
From: Michele Richards
Subject: FW: OC Equestrian Center

From: Ken Sobel <kennysocal711@gmail.com>
Sent: Friday, December 8, 2023 11:18:21 AM
To: Douglas La Belle <dlabelle@ocfairboard.com>
Subject: OC Equestrian Center

Dear Mr. LaBelle:

I understand that you are on the Board of the OC Fairgrounds including the Equestrian Center ("EQC"). I'm reaching out for your assistance. My daughter, Alex Creelman, is a long time resident of Orange County (Costa Mesa and Newport Beach) since her college graduation in 2007, and she grew up in La Mesa where she attended Grossmont High School and learned to ride horses at the stables in the adjacent Spring Valley area. Learning to ride and care for horses was her passionate avocation and I felt that experience helped her to become the successful businesswoman and mom as she is today. Alex enjoyed riding at the EQC, and now she takes my 5 year old granddaughter, LuLu, who also really loves learning to ride and care for horses.

I've also had the opportunity in the past to visit the EQC with my daughter and I was very impressed that such a great facility existed in a relatively dense urban environment and is definitely preserving for generations to come.

Alex advised me that OC Fairgrounds may be seeking to re-purpose the space and I have since read some local media on the subject. Of course, Alex and her friends in OC were devastated to learn that they might lose this important recreational facility and would like to both encourage the Board not to let that happen and also offer their advocacy and assistance to the Board to keep that from happening. I'm hoping you can help by advocating to keep the EQC open. I'd love to speak with you if possible and/or connect you with my daughter.

I'm also reaching out to you because I noticed while doing some research that you and I share the City of La Mesa in common. Although I'm not sure our paths crossed then, I became involved with the City as the elected President of the La Mesa Youth Sports Council with nearly 5,000 registered participants, President of La Mesa National Little League, and Chairman of the Bond Oversight Committee for La Mesa/Spring Valley School District. In 1999 I assisted in forming the La Mesa Park and Recreation Foundation and became its first Vice President serving under President Ed Burr ("Edco"). Our Foundation was instrumental in connecting the fields at Parkway Middle School for joint use and - eventually - with the assistance of Junior Seau - built the Junior Seau youth football field and the adjacent grass space for 3 baseball/softball diamonds plus space for 3 youth soccer fields. I'm a huge fan of developing and maintaining space and activities that promote the health and welfare of members of our community. I hope the EQC is maintained not only for the benefit of my daughter and granddaughter but also for generations who come after.

In my life experience of 70 years, I believe the EQC is a very unique and wonderful place, and I hope it continues well into the future.

With kind regards, I am
Very truly yours,
/s/
Ken Sobel

--
Ken Sobel, Principal, Senior Consultant & Attorney
Genesis International Cannabis Solutions
Director, LA Confidential Collective
Co-Founder and Board Member: Arizona Dispensaries Association, Inc.
Co-Manager, The Heavenly Harvest, LLC
kennysocal711@gmail.com
[REDACTED]

From: Michele Richards
Subject: FW: Support of EQC

From: eq.coalition@gmail.com <eq.coalition@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, December 11, 2023 10:57:39 PM
To: Nick Kovacevich <nkovacevich@ocfairboard.com>; Barbara Bagneris <bbagneris@ocfairboard.com>; Tanya Bilezikjian <tbilezikjian@ocfairboard.com>; Dimetria Jackson <djackson@ocfairboard.com>; Douglas La Belle <dlabelle@ocfairboard.com>; Newton Pham <npham@ocfairboard.com>; Natalie Rubalcava-Garcia <nrubalcava-garcia@ocfairboard.com>; Robert Ruiz <rruiz@ocfairboard.com>; MRichards@ocfair.com <MRichards@ocfair.com>
Cc: bri@beachcitiescb.com <bri@beachcitiescb.com>
Subject: FW: Support of EQC

Please find attached letter from a member of the local community, declaring that the equestrian center is an important community, public, asset.

Any responses should be sent, "reply all"

Thank You,
Equestrian Coalition of Orange County
Est 1996

From: Bri Alvarez <Bri@beachcitiescb.com>
Sent: Monday, December 11, 2023 10:06 AM
To: eq.coalition@gmail.com
Subject: Support of EQC
Importance: High

Good morning

I am writing to the OC Fair Board in hopes they keep the Equestrian Center at the fairgrounds. I grew up showing at the fairgrounds and it was a wonderful experience. Currently I board in San Juan Capistrano however I know that equestrian facilities are closing and places to keep horses have drastically reduced. We have such limited places to keep these animals that are not only loved by their owners, but they are also loved by friends, family and the community. Children, veterans, special needs, etc all come together, and horses provide much needed therapy to everyone who comes in contact with them. Losing the facility will be a tremendous loss for the community. Please reconsider and keep the equestrian facility. Spend time there and you will experience the incredible gift these animals provide us.

Bri Alvarez
VP of Administration
bri@beachcitiescb.com




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From: Michele Richards
Subject: FW: OC Fairgrounds Equestrian Center

From: eq.coalition@gmail.com <eq.coalition@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, December 11, 2023 11:52:36 PM
To: Nick Kovacevich <nkovacevich@ocfairboard.com>; Barbara Bagneris <bbagneris@ocfairboard.com>; Tanya Bilezikjian <tbilezikjian@ocfairboard.com>; Dimetria Jackson <djackson@ocfairboard.com>; Douglas La Belle <dlabelle@ocfairboard.com>; Newton Pham <npham@ocfairboard.com>; Natalie Rubalcava-Garcia <nrubalcava-garcia@ocfairboard.com>; Robert Ruiz <rruiz@ocfairboard.com>; MRichards@ocfair.com <MRichards@ocfair.com>
Cc: jenniferdawnhull@gmail.com <jenniferdawnhull@gmail.com>
Subject: FW: OC Fairgrounds Equestrian Center

Please find fw letter from member of local community, confirming that the equestrian center is a public benefit to the entire surrounding community.

Please send any responses "reply all" to include original sender.

Sincerely,
Equestrian Coalition of Orange County
Est. 1996

From: Jennifer Hull <jenniferdawnhull@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, December 11, 2023 10:40 AM
To: eq.coalition@gmail.com
Subject: OC Fairgrounds Equestrian Center
Importance: High

I am trying to rearrange my schedule to be able to make this meeting, but I wanted to email, just in case I cannot.

The equestrian center at the OC Fairgrounds is a huge public benefit. There are so few places left in Orange County, especially in the super urban parts of the county, that have horses. After the loss of Rancho Del Rio in Anaheim, it is the only public horse facility in central county. The equestrian center offers kids and adults the ability to be around animals that they may never get to see. Multiple trainers offer riding programs for 'horse crazy' kids and adults, which is absolutely amazing! OC Vaulting offers the only vaulting program in Orange County and teaches so much more than just 'dancing with horses'.

The fun-days that have been able to happen since post pandemic have been so much fun! The most recent halloween costume parade and exhibition was a blast. It was so much fun to see the community gather at the Equestrian center to see how much fun we have with our hooved family!

My daughter is a former member the OC Vaulting team, and I am a current volunteer. We learned about OC Vaulting at Imaginology and signed up for their recreational class. (Which is the only one in Orange County.) She fell in love with it. The mix of gymnastics and horses made her happy. (If you have met many 16 year olds, you'll know that not much does that these days....) She worked hard and advanced to the competition team. When I say that these kids pour their hearts and souls into these horses, I'm not exaggerating. They come early to set up feed for their horses and groom and tack them up for classes. Many of these kids are at the center 3 or 4 days a week to care for the horses.

And then there are the adults. My daughter has since moved on from vaulting, but I stayed. We have other adults that either had kids in the program or that just wanted to be around horses. They learn to lunge for classes and competitions and they keep the vaulting horses fit and happy between classes. As an adult volunteer, I get as much out of these animals as the kids do, if not more.

