

A Land Use Planning Primer for Equestrians – Our Future Depends Upon It  
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### **What is Land Use Planning?**

Land use planning is an important activity that assists a community grow and function in the manner that is needed and desired by its residents. A comprehensive plan is a guide to future development of the community. A plan is developed through a process of information gathering and public comment. The goal is for the final plan to represent the wishes of the residents in the planning area. The plan often takes into account the preservation of natural features, historic elements and practices of the community.

In some states, such as Maryland, law requires comprehensive land use planning at the county-level. In other states, some communities practice land use planning although law does not require it. A comprehensive plan may provide justification for community zoning laws.

The planning process asks the following questions:

1. Where are we now with regard to the use of our land?
2. What do we value?
3. What do we need?
4. How do we get there?

The comprehensive planning process includes a period of data gathering and resident comment on the following:

- Current use of planning area lands (urban and rural)
- Transportation systems
- Communications infrastructure
- Community facilities (educational, emergency services, health care)
- Parks and recreation opportunities
- Buildings (housing, agriculture and commercial development)
- Watershed protection

Once developed, the comprehensive plan typically includes a vision statement, goals, and an implementation strategy.

### **Why Is It Important for Equestrians to Participate?**

Lack of participation by equestrians can lead to dire consequences for open spaces we value. For example, lack of equestrian representation at comprehensive planning meetings can lead to the loss of land for riding, driving, training, breeding, camping, pasturing, growing hay & grain, and competing. Active and interested residents can make

a significant, positive difference in the plan outcome through their participation in the planning process.

### **What Can I Do?**

As a comprehensive plan is developed or revised, it is important for equestrians to participate in the process and voice their support for maintenance of equestrian land and recreational opportunities. Be aware of your community planning process. Contact your county planning department or county government leader to inquire about the existence of a comprehensive land use plan. If a plan exists, read it and become familiar with its elements and goals. Be aware of when the plan is to be developed or revised. Typically, land use plans are updated every five to six years. Watch for the notice of the plan revision and public comment period. Attend the meeting and share your preferences. Notify your equestrian friends of the meeting(s) and encourage them to attend.

While at the meetings, equestrian are encouraged to speak up for their equestrian business and/or hobby. Know your community's equine heritage and history and honor it. Voice your preference for the preservation of open space and farmland, and the inclusion of equestrian facilities and trails in the community land use and recreation plans. Be aware of urban service boundaries, the promotion and incentives for urban infill and redevelopment rather than continued sprawl. Speak about the benefits to human health through farmland and open space preservation. Promote increased recreational opportunities through the development of shared use trails, including horses. Encourage the development or enhancement of community trail systems and ask for their inclusion in the comprehensive plan.

Planning commissions and processes are often comprised of volunteers appointed by elected municipal officials. Consider becoming a leader in your communities planning process to make a positive difference for yourself, your fellow equestrians and to maintain our lifestyle and heritage for the benefit of future generations.

### **A Final Word**

There was a time when equestrians did not need to be so concerned about land use planning as a threat to our hobby, business or sport. As the U.S. population has grown and communities have expanded, most regions of the country are experiencing the "sprawl" that consumes our horse lands. Horse land preservation depends upon our active engagement in land use planning in our communities.