paddock Hills Equestrian Center in Union. The amount of clinics offered in McHenry County would have been severely impacted by a proposed equine zoning amendment that has been tabled. Christy Rettger

A zoning change that would limit farms to hosting just one equine event per year is "dead on arrival," according to Dennis Sandquist, McHenry County Planning director.

The McHenry County Planning and Development Committee heard the concerns of equestrians from near and far over the proposed amendment to the McHenry County Zoning ordinance when horsemen in McHenry County, Barrington and as far away as Springfield met at farm in Woodstock, March 7.

As written, the amendment would have changed the face of equestrian activity in the region by limiting barns to hosting just one equine event per year.

The zoning change would have had an adverse effect on the entire equine community in the region, according to Sarah Reschly, horse owner of Fox River Grove. The effect would have been felt by, not only by the large barns, but would have impacted the novice riders and 4-H participants as well. Instruction clinics and inspections for breed registries would have also been impacted.

Representatives from state-wide equestrian organizations attended the meeting. Mandy Bisek Solner, of Elgin, a board member for the Illinois Dressage and Combined Training Association (IDCTA) was concerned that the zoning change would eliminate show opportunities for novice riders.

As Reschly explained, horse people from throughout the collar counties travel to McHenry County for equestrian events. She said attendees at the meeting were concerned about the negative economic impact eliminating the events would have on farms in the region.

"McHenry County has a tradition of horses and horse sport. We spend a lot of money," said Rachel Kane, a veterinarian and owner of Entropy Farm in Woodstock, which hosted the meeting.

The zoning change was a reaction to neighbor's concerns over horse racing events at a farm in Union. The farm attracts thousands of spectators and neighbors have complained that the attendees' behavior is disruptive.

Ersel Schuster, a McHenry County board member and member of the planning committee, said the committee directed planning staff to address the issue.

However, Schuster, a Woodstock horseman, did not expect the wording to be so stringent.

"I was taken aback by it. I told the director this was not going to fly," Schuster said.

Schuster believes that McHenry County's handling of the issue could be precedent-setting. She said other nearby counties are watching how McHenry County deals with the issue.

"It's not just horse racing. We are also dealing with rodeos. We haven't had the problem yet, with the rodeo issue, but other counties have," she said.

Schuster said it's a challenge to protect the existing land owners' rights while also addressing the concerns of neighbors.

"Today a farm might be sitting in the middle of nowhere. Tomorrow there might be a subdivision next door," she said. "When you have people who think they have a right to do anything, you have a problem."

McHenry County Board member Barbara Wheeler, of Crystal Lake, also attended the horsemen's meeting.

Wheeler believes the county is overreacting to what she sees as a civil issue.

"I think it's a dangerous shift . . . This is a huge business in McHenry County. To squelch it for a few property owners in Coral Township could have a negative impact on all business owners," Wheeler said.

While the zoning amendment has been tabled, Kane said the horse community would continue to work with government on solutions.

"I feel for the people whose lives are disrupted by the event," Kane said. She said, as the county grows, there would likely be more similar issues.

"Our stance is that the problem at the farm is not so much a horse activity as the amount of people it draws and the type of activity," Kane said. "It is very difficult to legislate good behavior."

The proposal was scheduled to come before the McHenry planning committee at its March 17 meeting. Sandquist said the committee is looking at alternatives and is considering a mass gathering ordinance.

Sandquist said he is happy members of the equestrian community spoke up. He said the committee will consider whether there is a need for additional regulation of equestrian events or just regulations of

large gatherings.

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