



July 7, 2023

Members of the Planning, Zoning, and Adjustment Board,

Equine Land Conservation Resource (ELCR) is a national nonprofit organization that leads in the protection of access to land for horses and equine activity. The organization was formed almost 25 years ago, recognizing that unplanned growth and sprawl continue to put the equine experience out of reach of many Americans while threatening the horse human connection and our equine history, culture, and industry in the United States.

We are contacting the PZA board as a result of the concern equestrians, both residing in the Village of Wellington and those residing elsewhere but actively competing in equestrian events in Wellington, have expressed regarding two real estate development projects before you: Wellington North and Wellington South. These projects seek to convert 600 acres of protected land in the Village's Equestrian Preserve into high-density condominiums, a golf and tennis complex, and other commercial and retail space, none of which are compatible with the zoning and intent of the preserve. Village residents are vehemently opposed to these proposed development projects for good reasons.

In our 25 years of operation, ELCR has collaborated with many individuals, organizations and communities concerned about local horse land issues and often share models and best practices to protect horse lands. In our publication, "Horse Friendly Zoning Practices in American Communities" the Village of Wellington is one community we highlight as a model for its exceptional horse-friendly zoning practices, which include the Equestrian Overlay District (EOZD). The purpose of the EOZD being to:

- Protect and enhance the equestrian preservation areas of the village;
- Preserve, maintain, and enhance the equestrian community associated with the village;
- Preserve, maintain, and enhance the rural lifestyle associated with the equestrian community;
- Identify and encourage land uses that are supportive of the equestrian and rural character of the preservation areas; and
- Preserve, maintain, and enhance development patterns that are consistent with the overall character of the equestrian community.

It is our professional opinion that the rezoning requirements of these two proposed development projects before this board are in direct conflict with the planning, zoning and preservation principles and practices established in the Village of Wellington to maintain the brand and quality of life of this unique and highly cherished community. If even one parcel in the Equestrian Preserve is rezoned to high - density residential, it sets a dangerous precedent for the Village of Wellington that could lead to long term undesirable and irreversible impacts on the community. The developer has already stated the intention to seek future rezoning to accommodate additional commercial development associated with the Wellington North and Wellington South projects.

The equestrian lifestyle is clearly the brand of Wellington, Florida and recognizable nationwide. This brand not only makes your community unique and highly desirable, providing an exceptional quality of life difficult to find in other communities, but also contributes a significant sustainable economic impact to this community. Year after year, the equestrian industry is one of the most significant revenue drivers for the Village and county, contributing revenues close to the level of what some cities receive only once if they host a major event like a Super Bowl (\$300-\$600 million)

We can use the results of the 2014 Economic Impact Analysis of the Equine Industry in Marion County, FL to better understand the local economic impact of the horse show industry in Wellington. The Marion County study revealed interesting data related to the socioeconomic status of the HITS Ocala horse show out of town visitors that distinguish these event consumers from those of other regional large-scale events such as University of FL, Miami Dolphins, and Florida State football because the equestrians exhibit the following:

- **Higher household incomes** - *Average household income of HITS Ocala out-of-town visitors is \$223,000 – top 3% nationally.*
- **Higher per diem expenses** - *HITS Ocala visitors' average daily expenditures are 3- 4X higher than typical visitors in the region.*
- **Longer length of visits** – *Horse show attendees stay longer than typical visitors to the area.*

Our organization worked closely with Marion County as residents became increasingly alarmed at the rate of rezoning in the Marion County Farmland Preservation Area due to determined petitioning by developers. The Farmland Preservation Area is where many of Ocala's prestigious horse farms are located. Fortunately, efforts to reverse the rezoning trends in Ocala/Marion County have been successful. During that time we spent in Marion County, however, we realized a growing trend of Wellington residents relocating to Marion County, citing traffic and congestion in Wellington as the main reasons for their relocation. The two development proposals before this board threaten to only add to existing traffic and congestion with the potential of leading to an exodus of residents to communities that can offer a better quality of life.

The proposed development at Wellington North is currently approved for 50 multifamily units and the applicant requests to increase that to 300 units. Wellington South, though undeveloped, could be developed with 199 units and the applicant proposes 197 units (relocated within the same parcels), for a total of nearly 500 units. This massive increase in density is incompatible with the future land use plan designation of Equestrian Commercial Recreation. The applicant seeks to amend the plan designation, which was just adopted in 2021 to form a blueprint for Wellington's future. The proposed development would add a substantial volume of traffic to the area, increase the light and noise pollution in the community, and diminish the quality of life for residents. While the proposed developments may be profitable for the developers, the cost of extending services such as police, fire, stormwater management, street maintenance, and trash collection would be a disproportionate burden to the village government and existing residents.

Staying competitive as a desirable location for a winter show destination should not mean altering the unique character of the village, devaluing the property of current owners and residents, nor reducing their quality of life by increasing noise, traffic congestion, stormwater runoff, and reduced access to the equestrian preserve. These impacts will harm residents, and also make Wellington a less comfortable place to visit. Fundamentally altering the character of Wellington to try to keep up with, and look more like, neighboring equestrian communities could have a negative long-term impact on the desirability of

Wellington as a destination. Maintaining Wellington as a special, one-of-a-kind, horse-friendly community, rather than a generic option among many, is far more valuable in the long run than nondescript commercial and condo development.

The proposed rezoning, map amendment, and development are misconstrued by the applicant to help position the village as a more desirable location. The real impact would be the creation of something that could possibly, though not guaranteed to, appeal to those who may visit once a year at the extreme detriment of those who make the village their home for all or part of the year.

In conclusion, for the reasons we have addressed in this letter, we urge the PZA Board to follow the Equestrian Preserve Committee in rejecting both the Wellington North and Wellington South development proposals to protect the intent and integrity of the Equestrian Preserve and the quality of life for both current and future residents of the Village of Wellington.

We thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Halley Groshek". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Halley" and last name "Groshek" clearly distinguishable.

Executive Director