

Community Based Organizations Working for Sustainable Land Use

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ELCR always recommends that our equine constituents form some level of organization that can keep an eye on local land use and planning, share information with members, and work both proactively and in response to issues that arise to limit equine land access. There are other grassroots-based organizations that are also working to monitor and influence land use policies at the local level.

Land use watch groups have been forming in communities across the US as residents become more concerned about suburban and rural sprawl. These organizations

- Assess what the community's land use concerns are
- Work with residents to find out what people want to see in their communities
- Speak up about how those needs are being met (or not met) by planners and decision makers.

Organizations that don't focus specifically on equine lands can still be extremely helpful to the equine community's land use needs. Good city planning can result in protection of agricultural, equine and natural lands. Here are some exemplary organizations to look at. Please click the title or logo for websites.

[FAYETTE ALLIANCE](#)

The question posed by the Fayette Alliance is not "if we grow, but how we grow." They believe that Fayette County can be the model for sustainable growth by balancing and connecting Lexington's increasingly vibrant city with its productive and beautiful Bluegrass farmland.



It's a challenge, but so far Fayette Alliance has been successful.



Executive Director of Fayette Alliance, Susan Speckert

According to Executive Director Susan Speckert, Lexington was the first community in the U.S. to create an urban services (growth) boundary, which is a "hard line that limits development into our farmland. This boundary serves twin purposes—it preserves our irreplaceable Bluegrass farmland, while directing development and investment inside our city limits. This has been and continues to be the key to our economic development and quality of life. The urban services boundary enables our signature agricultural industries to thrive and creates a vibrant city."

Fayette Alliance approaches its work in three ways—advocacy, education and research. The research is critical. Fayette Alliance conducts and commissions research by experts so that all of their positions are based on data, facts and the law. They have commissioned studies on housing demands; land utilization; the economic impact of Fayette County's agricultural industries; the costs of community services; and many others. This thorough research enables them to offer real solutions to Fayette County's growth needs while protecting farmland.

Fayette Alliance works with the city and other stakeholders on dynamic, comprehensive growth and planning strategies that incorporate the city's wealth of vacant and underutilized properties, helping to develop policies that utilize these assets in a sustainable way. The process prioritizes needs such as traffic and multi-modal transportation, infrastructure and other issues that affect quality of life. Importantly, greenspace is recognized as a necessary part of the urban-county infrastructure as opposed to an add-on feature. The planning and growth processes are dynamic – needs change over time, and must be responded to.

Fayette Alliance is truly an alliance of committed citizens. Its Board members and supporters represent a diverse cross-section of the community, including farm owners, developers, affordable housing advocates, planners, economic development experts, educators, entrepreneurs and other community leaders who care about how Lexington-Fayette County grows. By working for "sustainable, responsible growth, and by partnering with other local organizations," the Alliance is protecting "the prime soils of the county while promoting smart city development," says Ms. Speckert.

What can other communities and their equestrian constituents, learn from Fayette Alliance?

- Like many equine and community organizations, Fayette Alliance is small but highly focused and specific in what it wants to achieve. Understanding your mission and sticking to it will help you to accomplish specific goals.
- The Alliance has garnered a high level of support from the community, and is 100% funded by donations. Organizations in your community can accomplish funding by refining your message to gain mission support and making the "ask" directly to the local community.
- Equine land advocacy organizations can learn from their focus, persistence and ability to work with other community groups and individuals to accomplish a common goal. These are key elements in achieving success over the long term.

Fayette Alliance brings a continual and positive message to the community – that urban growth and rural preservation can coexist with good planning, and that community image and quality of life are just as important as growth.

WOODFORD FORWARD

Woodford Forward is a relatively new non-profit organization in Woodford County, Kentucky, starting up in 2014. This group of community members advocates for the policies that will promote the best use of urban land to help ensure continued agricultural use of the county's excellent farm lands. Woodford Forward's CEO, Patrick Chase Milner, talked with ELCR about the purpose of the organization, how it came to be and what projects they are taking on.