I grew up here in Orange County. I love it here. I love that we have this option of having horse-life in the middle of our cities. There is so much more that could be done to make this center even better, if you would just give it a chance.

Thank you for your time,
Jenn Hull

From: eq.coalition@gmail.com
Sent: Monday, December 11, 2023 9:43 PM
To: nkovacevich@ocfairboard.com; bbagneris@ocfairboard.com; tbilezikjian@ocfairboard.com; djackson@ocfairboard.com; dlabelle@ocfairboard.com; npham@ocfairboard.com; nrubalcava-garcia@ocfairboard.com; rruiz@ocfairboard.com; Michele Richards
Cc: 'Tom Ropel'
Subject: FW: OC Fair Stables Public Benefit - [Questionable]

Importance: High

Please find attached letter from member of the public. Any responses should be "reply all".

Thank You,
Equestrian Coalition of Orange County
Est. 1996

From: Tom Ropel <tom.ropel.3@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, December 11, 2023 9:30 AM
To: eq.coalition@gmail.com
Subject: OC Fair Stables Public Benefit
Importance: High

Dear Orange County Fair Board,

I hope this letter finds you in good health and high spirits. My name is Thomas Ropel, and I am writing to you as a concerned member of our community regarding an important matter that holds sentimental and practical significance to many residents in Orange County.

It has come to my attention that there may be discussions about the potential removal or restructuring of the horse stables on the fairgrounds. I understand that decisions regarding the fairgrounds must consider various factors, and I appreciate the effort invested in enhancing the overall fair experience for the community. However, I would like to express my sincere plea to retain the horse stables on the fairgrounds for the following reasons:

The horse stables have been an integral part of the Orange County Fair for many years, contributing to the fair's rich tradition and cultural heritage. They serve as a reminder of our agricultural roots and provide a unique and educational experience for fairgoers. The horse stables offer an excellent opportunity for educational programs and activities. They provide a hands-on learning experience for visitors, especially children, allowing them to gain insights into horsemanship, animal care, and agriculture. This aligns with the fair's mission to promote education and awareness in our community.

The horse stables foster a sense of community and connection among horse enthusiasts. They serve as a gathering place for individuals who share a passion for equestrian activities, creating a supportive network within our community. The stables play a vital role in supporting local equestrian events and competitions, providing recreational opportunities for riders and spectators alike. Retaining the horse stables ensures that

Orange County continues to be a hub for equestrian activities, benefiting both participants and the local economy.

Lastly, Equine therapy has proven to be a transformative and healing experience for veterans and victims of domestic violence alike. The unique bond formed between individuals and horses provides a non-judgmental and empathetic environment, fostering emotional expression and trust. For veterans grappling with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), equine therapy offers a holistic approach to healing, addressing both physical and emotional challenges. Similarly, victims of domestic violence find solace and empowerment through the therapeutic connection with horses, helping them rebuild confidence and overcome trauma. The rhythmic and calming nature of horse interactions contributes to reduced anxiety and increased self-esteem, making equine therapy a valuable and effective tool in the recovery journey for these individuals.

I understand that changes may be necessary to accommodate the evolving needs of the community, and I trust that the fair board will carefully consider the impact of any decisions on longstanding traditions and the well-being of our community.

Thank you for your time and attention to this matter. I sincerely hope that the Orange County Fair will continue to be a place that preserves its heritage while adapting to the changing times.

Best Regards,

Dr. Thomas Ropel

Professor of Criminal Justice

Vanguard University

55 Fair Drive, Costa Mesa, CA

From: Michele Richards
Subject: FW: Letter in support of public benefit of Equestrian Center
Attachments: C Beaver 12 12 23 Letter to the Orange County Fair Board.pdf

Begin forwarded message:

From: Douglas La Belle <dlabelle@ocfairboard.com>
Date: December 13, 2023 at 10:15:31 AM PST
To: mauidoug3@hotmail.com
Subject: Fwd: Letter in support of public benefit of Equestrian Center

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From: carolynbeaver1@gmail.com <carolynbeaver1@gmail.com>
Sent: Tuesday, December 12, 2023 1:18:30 PM
To: Newton Pham <npham@ocfairboard.com>; Nick Kovacevich <nkovacevich@ocfairboard.com>; Barbara Bagneris <bbagneris@ocfairboard.com>; Douglas La Belle <dlabelle@ocfairboard.com>; Dimetria Jackson <djackson@ocfairboard.com>; Natalie Rubalcava-Garcia <nrubalcava-garcia@ocfairboard.com>; Robert Ruiz <rruiz@ocfairboard.com>; Tanya Bilezikjian <tbilezikjian@ocfairboard.com>
Subject: Letter in support of public benefit of Equestrian Center

December 12, 2023

To the Orange County Fairgrounds Board

Dear Board Member:

I have spoken at many meetings, written a number of letters to you over the past few years and heard many people speak to the Board about the benefits of horses to them or their children. I am once again astonished that the question of the public benefit of the Equestrian Center at the Fairgrounds (EQC) is even up for discussion.

There are fewer and fewer places in Orange County which can accommodate the need for space for horses. Equestrians are athletes, recognized as Olympic sports in various equestrian disciplines, and require space as do other sports such as football, baseball, soccer and other sports which are commonly made available to the public. It so happens that equestrian sports tend to be predominated by female athletes at the early levels, which includes beginner level and up through various competitive levels, who participate at the EQC.

The mission of the 32nd DAA is: "Creating equitable community access to agriculture, entertainment, cultural and educational experiences". The EQC provides such access through the ability of the public to board horses, and for the public to take lessons from trainers who provide lessons on the horses that the trainers or others own. Here is the plaque honoring the Board members who had the vision to create the Equestrian Center when the existing site was first opened in 1979.

ORANGE COUNTY FAIR & EXPOSITION CENTER
32ND DISTRICT AGRICULTURAL ASSOCIATION

EQUESTRIAN CENTER

INCREMENT I - COMPLETED DECEMBER, 1979

INCREMENT II - COMPLETED FEBRUARY, 1982

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CHAIRMAN - BUILDINGS & GROUNDS COMMITTEE

KENNETH R. FULK, GENERAL MANAGER

JOHN B. BURKE, ASSISTANT MANAGER

DEDICATED: JULY 9, 1987

The connection to horses is indeed magical and therapeutic to many who have made that connection. Some choose to become dedicated equestrians, others enjoy it for a time and move to other passions. All benefit from learning to ride, from the feeling of controlling an animal many times the size of the person, and from experiencing the movement of the horse, which itself has therapeutic benefits for many, both mentally, emotionally and physically. The benefits to individuals increase as a child or an adult becomes immersed in becoming an equestrian. The immersive experience reaches deep into the soul of a person; it is far more than a brief encounter with a horse that one has by just observing or touching a horse.

Since the Covid pandemic, there has been an increase in the number of people wanting to take lessons, to connect with horses, to find ways to get their children outdoors and experience the joy of horses. The many lesson and camp programs available at the EQC have been invaluable to these families. The impact of each encounter may be far greater than you imagine.

As a little girl, I watched horses being ridden from the stables down my street, and I went to see them every day. I begged my parents for a horse, and finally got one when I was 11 years old. That horse kept me out of trouble in high school, and motivated me to pursue a career where I could afford a horse. After a 20 year break in riding, I started

riding again by taking lessons here at the EQC over 11 years ago. My own fitness level has improved, while I have also enjoyed watching children learn to ride and become confident young adults.

Since the Fairgrounds have taken over management of the EQC, management has made choices to:

- Engage in a contract resulting in a loss of approximately \$100K per month, with Board approval at the outset despite the objection of equestrians before the contract was entered into;
- Reduced public access by providing signage which discourages public participation;
- Reduced public access by its lack of promotion and by its emphasis on “private boarders and training”, while not acknowledging the public’s ability to obtain lessons from multiple trainers at the EQC; and
- Discouraged people who called to enquire about boarding, as reported to the Board in previous meetings.

