

Planning Commission Field Meeting, 725 Portola Road, Review of Proposal to Amend Existing Conditional Use Permit at Spring Down Equestrian Center

Commissioner Hasko called the field meeting to order at 4:05 p.m.

ROLL CALL:

Planning Commission: Commissioners Goulden, Von Feldt, and Hasko

Town Staff: Planning Director Debbie Pedro, Associate Planner Arly Cassidy, Public Works Director Howard Young

Others present relative to the proposal for Spring Down

Carol Goldstein, stable owner and operator

Rick Anderson, neighbor at 15 Woodview Lane, Woodside

Associate Planner Arly Cassidy presented the report regarding the application to amend the existing use permit to increase horse boarding at Spring Down from 50 to 60 horses on the 5.64 acre property. She stated that no new construction is required for the increase, as the existing barn has space to hold the additional horses.

Spring Down owner and manager Carol Goldstein then took the group on a tour of the facility, including the barns, stalls, covered and uncovered arenas, manure storage area, rear equipment storage and washout areas, housing, and ferrier's shed. She pointed out the fire exits, fly control, public address system (used only in the uncovered arena), and pellet bedding. She stated that they currently have 40 horses belonging to her and 11 outside horses boarding (one soon to leave), and that the increase would allow her to have 20 horses boarding, which would bring in more income for the stable.

Owner Goldstein stated that a boarded horse was fed and had its stall cleaned twice a day, and would be groomed and exercised for additional cost. She stated that, in 2010, boarding 50 horses was enough. Now, the cost of hay has increased sharply and competition from other stables offering lessons has increased as well.

At the end of her tour, neighbor Rick Anderson spoke, describing his support for the stable and for the increase in boarding. He said that he has lived directly across the road and valley from the stable for twenty years, and that the one time there was an issue with noise, it was fixed instantly after Spring Down was notified. He described Spring Down as a "great neighbor."

Commissioners asked a number of follow up questions regarding lessons and horsemanship, student ages, medicines and vet care, emergency plans and the possibility of becoming a non-profit. Owner Goldstein answered their questions and explained the details of the operation.

Commissioner Hasko stated that Commissioners would offer further comments on the proposal at the regular evening meeting that evening. Members thanked the applicant for participation in the site meeting. The field meeting adjourned at 4:55 p.m.

PLANNING COMMISSION REGULAR MEETING, TOWN OF PORTOLA VALLEY, AUGUST 2, 2017,
SCHOOLHOUSE, TOWN CENTER, 765 PORTOLA ROAD, PORTOLA VALLEY, CA 94028

Commissioner Hasko called the Planning Commission regular meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. Planning Director Pedro called the roll.

Present: Commissioners Goulden, Hasko, and Von Feldt.

Absent: Vice Chair Targ and Chair Gilbert

Staff Present: Debbie Pedro, Planning Director
Arly Cassidy, Associate Planner

Town Council Liaison: Jeff Aalfs

ORAL COMMUNICATIONS

None.

NEW BUSINESS

1. Preliminary Review of a Proposal to Amend a Conditional Use Permit, Spring Down Equestrian Center, 725 Portola Road, File #PLAN USE 6-2017

Associate Planner Arly Cassidy said the Planning Commission had attended a site visit earlier this afternoon regarding the proposed amendment to an existing Conditional Use Permit at the Spring Down Equestrian Center. The applicant is requesting to increase boarding by another 10 horses, from 50 to 60. Associate Planner Cassidy described the background of the property and the CUP, the proposed amendment, and staff's recommendations as detailed in the staff report.

The applicant had no additional comments.

Commissioner Hasko invited questions from the Commission.

Commissioner Goulden asked why noise would need to be called out as a condition since the Town's noise ordinance already covered that issue. Associate Planner Cassidy said there have been ongoing issues with some neighbors complaining about noise.

Commissioner Von Feldt asked if the decibel level at the property line is in compliance with the Town ordinance. Associate Planner Cassidy said she could only say anecdotally since the applicant has reduced the volume of the speakers because of the complaint. She said the speakers are not noticeable except at the edge of the arena.

Commissioner Von Feldt asked if the reason for the recommendation for five horses per acre was primarily related to the health of the horses versus concerns regarding the intensity of land use. Associate Planner Cassidy said that is her understanding; that the recommendation for five horses per acre was passed down from an old San Mateo County standard, and was common throughout the County. However, she said Woodside has removed that restriction and makes decisions based on stable and land conditions. She said the current proposed wording would allow for that interpretation. She said the previous stable inspector specifically stated that because these horses are not grazing, a higher density is appropriate for their safety and health as well as appropriate for the land. Planning

Director Pedro said every jurisdiction is different. For example, San Diego County allows up to 10 horses per acre.

Commissioner Hasko asked what finding must be made to make an exception to the five-horses-per-acre requirement. Planning Director Pedro said the finding must be made that there are unreasonable restrictions or unnecessary and extraordinary hardships in which damage will be imposed upon the applicant. Planning Director Pedro said in 2007, when Spring Down requested an increase from 40 to 50 horses, a determination was made at that time that extraordinary conditions were affecting the property because of the historic use with 84 horses, and that it was unreasonable to apply the five-horses-per-acre restriction.