Woodford Forward focuses on "working with government officials and the community stakeholders to advocate for innovative development and redevelopment of their urban areas, adequate infrastructure for citizens and business and the agricultural use of productive farmland throughout the County. Through these efforts, Woodford Forward works to promote the link between quality of life and economic development", says Mr. Milner.

Like Fayette Alliance, Woodford Forward supports the county's Purchase of Development Rights Program and organizations that also advocate for the "protection of the prime productive farmland soils

in Woodford County which are excellent for producing food, feed, forage, fiber and oilseed crops” says Milner. This too is excellent land for raising horses.

The organization works on or lends its support to projects that align with their mission, including the support of a new multi-use (including equestrian) trail system proposed for the county.

A 2015 Survey of Woodford County residents confirmed the high level of support for Woodford Forward’s mission, and Milner has personally found the community to be receptive and appreciative of the organization’s efforts. Clearly the community is aware of what they have to lose and want policies that will protect it. Funding is through private donations.

Woodford Forward’s focus on quality of life through the economic wellbeing of the community, especially in relation to the use of prime agricultural lands emanates from understanding what the community wants and needs through undertaking public surveys and hosting local candidate forums. This has helped them to gain the community’s support and encourage membership. Woodford Forward is funded by its annual membership program.

What can other communities and their equestrian constituents, learn from Woodford Forward?

- Local and equine land advocacy organizations can work to gain an understanding of how residents view their community culture and economic potential, as well as the value of their natural land resources.
- Local equine and land use advocacy organizations can secure funding by refining your message and making the “ask” directly to local community stakeholders through a thoughtfully conceived message.
- Equine land advocacy organizations can learn from Woodford Forward’s focus, persistence and ability to work with other community groups and individuals to create partnerships and accomplish a common goal. These are key elements in achieving success over the long term.

HOW AN ORGANIZATION’S ORIGINAL PURPOSE CAN EVOLVE

Organizations offer empowerment to their members and their citizens. They can engage with the community and decision makers to advocate for land use issues and challenge the status quo. Often, an organization with a particular purpose realizes the importance of reaching out to their community on many levels.

[EQUESTRIAN TRAILS, INC.](#)

ETI recognizes that “a group has a stronger voice than an individual. United we can influence the laws, ordinances, and policies that affect our ability to have and enjoy our equines in the present and in the future.” Their efforts have resulted in expanded trail opportunities for both equestrians and other users, adding value and enjoyment for all community members.



[GREENBELT ALLIANCE San Francisco, CA](#)

Their work ranges from saving farms in Santa Clara County and wildlife habitat in Sonoma County to revitalizing commercial strips in Silicon Valley and Oakland. Equine and recreational open space and trail corridors are also addressed.



Greenbelt Alliance has set specific goals to be reached by 2035 that focus on protection of their extensive greenbelt and directing new development to existing urban areas.

Working both locally and regionally, they “bring together the community, decision-makers, business leaders, labor unions, and organizations to find innovative solutions to our region’s growth challenges.”

7 STEPS: WHAT TO TAKE FROM THESE ORGANIZATIONS – STEPS TO ADVOCACY AND ACTION

- Organize to empower individuals, group members and communities to influence growth and land conservation policies.
- Assess community needs and desires and incorporate equine land use needs, sometimes bringing in assessment specialists to assist.
- Gain an understanding of how both equine and community needs can be met in a sustainable manner (economically, environmentally and land use policy-wise)
- Advocate for the policies that will work best to protect equine land and access locally.
- Achieve more through your organization by working with community decision makers, government agencies and other local organizations with both similar and diverging interests.
- Gain an understanding of and become involved with the planning process to achieve your goals. An understanding of smart growth, the comprehensive planning process and local decision making, and how these can work toward conserving open space locally, is critical.
- Understand that advocacy is a long-term endeavor that requires monitoring, communicating with other organizations and decision makers on a regular basis, and an organizational commitment to advocate for equine land needs beyond just the present.