Furthermore, the Fairgrounds management has not fulfilled its commitments to public programming (other than boarding) as set forth in its strategic plan. In fact, there has been no other discernible public programming offered by the OCFEC staff during its management of the EQC in 2023. The trainers and boarders have offered public programming in the form of lessons, docent tours, horse shows, Halloween parade, our Changing Strides programs including lessons for foster youth and other disadvantaged youth, and many other programs, and continue to kindly welcome visitors to the EQC.

As equestrians, we wish to continue to support public access and welcome opportunities to support the community in ways that are safe for the community and our horses.

Please seek an operator who can provide the level of service to the Orange County community which supports the needs of equestrians and the community at large. Respect and maintain the vision of previous board members, whose vision is **STILL** appropriate for the community today.

Best regards,

Carolyn Beaver

From: Leigh-Ann Kazolas <kazwomanlb@gmail.com>
Sent: Tuesday, December 12, 2023 11:31 AM
To: npham@ocfairboard.com; nkovacevich@ocfairboard.com; bbagneris@ocfairboard.com; tbilezikjian@ocfairboard.com; djackson@ocfairboard.com; dlabelle@ocfairboard.com; nrubalcava-garcia@ocfairboard.com; rruiz@ocfairboard.com
Cc: Michele Richards; Summer Angus
Subject: Letter regarding Agenda Item 8-B December 14th Board Meeting
Attachments: LettertotheBoardDec122023.pdf

Dear OC Fairgrounds Board of Directors,

Please find attached a letter on behalf of the Equestrian Center Task Force regarding Agenda Item 8-B and the Equestrian Center.

Thank you for your consideration and time,
Leigh-Ann Kazolas

December 12th, 2023

Dear OC Fairgrounds Board Members,

It is deeply frustrating that the public must once again explain to you all the clear public benefit of the Equestrian Center. Since 2018 and for hours and hours of public comment since, countless individuals have shared firsthand accounts of the positive impact gained at the Equestrian Center and with horses – those that board there, take lessons, have attended public events, participated in free public programs, or simply enjoy having this unique and amazing facility in the community you serve. We ask ourselves; how many more hours of public comment and heartfelt testimonials are required before you will realize the overwhelming public support for this vital resource?

You have received letters from many local governments, public agencies and most recently, Supervisor Katrina Foley. They unanimously support and extol the public benefit the OC Fairgrounds Equestrian Center provides to the community. While you as Board members may hold differing opinions about horses and equestrian centers, it is your duty to listen to and serve the public and to actively listen to the needs and perspectives of the community. The public thinks it is an important public asset. Local governments and politicians think it is. Why is it that OCFEC leadership are the only ones that don't seem to get it?

With privately owned Equestrian Centers being sold to real-estate developers, the responsibility falls on public entities to preserve these vital resources. Your mission statement clearly outlines your commitment to preserve access to agriculture and the Equestrian Center sits at the heart of that mission. There are strong cultural heritage ties to horses within the diverse communities in Orange County – from Black cowboy history to the significance of horses in the Chicano community. Imagine adding in riding programs like the Compton Cowboys or having an Escaramuza Charra group practicing in the arena while the vaulters and Pony Clubbers are working hard on their horsemanship goals. The Equestrian Center has so much unrealized potential to truly serve the public in a variety of impactful ways alongside the benefits it already provides. Why isn't OCFEC leadership interested in helping the Equestrian Center realize its full public potential?

As for Gifts of Public Funds concerns, across the United States, numerous public equestrian centers are built, maintained, and operated with public funds. These centers are not expected to be profit-driven entities, but rather valuable community resources providing benefits beyond financial gain. None of them are violating "Gift of Public Funds" laws. LA County government recently rebuilt and revitalized Whittier Narrows equestrian center that has boarders and trainers and is open to the public. The \$13M investment of taxpayer dollars was made without the expectation of immediate financial return, as the County recognizes the center's value to the community. (please click on link to watch video https://youtu.be/1EsN88_2SeA). Additionally, according to the 2021 OCFEC Equestrian Center conducted by Doug Lofstrom: "It is customary practice at public equestrian centers NOT to charge trainers a fee for their business operation since trainer businesses assists filling stalls for boarding which benefits the public agency".

Regarding “maximum public benefit”, the current metric leadership is using seems to prioritize short-term educational experiences and sheer numbers of visitors. While serving hundreds of thousands of residents annually through site visits is undoubtedly impressive, it fails to capture the deeper impact the Equestrian Center has on many individuals.

Instead of focusing solely on breadth, please consider the depth of impact. The Center currently averages 75,000 public visits annually, and for a significant portion of those visitors, the experience is transformative. In a 2018 public workshop, the Equestrian Center was ranked the most important and impactful public asset on the property. You have all recently heard the parents of neurodivergent children testify to the miraculous changes in their kids' lives thanks to the Equestrian Center's programs. While educating young people about the origins of their food is important, the depth of impact on individuals like these cannot be ignored. Both breadth and depth are crucial for maximizing public benefit, and the Equestrian Center has the space and resources to accommodate both.

Therefore, we urge the Board to continue the RFP process, make room in the budget for the deferred maintenance, capital improvements, and program enhancements and publicly recognize the Equestrian Center as a valuable public asset serving a critical public purpose. Its unique ability to provide transformative experiences for individuals of all backgrounds makes it a vital resource for Orange County.

Sincerely,
Leigh-Ann Kazolas
per the Equestrian Center Task Force

From: Michele Richards
Subject: FW: OC Fairgrounds Equestrian Center

Begin forwarded message:

From: Lisa Kingston <lkington55@hotmail.com>
Sent: Tuesday, December 12, 2023 11:57:03 AM
To: Nick Kovacevich <nkovacevich@ocfairboard.com>; Barbara Bagneris <bbagneris@ocfairboard.com>; Tanya Bilezikjian <tbilezikjian@ocfairboard.com>; Dimetria Jackson <djackson@ocfairboard.com>; Douglas La Belle <dlabelle@ocfairboard.com>; Newton Pham <npham@ocfairboard.com>; Natalie Rubalcava-Garcia <nrubalcava-garcia@ocfairboard.com>; Robert Ruiz <rruiz@ocfairboard.com>; mrichards@ocfair.com <mrichards@ocfair.com>
Subject: OC Fairgrounds Equestrian Center

Hello all,

I just read that you're considering demolishing the equestrian center.

I respectfully ask that you reconsider this. People connect with horses in a unique and irreplaceable way. So many young, developing people can establish a bond and sense of trust with horses that they cannot with other people. Whether child, teen, or adult, interaction with horses develops confidence and self-sufficiency that cannot be developed at home, in school, or as a member of a sports team.

I know this to be true - I started riding when I was 2 years old. As a child, I was neglected and abused and the horses provided sanctuary and a sense of sanity. Without them I don't know where I'd be today. I boarded my horse at the center years ago, and now just how few options there are in Orange County now.

I read claims that the center is not profitable, and is losing money. I've also read that this is due to mis-management, and can be easily corrected.

Think of all the social problems people face today - If you demolish the equestrian center, you will have eliminated a very positive environment for many. We need more places people can go to 'unplug' and reconnect in a healthy environment.

