

Minutes – Maryland Horse Council (MHC)
“Save the Horse Farms” Kickoff Meeting
Thursday, March 18, 2010
Pleasant Prospect Farm, Brookeville, MD, 7:00-9:00 p.m.

Meeting adjourned at 7:10 p.m. with Maryland Horse Council President, Steuart Pittman requesting the people assembled in the room provide brief introductions of themselves and which counties they represented. Of the forty-plus people in attendance, people mentioned they represented the following counties: Frederick, Howard, Baltimore, Caroline, Kent, Carroll, Anne Arundel, Queen Anne, Montgomery, Cecil, Prince Georges, and Washington. A few additional people joined the group following the introductions and may have represented additional counties.

Steuart stated that the purpose of tonight’s meeting was to talk about specific county issues, but it was truly to kick off the overall Save the Horse Farms campaign. He mentioned that no one has ever collected all the county-by-county laws, and this was a good opportunity to review them – particularly some that didn’t make sense any longer. He said the interpretation of laws in some instances were preventing people from doing things such as building indoor arenas.

The overall plan of the campaign is to collect information, including the worst laws, the best laws, anecdotal examples of situations farm owners have faced, and discussions of poor interpretation of the laws at the different counties’ levels. A combined report will be developed from this effort, and the information contained therein would hopefully garner press interest in this statewide effort. The MHC will develop a final document including which laws should be changed and including some suggestions of best practice language that could be adopted and worked across counties, at the county-by-county level. An example would include language of what horse zoning should look like.

Jane Seigler, Reddemeade Farm and member of the MHC Executive Committee, provided a historical perspective of Montgomery County’s recent horse zoning and legal issues. In 2002/2003 there was a proposal to build a site with the intention of holding horse shows there, and some local citizens began raising concerns. Concurrently, the Montgomery County Department of Permitting started showing up at horse properties and citing violations of ordinances. At that time, it became clear that some of the zoning code was arcane and archaic. For example, the numbers of horses allowed per acre and the number of horses allowed boarded or rented out would have put almost every boarding stable in the county in violation of the law.

A Montgomery County Task Force for Horse Stables was stood up with the objective of rewriting the laws. The Task Force looked at several issues to include the notion that horse farms were NOT being considered as agriculture. Boarding stables were being considered “commercial,” a term fraught with peril, as the term commercial made things such as building permits, occupancies, etc., much more complicated than they needed to be. The Task Force needed to write into law that equestrian events and activities need be considered agricultural. Jane also discussed zoning – the issues that effect neighbors –

and finding out what really were going to be the problems. Would it be noise, lights, traffic? And then to come up with reasonable provisions to address them. The bottom line in improving zoning laws is to look at people's concerns, and address them.

A member of the group asked about working with Maryland National Capital Park and Planning Commission (MNCPPC), and Jane responded that for their issues, they did not work with them much, that they worked much more with the Economic Planning Committee, who helped them through the process. They also worked with the Montgomery County Council, who once voted on the issues, made them law. MNCPPC implements what the Council votes on, and enforcement is accomplished by County Zoning, not MNCPPC. MNCPPC works more with planning and development proposals, but does not write laws. (They also only effect Prince Georges and Montgomery Counties.)

Steuart mentioned that every county has to have a plan for open space, and a planning commission, and suggested people find out who is there. The planning and zoning commissions can advise the county councils. He also reiterated to the group the importance of the Maryland House Bill recognizing horses as agriculture and applying that sentiment to the county levels.

Royce Herman, MHC Treasurer, discussed his grass roots efforts in Queen Anne County. He started with the County Commissioners, told them the issues, gave them the Montgomery County re-written laws, and got their direction to go to planning and zoning and get them to write something to apply in Queen Anne County. They did, and got public comment. The language defines horse activities and evens at the county level as agricultural. Royce stated that Queen Anne County's laws and code is much simpler than Montgomery County's because it can be; they are not dealing with many of the same issues.

Several people discussed counties' minimum and maximum horse/land laws: Montgomery County states one acre per horse up to 10, then .5 acres per horse; Queen Anne County has no numerical standards; Cecil County has complicated tax code that could be interpreted as meaning you can't have less than 5 horses to be considered agricultural.

Steuart requested Elizabeth Winters, Paradise Stables, discuss her dealings with Frederick County planning and zoning with her recent efforts to build an indoor arena. She talked about rules and laws on the books that would have shut down all 89 stables in Frederick County because they could not be in compliance. She encountered some helpful people at the county level, but also encountered numerous bureaucratic difficulties. She found that when the county ordinances were written, no horse people had been consulted, which some in the room seconded as a consistent theme. In the end she had her arena constructed and inspected, but ended up spending many, many hours working issues that should not have been so difficult, had sensible laws been in place.

Another Frederick County resident mentioned that no prize money was allowed at equine

events, and that the county was currently requiring permits for standalone run-in sheds.