Commissioner Hasko asked why staff was recommending eliminating the schedule of review condition, considering this is a 20 percent increase. Associate Planner Cassidy said if the CUP is granted and the conditions are met, there should be no need for regular review unless there is something specific the Commission feels a need to follow-up on, or if there is a complaint or violation. Planning Director Pedro said scheduled reviews are recommended for brand new Use Permits, but not for Use Permits that have been in place for a long time.

Commissioner Hasko asked how the applicant handled owners of boarded horses who were not caring for their animals appropriately. Carol Goodstein, applicant, said if they see anything lacking in the care of the horses, the issue is directed to the owners. She said, however, in all her years, that has never occurred. She said the owners take very good care of their horses. She said many of the horses are retired, but may need medication daily, blanketing at night, regular farrier visits, etc., which is handled by the horse owners, or the applicant, if the horse owners are busy.

Commissioner Hasko expressed concern about appropriate staffing with the number of horses being increased by 20 percent. The applicant said she would increase her staff as necessary, but at this point, with 50 horses, they have the same number of staff they had for 84 horses. She said many of their staff have been there for more than 20 years.

Commissioner Von Feldt said she appreciated that Spring Down provided housing for some of their workers. She asked if there has been any interest in on-site housing expressed by other workers. The applicant said two of her employees live on the property. She said there is another vacant space available; however, no one at this time needs it. She said she recently took in someone from NCEFT who is renting the studio apartment on the other side of her garage.

Commissioner Goulden asked about the loudspeakers pointing at Portola Road. Ms. Goodstein said there are three speakers on the outdoor arena; one at either end of the long sides and one at the furthest end of the arena, facing Portola Road, but is pointed down. She said they don't use the speaker system in the inside arena. She said in the outside arena, when the wind is blowing or multiple horses are moving about, people cannot hear if they don't use the microphone. She said not hearing the instructor can be dangerous.

With no further questions, Commissioner Hasko brought the issue back to the Commission for discussion.

Commissioner Goulden said the usage is not significantly changed, and the increase in number of horses is not an issue as far as the health of the horses. He was supportive of the proposal.

Commissioner Von Feldt agreed and said that since 84 horses had been satisfactorily accommodated in the past, there should be no surprise issues by increasing the number of horses to 60. She said she could make the CUP findings and the hardship finding. She said equestrian use is an important value

to the community and supported by the General Plan. She suggested the newer best management practices for storm water and pollution prevention be part of the facility's staff training.

Commissioner Hasko agreed that the preservation of equestrian use is important to Portola Valley. She said that underscores the value of the facility to the community and maintaining that part of the town's culture. She said the applicant is a conscientious owner who pays great attention to maintaining the horses and facilities, has longtime employees, and is very thoughtful. She said her concern is that this property could be sold at some point, and since the Use Permit runs with the land, there might need to be conditions in place to ensure adequate staffing if another business takes over. Commissioner Goulden suggested a condition that called for an adequate level of care for the horses. Planning Director Pedro said staff would work with the applicant to come up with an appropriate and enforceable condition to be added to the CUP.

Commissioner Hasko said she was comfortable with the required CUP findings and the hardship finding.

COMMISSION, STAFF, COMMITTEE REPORTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Planning Director Pedro presented a letter submitted by Carter Warr regarding the 0.25 acre property behind the Hallett Store, which is zoned AP (Administrative Professional). Mr. Warr requested a Planning Commission discussion to consider applying residential zoning district regulations to the AP parcel, ultimately to develop a single-family home with an accessory dwelling unit. She said staff is reviewing the request and will bring it before the Commission within the next couple of months for discussion.

Commissioner Von Feldt said upon presentation of the Town Center Master Planning Committee's list to the Council, there was concern by some regarding the proposal to daylight the creek. The Council then asked for more criteria to evaluate potential projects. She said there seems to be misunderstanding in that some people did not realize the list was comprised of ideas to be evaluated, not necessarily executed. Planning Director Pedro said the projects and ideas were results of the public outreach process and were categorized into three groups – near term, long term, and ongoing maintenance type projects. She said the creek, for example, is a long-term project, and parking and EV chargers are near-term projects. She said the final list is expected to go to Council in September.

Commissioner Von Feldt said the ASCC was unanimous in their support of the owl on the Neighborhood Watch signs. Planning Director Pedro added that the signs will be further discussed at Neighborhood Watch group meetings before returning to Council for review and approval.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

2. Planning Commission Meeting of May 3, 2017

The minutes of the May 3, 2017, meeting, were approved as submitted by an all-in-favor vote, with Commissioner Von Feldt abstaining.

3. Planning Commission Meeting of July 5, 2017

Commissioner Hasko provided comments regarding the July 5, 2017, meeting. Approval of the minutes was postponed to a future meeting.

ADJOURNMENT [7:48 p.m.]