Best regards,
Lisa Kingston

From: danielle slutzky <lawzky@hotmail.com>
Sent: Wednesday, December 13, 2023 7:28 PM
Subject: OC Fairgrounds Equestrian Center - [Questionable]

Dear Orange County Fair Board Member,

I am writing as a Newport Mesa resident, having been brought up horseback riding at the Orange County Fairgrounds Equestrian Center since 1981. The time spent at the OC Fairgrounds Equestrian Center in my youth was one of the most memorable, communal, and special times in my life. With continued development, urban sprawl, and loss of many of our equestrian centers in Orange County, it's heartbreaking to know that the OC Fair Equestrian Center will potentially be suffering the same fate as so many others. There is a very special and unique community inside the gates, for horse owners, riders, workers, and equine staff. To say that the equestrian center does not benefit the public is simply not true. Preserving Orange County's horse culture and history is at stake here, as well as providing many OC residents with steady jobs, and contributing to the overall health and wellness of communities that reach outside of the gates. Additionally, the OC Fairgrounds Equestrian Center is one of the only remaining locations in Orange County where we can safely evacuate horses that are boarded in locations that have high risk of annual fire dangers, such as Irvine, Trabuco and Silverado Canyons. I hope you will consider the importance of keeping the Orange County Fairgrounds Equestrian Center intact for future generations of Orange County families and the horses they steward as well.

Thank you for your consideration,

Danielle Slutzky
[REDACTED]

From: Dennis Geiler <Denny@poloproperties.com>
Sent: Wednesday, December 13, 2023 9:49 AM
To: nkovacevich@ocfairboard.com; bbagneris@ocfairboard.com;
tbilezikjian@ocfairboard.com; djackson@ocfairboard.com; dlabelle@ocfairboard.com;
npham@ocfairboard.com; nrubalcava-garcia@ocfairboard.com; rruiz@ocfairboard.com;
Michele Richards
Subject: Fair Grounds Equestrian Center

Dear Board Members,

Thank you for the job you are doing on the Fair Board. I know it is a complex business with many issues that are difficult to resolve.

I'm writing to you today about the Equestrian Center at the Fair Complex. I'm sure you will get messages about the importance of maintaining the equestrian history of our county.

I think the most important issue is the training that our children receive by owning a horse. It teaches them the responsibility of owning and caring for an animal. The partnership that a young rider experiences with a good ride with their horse is so important about learning partnerships and building confidence. You can't go forward unless there is a good partnership between the horse and rider. They only learn this by doing it.

It seems that everything our children do today is controlled by adults.

At the equestrian center there is adult supervision but there is so much more a child must do on their own. They must tack up the horse. They must ride the horse. When they are through, they clean the horse, be sure they have water, put the saddle and bridle away, return the horse to its stall and be sure there is food there and many more things. This is where the child learns responsibility.

All the after-school team sports cannot replace the responsibility a child learns by owning and taking care of a horse.

Please do not take that opportunity away from our children.

Sincerely,

Denny Geiler

From: Erin Moncure <erinneko@gmail.com>
Sent: Wednesday, December 13, 2023 12:29 PM
To: nkovacevich@ocfairboard.com; bbagneris@ocfairboard.com;
tbilezikjian@ocfairboard.com; djackson@ocfairboard.com; dlabelle@ocfairboard.com;
npham@ocfairboard.com; nrubalcava-garcia@ocfairboard.com; rruiz@ocfairboard.com;
Michele Richards
Subject: EQC & the public benefits

Hello board members,

I'm writing today after hearing distressing news regarding the potential destruction of the EQC. It is shortsighted and simply incorrect to purport the stables only benefit the horse owners.

The equestrian center has always made their events available to the public and I personally have attended several shows and clinics, not because I'm directly involved in our horse culture, but because it's such a special part of Orange County. I've always felt lucky to have access to these events and Orange County is the only place I've lived where I would associate the equestrian lifestyle with the authentic spirit of the community.

I think we all know how beneficial horses are to the human experience. Whether it be mental or physical health, their ability to strengthen and heal is endless. I could list countless examples but I'll just mention one: a very close friend and young person has found success in her sobriety through horse care. She may not be here today without the sense of purpose she found through riding, and for me that's reason enough to preserve the EQC.

From a business standpoint, the multitude of jobs provided at the stables equate to more consumers in the area. The horse trainers, maintenance crew members, stall cleaners and feeders, vets and riders all spend money in the community. They help the community thrive. I also worry about these same people. What will they do if their jobs are eliminated? Where will the horses go if their homes are destroyed?

I'm a Nebraska native. We have a rich history of agriculture, but horses have never been a big part of that. I lived in Los Angeles for 20 years and in no way does the city feel like a horse haven. Orange County is the only place I've called home that has a true equestrian quality. It's part of our culture, and that's something to celebrate and take pride in. It's unique. Please don't ruin that by destroying the center. You have something very special in the EQC and I hope my thoughts have helped you see that a little more clearly.

Thank you so much for reading,

Erin Moncure

Lake Forest resident

From: Evelyn Nichka <evelynnichka@gmail.com>
Sent: Wednesday, December 13, 2023 10:49 AM
To: nkovacevich@ocfairboard.com; bbagneris@ocfairboard.com;
tbilezikjian@ocfairboard.com; djackson@ocfairboard.com; dlabelle@ocfairboard.com;
npham@ocfairboard.com; nrubalcava-garcia@ocfairboard.com; rruiz@ocfairboard.com;
Michele Richards
Subject: I strongly urge Orange County Fairgrounds to maintain and keep the Equestrian Center open for horses and their owners.

Dear Orange County Fair Board,

I am writing this email to let you know I strongly oppose closing the Equestrian Center at the Orange County Fairgrounds. I have lived in Orange County since 1987. I have owned a horse for the last 17 years. I have considered moving my horse to the Orange County Fairgrounds as I live on Victoria Street, only a mile away from the fairgrounds. There are many reasons to keep this facility open to equestrians. Giving people of all ages access to owning, leasing, or taking lessons with horses is a vitally important piece of happiness to many citizens of Orange County. I'm sure if somebody did the research, you would find many thousands of Orange County citizens reaping the benefits of the Equestrian Center over the years. Horsemanship allows people of all ages to develop important life skills, including building confidence and leadership. Another important aspect of the Orange County equestrian center is to provide a place to evacuate horses in an emergency. I was in need of such an evacuation when I used to board my horse in Trabuco Canyon during one of the fires. My horse was evacuated to San Juan Capistrano. However, there were some horses that were evacuated to the Orange County Fairgrounds. If this facility gets closed, there will be even fewer places to take horses in an emergency.

Allowing horses to remain at the fairgrounds will give adults and children the continued opportunity to build relationships with horses. Please do not discriminate against horse owners. Yes, I know there aren't as many of us. We need your help to maintain as many equestrian facilities in Orange County as possible.

Sincerely,

Evelyn Nichka
Evelynnichka@gmail.com

From: Heather Perkins <Heather@ocpolo.com>
Sent: Wednesday, December 13, 2023 8:58 AM
To: nkovacevich@ocfairboard.com; bbagneris@ocfairboard.com;
tbilezikjian@ocfairboard.com; djackson@ocfairboard.com; dlabelle@ocfairboard.com;
npham@ocfairboard.com; nrubalcava-garcia@ocfairboard.com; rruiz@ocfairboard.com;
Michele Richards
Cc: eq.coalition@gmail.com
Subject: OC Fairgrounds Stables

Good morning:

I am writing in support of keeping the stables at the OC Fairgrounds OPEN. Growing up in Huntington Beach in a non horse owing family, I appreciated the opportunities to visit a public stables and foster my lifelong love of horses. As real estate values in our arena continue to climb the reality of being able to rely on private landowners to share their facilities with the public for equestrian use continues to diminish. I run a private equestrian facility and wish we had the ability to share more with the public, however due to the rising cost and liability we are limited in that opportunity.

If not for public facilities such as the Equestrian center at the Fairgrounds there would be countless OC residents losing their only potential access to horses which would be a significant loss to the community.