A Prince Georges county resident stated that he was permitted to build a 20-stall foaling barn with NO permits or inspections because it was an agricultural building. Some discussion ensued as to what makes buildings agricultural or non-agricultural, such as the “people” use. In some counties, as long as the poles go into the ground (pole barn), the building is considered agricultural.

A Baltimore County resident mentioned her attempts to get a permit for a barn since her property backed into a state park. She mentioned state laws, setbacks, tree laws, wetlands surveys, etc., and difficulties in trying to obtain permits of sell property due to all these requirements. She recommended MHC try to work this campaign at the state level vs. the county level. Stuart said that any obstacle to maintaining horse land, we should be attacking. It can be state level or county level – any regulations and obstacles – we want to know about. He said in some instances, if we can SIMPLIFY issues, it may work better. For example, if we can go with state standards instead of specific county level standards, that may be enough. Some county officials would probably go with the recommendation. But we need to be clear on what standards protect who: State stable licensing protects horses; county zoning protects your neighbors from you.

Jane said in Montgomery County they made it clear to the Council that horses were a way to preserve open space with private funds (not taxpayer dollars). Horses are becoming a larger portion of the agricultural population in many counties. As dairy farms are disappearing, the choice becomes horses or houses. (Someone recommended this as a good bumper sticker: Horses or Houses). Jane also mentioned that you can not have ZONING at the state level – only county.

A Prince Georges County representative mentioned that not many people are voting from the rural areas and used as an example that of the 9 councilmen in the county, only one represented open space.

A Department of Agriculture representative said MHC should be able to use the horse census data to show county council members the importance of horses in the counties. He also mentioned that people can ask for special exceptions when county laws or zoning does not seem to apply to their situation and they believe they should be waived.

Some additional points:

- Someone recommended a need to educate the public and constituents on horses and point out issues such as the number of boarders from developed areas who are voting in developed areas but are benefiting from boarding in open space and rural tiers.
- The Maryland State Farm Bureau is now working to keep horses in state, and along with a state Equine Committee is developing county Equine Committees.
- It is a good time to do this campaign due to the agricultural, open space, and environmental movements. Good time to bring allies onboard and recognize that horses are good for the environment.

A Baltimore County representative mentioned that different departments she had talked to contradicted each other. Some were very supportive, others, not so supportive, and each had its own interpretation of the laws. Someone suggested she take the language passed in Montgomery County and Queen Anne County to have them change the laws in a similar fashion in Baltimore County. That is one of the attempts of the campaign – to get items from different counties that make sense passed in other counties.

Amy Samman, Chairman of the Legislative and Policy Committee, stated that the collective group needs to educate County Council members who do not know or understand horse issues. Someone mentioned that one of the best places to speak to these members is at fundraisers. And people should be working the education effort not just in their districts, but next door.

Moving to the next item on the agenda, Steuart asked Valerie Ormond from the Legislative and Policy Committee to discuss research efforts for individuals at the county level. Valerie mentioned the wealth of data available to county coordinators, but recommended they focus efforts on the county laws and ordinances vice agricultural easements at this time. She explained three documents available to the group which could help in their research, which are attached. One is an explanation of Horse-Friendly Zoning, a second is the links to county codes and ordinances, and a third was sample code from Prince Georges County. She also recommended talking to county level planners and zoners and neighbors regarding their experiences.

Steuart said that MHC needs to have county people pull the county data together. Amy said that the zoning and planning people in the counties can be very helpful, and if anyone was having trouble locating what they needed, to contact her. At this point, people were requested to send county information to admin@MHC. Phase I will include collecting the existing county laws.

The following people volunteered (or were volunteered) to serve as County Coordinators:

Frederick	Judy Smith
Prince Georges	Valerie Ormond, Harry Ketts, Jon Stone (not present)
Anne Arundel	Heather Baygo
Queen Anne, Kent	Royce Herman
Carroll	Janet Breeding and Carroll County Equestrian Council
Caroline	Robert Jenner (not present)
Baltimore	Debbie Sharp, Kathy Masterson, Cheryl London
Montgomery	Amy Samman, Jane Seigler

If anyone would like to volunteer as the County Coordinator for any of the other Maryland counties, please let Amy know.

Additional information:

-The Maryland Farm Bureau has a list of Right to Farm information, and it is worth checking to see if your county has the same.

-Please remember to ask your member associations to include MHC information in their

publications and meetings

-This is a great opportunity as a political force at the county level to make a difference.

MHC will do the following as a result of this meeting:

1. Send out specific guidance for County Coordinators including a timeline for the laws and anecdotal collection phase.
2. Schedule a follow-on meeting with County Coordinators after data and stories are collected.
3. Include Jane's and Royce's zoning information as examples.
4. Send another survey with instructions for people to fill out with even the small nuisances that could be useful data for the collection phase.

The meeting adjourned at 9:05 p.m.