

Galway Downs proposes changes, stirs equestrians

Horsepeople balk at altering Co. General Plan, use permit

HORSETRADER STAFF REPORTS

TEMECULA — A pair of requests to Riverside County to alter policies defining how Galway Downs property can be used were submitted in January, and area equestrians are voicing their disapproval.

Galway Downs, a 242-acre centerpiece to the equestrian region of southwest Riverside County, originally opened in 1968 as a racehorse training facility and now hosts equestrian competitions, trainers and services. It lies within the area's Wine Country Community Plan, a formal guideline adopted in 2014 and then incorporated into the County's General Plan to recognize and preserve the area's equestrian and vineyard elements.

At a public hearing Jan. 13 of the Riverside County General Plan Advisory Committee, land-use consultant Alan Long presented on behalf of Galway Downs owners a request to alter the General Plan. The proposal would remove three of six parcels belonging to Galway Downs owner Ken Smith from current rural zoning to commercial. Also, the request asks to remove current Equestrian District designation of three parcels, instead designating them as part of the Wine District.

Opponents to the proposed changes, including operators of prominent, longtime horse operations in the area, regard



Galway Downs attracts world class equestrian events to its Temecula venue, as well as soccer tournaments. Opponents to zoning changes say resultant traffic already impacts their equestrian operations.

Courtesy photo

any shift in land use away from equestrians as a move inconsistent with preserving the area's unique aesthetic and historic appeal — especially in Southern California.

“Residents and business owners do not believe these proposed changes will enhance and grow the Equestrian District — quite the contrary,” said Lorraine Harrington, “They will change its land use policies to more disturbing commercial uses that will make the raising and boarding of horses far more difficult.”

Harrington said proposed commercial uses for the northeast corner of Los Caballos Road and State Highway 79 south include a gas station, convenience store and car wash. Across Highway 79 on the southwest corner, a winery resort is proposed.

At the hearing in mid-January, planners recommended the requested General Plan Amendment be placed before the planning commission. The item, initially scheduled on the Feb. 5 Planning Commission meeting, has since been removed from the agenda. A new meeting date has not yet been made public.

Since the hearing, a change.org petition by the group “Save The Equestrian District” on change.org has collected 1,066 signatures against proposed changes to zoning or ordinances.

“A rezoning to Commercial Retail could allow for everything from gas stations to arcades to professional office buildings,” reads a published report. “These types of land use are NOT appropriate in the Equestrian District, not even appropriate in Wine Country, more broadly. This is a unique area — not urban or suburban.”

A second request by Galway Downs before the County that is also being challenged within the Equestrian District is a revision to Galway Down's Conditional Use Permit (CUP).

As a property of over 100 acres, Galway Downs is allowed certain activities that smaller parcels are not, but these activities require approval and an issuance of a CUP. The new proposal (CUP 2303 R1) asks to include new activities as well as a Zone Change (CZ 20000010) and an exception to Riverside County's Noise Ordinance (847). Opponents say this would enable

concerts and other events that require amplified sound and would impact traffic that already is problematic on local roads.

Galway Downs Equestrian Manager Robert Kellerhouse understands local equestrian concerns, but he says the proposed changes are with long-range vision of enhancing amenities at Galway Downs that will

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— Lorraine Harrington,
Equestrian advocate



Galway Downs on a busy weekend.

help attract equestrian competitors for generations to come.

“That seven-acre corner along the highway as people pull off Los Caballos Road leaving Galway will never be a desirable location for an equestrian operation, but it would be ideal for folks to fuel up their rigs on the way out,” says Kellerhouse, whose facility has about a dozen current jumper, dressage and eventing trainers with more than 100 horses in training, combined. “Current fueling options are not ideal. The proposed planned uses are equestrian-oriented, and we need to share the details and earn support.”

Another Wine Country resident says that since the Equestrian District was defined in the Wine Country Community

Plan in 2014, new equestrian investment has come into the area because it is in an area that has protections in place.

“Horse owners who have been pushed out of other areas because of invading commercial usages have elected to come here after doing extensive research,” he says.

Adds Harrington, “We believe Temecula’s Horse Country adds a lot to the ambiance of the Wine Country — we often hear from tourists how much they enjoy the quiet, agricultural, equine area. We ask our County Supervisors and Planning Commissioners to protect this treasure. That’s what the Wine Country Plan has been designed to do.”

MORE BACKGROUND ON PROPOSED CHANGES ONLINE:

- Initial Environmental Study
<https://bit.ly/HT-Environment0502>
- Wine Country Community Plan
<https://bit.ly/HT-WCCP502>
- ‘Save The Equestrian District’ Petition
<https://bit.ly/HT-petition0502>

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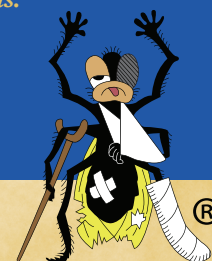
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