In addition, the OC Fairgrounds Eq Center is one of the last remaining facilities in the county that is able to accept horses in case of emergency. We lost Rancho Del Rio last year (to become a parking lot) and the community cannot afford to lose another equine evacuation location. The county does not need another parking lot or campground. It needs to continue to support opportunities for the public to experience horses in a way that ensures community growth through future generations.

Sincerely,

Heather Perkins
Orange County Polo Club
27271 Silverado Canyon Rd.
Silverado | CA 92676
m 714.791.8369 | heather@ocpolo.com
[Instagram](#) | [Facebook](#)

From: Michele Richards
Subject: FW: The OC Fair & Event Center Equestrian Center

From: irene lifewriters.com <irene@lifewriters.com>
Sent: Wednesday, December 13, 2023 9:47:39 AM
To: Douglas La Belle <dlabelle@ocfairboard.com>
Subject: The OC Fair & Event Center Equestrian Center

December 12, 2023

Dear Orange County Fair and Event Center Board Member,

It has come to my attention that this board is advocating for a complete shutdown of the Equestrian Center located on the OC Fair and Event Center. Such a move would, in my opinion, be a huge disservice to the Orange County community and a tragic loss of recreational opportunity to local residents.

It appears that financial loss is one of the points being made for closing the facility. The fairgrounds is a community asset as are parks, including dog parks and other recreational outlets that are valued for the quality of life offered to those that frequent them. They are not expected to "carry their weight" financially. And if they do generate revenue from athletics and other means, it is surely not a requirement for their existence.

I moved to Costa Mesa from a more rural setting in the San Juaquin Valley in 1968. As a child that had access to horses throughout my childhood, the fairgrounds provided a lifeline for me. My family never had the means for me to formally be involved in equestrian activities, but I was able to go to the fairgrounds stables and at least be in the company of horses, which was enough to bridge the gap of the loss I had felt. It's a misnomer to think that only those participating in riding and training are enriched by the existence of the Equestrian Center.

For many underprivileged or physically challenged children that partake in equine-oriented activities at the fairgrounds, the therapeutic benefits therein cannot be reproduced from any other method, nor the value therein calculated. *It is simply irreplaceable.*

Many other state or county owned fairgrounds across California view the equestrian community as a vital asset. They provide designated land on their grounds for housing horses and promote equestrian activities and events.

Since Costa Mesa and the surrounding cities from which community members come to the Equestrian Center have been essentially built out over any remaining open land, equestrian access and activities for most all

living in proximity to and seeking this recreational outlet falls to this invaluable facility. Given the loss of nearly all other horse stables that were once thriving in the Costa Mesa/Newport Beach/Huntington Beach/Fountain Valley/Santa Ana vicinity, there is no other facility to house the horses currently existing at the fairgrounds. Losing the Equestrian Center would essentially render access to equestrian activities in this immediate region into the history books.

Please do not remove forever an irreplaceable and essential outlet for this community.

Please *find a way* to continue operating the Equestrian Center at the OC Fairgrounds and Events Center.

Respectfully,

Irene Dunlap

From: Jillian <jillian@surfandturftherapy.org>
Sent: Wednesday, December 13, 2023 11:48 PM
To: nkovacevich@ocfairboard.com; bbagneris@ocfairboard.com;
tbilezikjian@ocfairboard.com; djackson@ocfairboard.com; dlabelle@ocfairboard.com;
npham@ocfairboard.com; nrubalcava-garcia@ocfairboard.com; rruiz@ocfairboard.com;
Michele Richards
Subject: Recognizing the Importance of Horses in Orange County
Attachments: Fairground Letter.pdf

Dear OC Fair Board Members –

Please see my attached letter in support of the equestrian facilities at the OC Fairgrounds. I am happy to discuss anything further or provided referenced literature if you would like, please just let me know.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Jillian

Jillian Stewart, PT, DPT, HPCS

Founder | Executive Director

(949) 312-7227

jillian@surfandturftherapy.org

www.surfandturftherapy.org





31441 Avenida De La Vista
San Juan Capistrano, CA 92675
info@surfandturftreatment.org
(949) 312-7227

Dear Members of the Orange County Fair Board,

I hope this letter finds you well. My name is Dr. Jillian Stewart, and I am writing to share my perspective as both the Executive Director of Surf & Turf Therapy and a seasoned horse owner for nearly 30 years.

While my work with hippotherapy has allowed me to witness firsthand the transformative impact of equine-assisted activities on individuals facing various challenges, I am writing primarily to emphasize the broader significance of horses in Orange County.

As you may be aware, horses have played a crucial role in human development throughout history. Studies have consistently shown the positive impact of equine-assisted activities on cognitive, emotional, and social well-being. The unique connection between humans and horses, known as equine therapy, has been widely recognized for its therapeutic benefits. I encourage you to explore relevant literature, which underscores the positive effects of equine interactions on personal development, such as improvements in youths' self-esteem, confidence, social behaviors, school grades and standardized test scores, for individuals from all backgrounds.

Public stables, such as those offered by the Orange County Fairgrounds, play a vital role in providing opportunities for both horse owners and non-owners to engage with these magnificent animals, allowing opportunity for all to experience the proven benefits. The availability of traditional riding lessons and unique programs, like the OC Vaulting program, not only promotes physical fitness but also fosters a sense of community and connection.

In times of crisis, such as wildfires, having a central evacuation site is of utmost importance. The Orange County Fairgrounds, with its expansive facilities, serves as a vital evacuation site for surrounding areas. Ensuring the safety of both residents and their animals during emergencies is a critical community service that cannot be overstated.

In conclusion, I urge the Orange County Fair Board to recognize and continue supporting initiatives that celebrate the role of horses in our community. I have witnessed the positive impact of equine interactions on personal development and community well-being. We cannot lose this important piece of our community for future generations.

Thank you for your time and consideration. Your continued support will contribute to sustaining the positive impact of equine-related activities and services in Orange County.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "J. Stewart".

Dr. Jillian Stewart, PT, DPT, HPCS
Founder | Executive Director

From: jim.w.staggs@cox.net
Sent: Wednesday, December 13, 2023 7:18 AM
To: nkovacevich@ocfairboard.com; bbagneris@ocfairboard.com; tbilezikjian@ocfairboard.com; djackson@ocfairboard.com; dlabelle@ocfairboard.com; npham@ocfairboard.com; nrubalcava-garcia@ocfairboard.com; rruiz@ocfairboard.com; Michele Richards
Cc: eq.coalition@gmail.com; ponymom10@cox.net
Subject: Discussions of closure of equestrian center at OC pairgrounds

I respectfully submit this message to you at a challenging time, wherein the future and fate of the OC Fair Equestrian Center lies in your hands.

I am a 40 year resident of Orange County and appreciate the quality of life with many amenities in this area. Part of our family are our horses.

The equestrian life has been an important part of the character of Orange County with cities and areas growing around the equestrian centers.

When looking at the activities that are supported by the county there are many areas that are important to the appreciation of the outdoors such as soccer fields, tennis courts, skate parks, human and dog parks.

I am perfectly fine paying taxes that support this wide range of facilities that enriches residents lives.

In the case of equestrian activities the majority of facilities are private however all of them are under increasing pressure.

There are also a significant number of people who are employed by equestrian activities as well.

It is important to support the remaining equestrian facilities in Orange County to allow people and horses enjoy a quality of life consistent with the vision of Orange County.

I appreciate your support to help maintain the character of Orange County.

Jim Staggs

Jim.w.staggs@cox.net

From: 2000EFNancy <nancyef2010@gmail.com>
Sent: Wednesday, December 13, 2023 10:38 AM
To: nkovacevich@ocfairboard.com; bbagneris@ocfairboard.com;
tbilezikjian@ocfairboard.com; djackson@ocfairboard.com; dlabelle@ocfairboard.com;
npham@ocfairboard.com; nrubalcava-garcia@ocfairboard.com; rruiz@ocfairboard.com;
Michele Richards
Subject: Canceling RFP process for OC Fairgrounds Equestrian Center

I wish to voice my STRONG opposition to the last minute, unannounced decision to stop the search for a new (better) operator for the Orange County Fairgrounds Equestrian Center. The remarks that the Equestrian Center does not provide enough public benefit is patently not true. Also inaccurate is the notion that only horse owners are receiving benefits from using the center.

