



County of Los Alamos

Los Alamos, NM 87544
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Council Meeting Staff Report

June 8, 2017

Agenda No.: C.
Indexes (Council Goals):
Presenters: Christopher Wilson
Legislative File: 9546-17

Title

Review and discussion of the North Mesa Stables Management in regards to neighbor complaints.

Recommended Action

I move that the Board accept the staff report as presented and that no further testing be done as we are in compliance with health codes, environmental standards and our own County requirements.

Body

A recent concern expressed from several neighbors near the stables initiated additional investigation by the County staff into these concerns. A meeting was organized to include the neighbors, Los Alamos Stable Owners Association members, stable licensees, and Los Alamos County staff.

Although the meeting was planned to be a walking/talking format, inclement weather moved the meeting from the stables to the Aquatic Center Classroom. The agenda covered a welcome, discussed land dedication, Wildland/Urban Interface fire mitigation, health and vigor of vegetative overstory and understory, water as related to run-off, possible well contamination, well locations, safety precautions and water quality testing regimes. Site drainage was also discussed as the County is finalizing an extensive project in this area. Soil reports were reviewed for samples taken in Overlook Park for fertilization needs and a series of three samples taken at the North Mesa Stables area which included an off-site control sample, an exterior lot sample and an interior lot sample. The established rules and regulation for the stables operations and management was also touched on. Finally, the Vision Plan that was jointly developed between the stable licensees and the County was briefly discussed. We established a parking lot for topics needing further discussion that were off-topic yet related.

The U.S. of America, through the Secretary of interior, conveyed 294.663 acres of land together with all improvements and appurtenances to the Incorporated County of Los Alamos, New Mexico, under a quit claim deed dated October 31, 1972 and filed for record in the Los Alamos County Records on October 31, 1972. The County, in its application dated September 18, 1972 to the Department of the Interior, Bureau of Outdoor Recreation, state that a portion of the conveyed land would be utilized as a County Recreation Area that would include stables and corrals for use by horse owners. The North Mesa Stable facility's heritage and history is established via this documentation.

Ramon Garcia, LAFD, Wildland Fire Chief reviewed the fire break and thinning that will be conducted by his staff this year. The extensive growth of vegetation will require access along the backside of the lots along the Northside of the stables. This will assist in fire mitigation by reducing fuels and improving access to the area.

Carlos Valdez, County Program Director/Ext. 4-H Agent with the New Mexico State University: Los Alamos

County Extension Office, had been to the site and reviewed vegetative health and vigor in this same area and stated the vegetation is vigorous and healthy. He concluded that the dead grass concern was not related to stable run-off or contaminated soil yet was cheat grass moving through its usual growing cycle. In addition, the dead trees were insect and disease related and again part of the natural processes.

Wayne Witten (Utilities Water Production Superintendent) with Department of Public Utilities was very helpful in addressing water quality, well location and safe guards from surface water contamination. The closest well is 2 miles from the stables, is over 600' deep and is protected at well heads with concrete. He also described the water quality testing both at a local and state level. He finished by letting the group know how dedicated staff is to maintaining the highest water quality standards.

An extensive drainage project has been underway at the stable for the last year with final elements being done this construction season at Brewer Arena. Offsite drainage is a concern and the plan addresses how runoff moves through the site.

Jeff Humpton, Parks Superintendent, had pulled soil samples and with the assistance of the Extension Office had forwarded them to Colorado State University for testing. Presently we don't have a comparable testing facility in New Mexico. The attached site map for the stable samples, associated test reports along with the County Park sample, are attached for your information.

Notice how close the test results are and that the comments section points out that although the PH and salts are very high within the stable lot sample the Soil Absorption Ratio (SAR) value is moderate indicating that there is sodium in the soil, but not enough sodium to make the soil "sodic". Although extensive sampling was not done over the entire area we can draw the conclusion that the test results from these samples show that the areas are within safe parameters.

Staff reviewed the Stable Rules and Regulations that guide the administration, management and licensee practices. The annual inspection process was explained as was the renewal and tiered fee requirements for individuals holding valid licenses. This collaborative effort continues to improve the health, safety and facilities within the North Mesa Stables area. The discussion addressed maintenance concerns, smell, flies and the best management practices in place at this time. Our final agenda item was explaining future planning for the North Mesa Stables as contained in the Vision Plan. The joint efforts of the County staff and Stable Licensee will bring this plan forward as annual planning focuses on improvements both physical and administratively.

On-going discussions and conversations between the neighbors and the County in regard to its management of the North Mesa Stable facility should be encouraged in an effort to be good neighbors. In addition, equestrian trail improvements need to be explored to provide a safe alternative to riding on sidewalks. Fly predator options should also be discussed and implemented by Licensees to help with this concern.

Alternatives

Given the land dedication, alternatives would be limited to changes within the Rules an Regulations and the administration of these changes.

Attachments

A - Los Alamos Projects
B - North Mesa Stable Area Water
C - North Mesa Stables Agricultural Test Report
D - Overlook Park Agricultural Test Report