The Equestrian Center fulfills a vital mission of the Fairgrounds charter to provide access to " community access to agriculture, entertainment, cultural and educational experiences" through several robust programs including boarding, lessons, training and therapy.

Highlighting the equine therapy program, Changing Strides, operates out of the Equestrian Center and serves veterans, battered women, adults with mental health challenges and at-risk youth through equine therapy. This vital therapy center not only benefits clients but the volunteers and assistants while fulfilling your mission to bring " community access to agriculture, entertainment, cultural and educational experiences." See <https://changingstrides.org/programs/>

I strongly urge you to start the search for a new (better) operator for the Equestrian Center. Do not throw away the baby with the bath water!

Thank you,
Nancy Reed
nancyef2010@gmail.com

serve veterans, battered women, adults with mental challenges, and at-risk youth in the urban setting of Orange County

From: Tom Rath <wrathoftom@gmail.com>
Sent: Wednesday, December 13, 2023 10:50 AM
To: nkovacevich@ocfairboard.com; bbagneris@ocfairboard.com;
tbilezikjian@ocfairboard.com; djackson@ocfairboard.com; dlabelle@ocfairboard.com;
npham@ocfairboard.com; nrubalcava-garcia@ocfairboard.com; rruiz@ocfairboard.com;
Michele Richards
Subject: OC Fairgrounds equestrian, Center and Staples

Please save our fairgrounds equestrian center and stables. This is one of the last few remaining in Orange County due to developers, pushing the rest out by big \$, Hook and crook. Please do not give in to the money.

Thomas Rath, long time ORANGE COUNTY, resident and supporter of equestrian center at the fairgrounds Sent from my iPhone

From: Brian Cummings <dr.brian.cummings@gmail.com>
Sent: Wednesday, December 13, 2023 10:29 PM
To: nkovacevich@ocfairboard.com; bbagneris@ocfairboard.com; tbilezikjian@ocfairboard.com; djackson@ocfairboard.com; dlabelle@ocfairboard.com; npham@ocfairboard.com; nrubalcava-garcia@ocfairboard.com; rruiz@ocfairboard.com; OCF Executive; Josh.Newman@sen.ca.gov
Subject: Item 8B. The \$13M County of Los Angeles Whitter Narrows Equestrian Center proves expenditure is NOT a gift of public funds.
Attachments: Whittier Equestrian Center Opens.mp4

Dear Chair Kovacevich and Members of the Board,

At the December 14th Board of Directors meeting, while speaking on item #8B, I intend to draw your attention to the County of Los Angeles's recent investment of \$13 million in public dollars to build the Whitter Narrows Public Equestrian Center. See the attached video or click the link to view online.

The Whitter facility, on county land, supports private owners and trainers in partnership with public access, public horse lessons, and outreach to youth groups.

Their situation is essentially identical to that of the OC Fairgrounds. The Board of Supervisors of the 1st District had no concerns about investing \$13M for the public benefit. Clearly, such use was evaluated and found NOT to be a "gift of public funds."

Knowing this should greatly simplify your decision on item #8B.

I'm looking forward to talking with you more if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Brian

Brian J. Cummings, Ph.D.
Associate Dean for Faculty Development (SOM Senate)
Professor, Physical Medicine & Rehabilitation
Neurological Surgery | Anatomy & Neurobiology
University of California,
Irvine, CA 92697-1705

(949) 584-3251 Cell



rr4---sn-a5mlrnll.googlevideo.com

1. *The central question is whether supporting an Equestrian Center on OC Fairground's property is a public good.*
2. The Board accepts a 700K deficit for Centennial Farms because they have determined that the public outreach and educational activities at the Farm justify the expense.
3. The Board accepts a 300K deficit for Hero's Hall because they have determined that veterans and students touring the museum justify the expense.
4. Over the past decade, the Equestrian Center has NEVER operated at a deficit - until staff took over in 2023 and triggered this public/private debate.
5. I want to play a short video on the recent opening of the Whitter Narrows Equestrian Center on public land in Los Angeles County. Play video or state - what you would have learned if I had been able to play the video is that...
6. Whitter is the largest public equestrian center in Los Angeles County, with 180 stalls. The all-new facilities, office, concessions, and lockers for private owner's tack were built by LA Parks and Recreation and the Department of Public Works with 13 Million in public funds.
7. The paradigm is the same as here: LA Parks does not own the horses, nor do they provide trail rides. They offer boarding and lesson programs under the *private trainers* that are there
8. Supervisor Hilda Solis of the 1st District was a strong supporter, was present at the opening, and was the spokesperson in the video.
9. *Why should you care about an Equestrian Facility in LA County?*
Why should you care about Supervisor Solis?
10. Because they speak to the central question - is spending public funds on an equestrian center a gift of public funds?
11. Supervisor Solis was a CA State Assembly member and then CA State Senator; she served as a CA Representative to Congress and then as Secretary of Labor in the Obama administration before being elected to the LA County Board of Supervisors for the 1st District in 2014.

12. If you are concerned that spending OC Fairgrounds funds on an Equestrian Center is a gift of public funds, you can be assured that Supervisor Solis and other members of the 1st District considered this same question and clearly showed that spending 13 million in public funds **was not** an illegal gift.
13. We call on the OC Fair Board of Directors to assert the same - that the Equestrian Center IS serving a public good and that the Equestrian Center is already offering public programs similar to those highlighted in Supervisor Solis's video.
14. We ask that the Board acknowledge that the Equestrian Center does NOT need to turn a profit - even though it **has** returned 100K per year in profits in 11 of the last 12 years.

From: eq.coalition@gmail.com
Sent: Wednesday, December 13, 2023 4:10 PM
To: nkovacevich@ocfairboard.com; bbagneris@ocfairboard.com; tbilezikjian@ocfairboard.com; djackson@ocfairboard.com; dlabelle@ocfairboard.com; npham@ocfairboard.com; nrubalcava-garcia@ocfairboard.com; rruiz@ocfairboard.com; Michele Richards
Cc: aloharanch@icloud.com
Subject: FW: Christine Slevcove

Importance: High

Dear Esteemed Board Members,
Please find forwarded letter of support from a local community member, testifying to the public benefit the equestrian center has to the entire community.
Please send any responses "reply all" to include original sender.
Thank You,
Equestrian Coalition of Orange County
Est. 1996

From: Christine Slevcove <aloharanch@icloud.com>
Sent: Monday, December 11, 2023 11:42 AM
To: eq.coalition@gmail.com
Subject: Christine Slevcove
Importance: High

Howdy, and thanks for reading this letter, I was from the corona Del Mar stables (also known as the Irvine Equestrian Center, when I move my horse to the Orange County Fairgrounds. And that was in the early 80s. No more riding on the beach, but the oc fairgrounds was the next best thing as a local cowgirl this is all we have.
And that has been great till another challenge came up many years ago and the OC Fairboard put this great stable into a tiny corner of the property. Cuz horses are part of the ocfairground land . And are supposed to be forever!
It's know that horses have always been in the planning and practice of this land from the start.
Many people benefit from horses such as myself a life of horses and a local cowgirl. I have been riding here for 55 plus years . My son with special needs, who needs this! Those with disabilities to mental health are helped with equine therapy, and just being around them. This is a scientific fact.
Horse people are loving and caring people for an American foundation and tradition.
Sent from my iPad
Blessing Christine Brestel Slevcove.
Born and raised in this town

From: beth gilovich <bethantiguahoa@gmail.com>
Sent: Thursday, December 14, 2023 1:08 PM
To: Michele Richards
Subject: Rights of stables, owners, public, and horses

Subject: Urgent Letter to Protect the Rights of Stables, Owners, and Horses

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing to express deep concern regarding the recent surprise agenda item proposing the cancellation of the current RFP process for securing a new operator and suggesting the demolition of the EQC (Equestrian Center) at the OC Fair.

It has come to our attention that there is a perception that the stables do not provide enough public benefit, with the assertion that only horse owners benefit and not the public at large. We believe this perspective overlooks how the EQC contributes to the community and the public.

The equestrian community is a vital part of our society, providing recreational and educational opportunities that extend beyond horse owners to the broader public. From riding lessons to therapeutic programs, the EQC serves as a valuable resource for individuals of all ages and backgrounds. Moreover, the cultural significance of preserving our equestrian heritage and open spaces cannot be overstated.

We respectfully urge the Fair Board to reconsider this proposal and recognize the substantial public benefit derived from the EQC. Demolishing the center would not only adversely affect the rights of stable owners but also deprive the public of a cherished resource.

We ask for transparency in decision-making and the inclusion of all stakeholders in discussions about the future of the EQC. Your support in preserving this valuable community asset is crucial for ensuring that the benefits of the equestrian center continue to reach both horse owners and the broader public.

Sincerely,

Beth Gilovich

A solid black rectangular box used to redact a handwritten signature.

From: Michele Richards
Subject: FW: Regarding Board Member Comment 12/14

Begin forwarded message:

From: erin simon <erinsimon22@gmail.com>
Date: December 14, 2023 at 2:22:47 PM PST
To: Barbara Bagneris <bbagneris@ocfairboard.com>
Subject: Regarding Board Member Comment 12/14

Board Member:

How insulting to insinuate that those of us who left the meeting today on 12/14, didn't immediately enter the zoom call because we were at capacity; people were not allowed inside unless we left and our children have school and naps. I wasn't even allowed to get the baby's bottle from the car, because I would be let back in. Glad you get to do your job and schedule when works best for you, and we don't get to do ours when you made a meeting at 9am on a Thursday morning.

Know that my 11 year old heard this from you. After listening for 5 hours. She is crying in the car, sick, scared from putting herself out there and upset that an adult has the audacity to shame her as a part of the public in attendance. She is currently saying "Your three minutes are up". Disgusting behavior from a board member.

Which manager of the equestrian center has equestrian experience? They are unavailable, they don't respond to calls, they don't manage it appropriately. I run a private facility and would never treat clients this way.

Incredibly disappointed in our elected officials behavior today,

Erin Simon
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
Sent from my iPhone

From: gailfayad@gmail.com
Sent: Thursday, December 14, 2023 7:26 AM
To: gailfayad@gmail.com
Cc: nkovacevich@ocfairboard.com; bbagneris@ocfairboard.com; tbilezikjian@ocfairboard.com; djackson@ocfairboard.com; dlabelle@ocfairboard.com; npham@ocfairboard.com; nrubalcava-garcia@ocfairboard.com; rruiz@ocfairboard.com; Michele Richards
Subject: OC FAIRGROUNDS EQUESTRIAN CENTER

I just received a notification that the Fairgrounds Board wants to close the Orange County Fairgrounds Equestrian Center. While I wish I could be there in person, I must speak up somehow. I once spoke before the San Juan Capistrano City Council Board in respect to keeping San Juan an Equestrian town. My opening line was “It seems we have been at these same crossroads way too many times!!” I guess I can add, “in way too many cities and in way too many states”. Horses are a great part of the history and landscape of this county and this state! Although you may think that it is just one stable in one city, that can multiply to many stables in many cities. It not only has served your Equestrians but in times of fires has also been the refuge of many horses from all over Southern California with nowhere else to go. **That is something to be proud of!** As for the fact that it doesn’t benefit enough of the Public, I don’t have any dogs or cats, but I would never want to shut down any animal facilities because I have none, nor would I want you to shut down any children’s facilities because I don’t have any young children. I encourage you to keep your Equestrian Center and, encourage your Equestrians to find extended uses of their facilities. Have events that introduce the public to your stables, let them enjoy what you do by having this Equestrian Center. We have continued to do that here in San Juan, with great success. Keep a part of your history, treasure the spirit and energy that every horse gives its rider and the joy that, somehow, every horse gives those in their company!

Sincerely,

Gail Fayad
San Juan Capistrano

Sent: Melissa Krawczyk <moolecular@yahoo.com>
To: Thursday, December 14, 2023 11:09 AM
nkovacevich@ocfairboard.com; bbagneris@ocfairboard.com;
tbilezikjian@ocfairboard.com; djackson@ocfairboard.com; dlabelle@ocfairboard.com;
npham@ocfairboard.com; nrubalcava-garcia@ocfairboard.com; rruiz@ocfairboard.com;
Michele Richards
Subject: PLEASE Don't close the Equestrian Center!

Dear OC Fairgrounds Board,

We have worked hard to find a way to give our children access to horses in Orange County. During the pandemic the connections they made with horses and trainers was invaluable for their mental and physical health- being outside, caring for intelligent and loving animals (they are much like dogs), spending long hours grooming and learning to care for horses and developing character and responsibility in addition to riding in lessons and learning to compete and show their skills in shows. So many horse areas have been closing, and owners are forced to move their horses out of our area. It's it's very expensive to own a horse and it's very hard to find a place to board them in our urban areas. We can't afford to own one so having access to places with public riding or even with privately owned barns that can afford to offer lessons because they're boarding fees are not skyrocketing.

Our daughter has been riding for 3 years now. Her father and I both had the great fortune to ride as young people and into adulthood, and her brother learned to ride during the pandemic too.

The barn we ride with has just moved to the OC Fairgrounds Equestrian Center location in order to be able to continue to offer lessons to children like my daughter. If if they are forced to leave our daughter will not be able to ride anymore and she will lose the connections she's built up over years.

We are begging you not to give up on finding a new operator. Instead of doing away with one of the only programs that allows Orange County kids and adults to have access to horses, please consider that marketing and events could completely revitalize the program and draw a significant amount of money for the fairgrounds and the county.

Please let our kids in our families and our neighbors continue to have access to some of the most majestic animals that we share our world with.

If this center closes, many of these horses will not have homes. Many of them will need to be sold because the owners can't leave and move to another county. The farther away the horses are from where people have to live and work the less attention and care these wonderful intelligent animals get.

Please reconsider and don't give up on the RFQ.

We are asking you to put your backing behind the equestrian center and keep this long running and historical program going long into the future.

Please.

Sincerely,

Melissa and Tom Krawczyk (children Laila and Tripp)



Laila and Bob on their last day before he moved to his new home at the Equestrian Center.

From: Leigh-Ann Kazolas <kazwomanlb@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, December 18, 2023 7:18 PM
To: npham@ocfairboard.com; nkovacevich@ocfairboard.com; bbagneris@ocfairboard.com; tbilezikjian@ocfairboard.com; djackson@ocfairboard.com; dlabelle@ocfairboard.com; nrubalcava-garcia@ocfairboard.com; rruiz@ocfairboard.com
Cc: Summer Angus; Michele Richards
Subject: Equestrian community concerns
Attachments: EquestrianConcernsDec14BoardMeeting.pdf

Good evening,

Please find attached a letter as a follow-up to the December 14th Board Meeting.

Thank you so much for your time and attention to this matter,
Leigh-Ann Kazolas

December 18th, 2023

Dear OC Fairgrounds Board of Directors,

Thank you so much for taking the time to hear all of the public comment about the Equestrian Center at Thursday's meeting. There definitely seemed to be some confusion, though, about why the public felt the urgent need to attend and submit comment regarding the tremendous public benefits of horses and the Equestrian Center, highlight the importance and impact of the current free, low-cost and for-fee public programming and to voice concerns about the future of the facility.

There was a real disconnect between the Meeting Agenda Item 8B as worded in the posted Agenda:

8B. Discussion Regarding the Development of Public Programming at the Equestrian Center and Vote on Next Steps: Action Item

AND the actual Staff notes posted about Agenda Item 8B on the website which stated the purpose of Item 8B to be:

“During the Board’s consideration, it must determine whether or not the equestrian center is currently being used for a public or private purpose. The following questions should be addressed:

1. Is the equestrian center currently serving a public purpose?
2. Is the District receiving adequate consideration for the expense of the equestrian center?

If from the discussion the Board determines the equestrian center is serving a public purpose, it can choose to continue funding the equestrian center operations at a loss or continue the current RFP process to identify a potential independent operator to alleviate the District’s financial losses as voted on by the Board at its September 2023 meeting.

If, however, from the discussion the Board determines the equestrian center is serving a private purpose using public funds, it can choose to either continue the current RFP process to identify an independent operator or direct staff to research and recommend how the property (7.5 acres) could be used to serve a public purpose and meet the Board’s expectations of “providing public programming to the maximum benefit of the public.”

https://s3.us-west-1.amazonaws.com/ocfair.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/08154226/23_12_Item8B_EQC_Public_Programming.pdf

This disconnect between the agenda title and separately-posted meeting notes caused alarm. It was not simply a discussion about developing and adding public programming as titled, but rather a decision that could potentially re-purpose the current 7.5-acre Equestrian Center footprint altogether. The language that “staff will research and recommend how the property (7.5 acres) could be used” does not imply that they will research and recommend how the current Equestrian Center could be used. This is especially of deep concern to the public given that the 7.5-acre Equestrian Center is NOT included in the current Master Site Plan.

The equestrian community, the public, community leaders and facility supporters are especially concerned and “on high alert” given that:

1. The District has doubts about the public purpose and public benefits of the Equestrian Center when its public purpose and benefits seem obvious to all the commenters (and supporters at large), and yet those doubts seem to be driving all important decision-making and legal opinions.
2. Staff did not develop any District-led public programming at the Equestrian Center this year because they were waiting to see if the Board would decide if the facility served a public purpose or not – but if Staff had worked on adding in robust public programming this year and encouraged public engagement, this issue of public purpose would not even be up for question.
3. As tax-paying members of the public who use/visit the public Equestrian Center, just as tax-payers who choose to use municipal, county or state public recreational facilities, there seems to be lingering confusion as to why the people who use the facility are not considered or referred to as members of the public.
4. There is deep uncertainty surrounding the future use of space given that the current EqC is NOT included in the Master Site Plan. Historically, Staff has only ever suggested turning the space into a parking lot/flexible paved space OR relocating the EqC somewhere else and shrinking it from 7.5-acres to one. There have been no other options considered to the best of our knowledge.
5. Just 3 short months ago, the Board was just one vote short of closing the facility for good
6. The RFP for a private operator that would bring up to 20 years of stability and investment to the facility was posted for bid on the same day as an agenda item that would (and did) reverse the board’s prior decision to bring stability and investment to the facility

Given the rapidly disappearing spaces for horses in urban areas, any hint of losing one more boarding stall or one more public lesson program or one more place for the public to interact with horses is cause for great community apprehension.

It is clear that both the Board and the Equestrian Center community (and its supporters at larger) are frustrated and neither side feels understood. For mutual understanding to happen, there needs to be two-way communication between us. We absolutely look forward to working together, in whatever forum you feel is most beneficial, to foster both mutual understanding and the development of an incredible public-serving model not only for the OC Fairgrounds Equestrian Center but for public equestrian centers everywhere.

Sincerely,
Leigh-Ann Kazolas
The Equestrian Center Task Force

From: Doug Labelle
Sent: Monday, December 25, 2023 10:17 AM
To: Michele Richards
Subject: Fwd: December 14th Fair Board Meeting

Sent from my iPad.

Begin forwarded message:

From: Douglas La Belle <dlabelle@ocfairboard.com>
Date: December 25, 2023 at 9:13:55 AM PST
Subject: Fwd: December 14th Fair Board Meeting

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From: Camryn Cummings <camryntac@gmail.com>
Sent: Sunday, December 24, 2023 7:28:47 PM
To: Nick Kovacevich <nkovacevich@ocfairboard.com>; Barbara Bagneris <bbagneris@ocfairboard.com>; Tanya Bilezikjian <tbilezikjian@ocfairboard.com>; Dimetria Jackson <djackson@ocfairboard.com>; Douglas La Belle <dlabelle@ocfairboard.com>; Newton Pham <npham@ocfairboard.com>; Natalie Rubalcava-Garcia <nrubalcava-garcia@ocfairboard.com>; Robert Ruiz <rruiz@ocfairboard.com>
Cc: Camryn Cummings <camryntac@gmail.com>
Subject: December 14th Fair Board Meeting

To the members of the OCF Board,

I apologize for sending this Christmas Eve, with finals week last week this got stuck in my outbox.

My name is Camryn Cummings, and I am currently a senior at University High School.

As a person who took a majority of my day away from school to attend the December 14th Fair Board meeting I was furious when I heard Board Member LaBelle criticize a number of people for leaving early after making their statements. To so blatantly minimize the sacrifice of so many people who took the day off of work to attend a PUBLIC meeting that took place in the middle of the work day is quite frankly abhorrent.

Yesterday, I skipped half of my school day right before finals week in order to attend. I left after being there for 5 hours to be at a mandatory physics lab. To suggest that this was a lack of commitment on my part conveys an appalling lack of awareness.

Now, this is only me. A high school student. Can you imagine the sacrifice from people who took time off and actual job to attend?

I hope you put more thoughts into your board decisions than that comment.

CAPITOL OFFICE
1021 O STREET
SUITE 6520
SACRAMENTO, CA 95814
(916) 651-4029

DISTRICT OFFICE
203 N. HARBOR BLVD.
FULLERTON, CA 92832
(714) 525-2342



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AMENDMENTS
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COMMUNICATIONS
TRANSPORTATION
JOINT COMMITTEE ON RULES

December 13, 2023

Board of Directors
Orange County Fair and Event Center (OCFEC)
88 Fair Drive
Costa Mesa, CA 92626

RE: Agenda Item 8B – SUPPORT for the OC Equestrian Center, Serving a Public Purpose

Dear Chair Kovacevich and Members of the OCFEC Board:

I am writing in strong support of the Orange County Fairgrounds Equestrian Center. The Equestrian Center, which unquestionably serves a public purpose, has firmly established itself as an invaluable asset and resource for a wide range of groups. Just last weekend, the Center hosted a group of foster youth from Olive Crest who enjoyed the opportunity to ride horses, many for the first time.

Under the prior operator, the Equestrian Center had docent-led tours; no-cost horsemanship classes; educational field trips for schools and pre-schools hosted by on-site trainers at no cost to the schools; equine therapy for veterans, at-risk youth, and others; and dozens of other programs and services for the public.

Over the past 20 years, the number of boarding stalls for horses across Orange County has dropped by nearly 80%, from 3,700 stalls countywide to just 784. The equestrian community in Orange County simply cannot afford to lose another 180 stalls if a decision is made to cease operating the Equestrian Center.

Over the past decade, the Orange County Fairgrounds Equestrian Center has generated approximately \$100,000 per year prior to the change in operations last year. I strongly encourage the Board to work collaboratively with the equestrian community to allow the RFP process for a new operator to move forward.

Thank you for your public service and for considering my comments supporting this important public resource on our state property.

Sincerely,

Josh Newman
Senator, 29th Senate District