



September 11, 2023

Village of Wellington Council
12300 Forest Hill Boulevard
Wellington, FL 33414

Re: Wellington North Comprehensive Plan Amendment

Dear Councilmembers:

1000 Friends of Florida is our state's leading nonprofit advocate for growth management, working with local governments and elected state officials to build better communities and save special places throughout Florida. We respectfully oppose the proposed Wellington North project that would allow a comprehensive plan amendment and rezoning of the properties currently known as Coach House, Equestrian Village, and White Birch Farms at the northeast corner of South Shore Boulevard and Pierson Road. The Wellington North project contemplates 300 homes (22 single family and 278 multi-family) as well as amenities. The multi-family use will require removal of 96 acres from the Equestrian Preserve Area.

The Equestrian Preserve Area ("EPA") is a gem of thoughtful planning to protect rural lifestyles in an area of the state that is facing incredible growth pressures. It is a unique feature in the Village of Wellington that complements and values the Village's strong equestrian character. The EPA comprises 9,000 acres of show grounds, polo fields, and over 100 miles of public bridle trails that connect and enhance nearby parks, ranches, stables and low-density residences. The EPA was codified in the Village of Wellington's comprehensive plan over two decades ago in 2000. In addition, the Village created the Equestrian Preserve district as part of its master plan called the Equestrian Overlay Zoning District (EOZD) to ensure the preservation and protection of the neighborhoods which comprise Wellington's unique equestrian lifestyle. All these planning efforts were adopted to create and conserve the open space that is an obvious necessity for an equine-based community.

A decade after adopting the EPA in the Comprehensive Plan, the Village took another step to further guide and protect the EPA by establishing the "Equestrian Preserve Committee" (the "EPC") per ordinance 2010-44. The EPC sits in an advisory capacity to your board, and its members naturally have strong connections with the equine community in Wellington. The EPC is legally tasked with providing advice on issues such as: 1) Protecting and preserving land in the EPA as equestrian; 2) The safety of riders and animals; 3) Flooding and drainage in the EPA; and 4) Comprehensive plan amendments and land development regulations as they apply to the EPA, among others. It is notable that after due consideration, the EPC voted 7 to 0 to deny the proposal to remove acreage from the EPA.

It is an unfortunate reality in Florida that degradation to unique communities like Wellington often occur by virtue of incremental changes in land use. It is the quintessential “death by a thousand paper cuts.” Decision makers in Wellington need to look no further than the Agricultural Reserve to your south to see how compromises, deal-making, and negotiating away the protection promised for agricultural land can be an irreversible trend that builds on the precedent of short-sighted planning decisions.

We strongly urge you to heed the EPC’s recommendation and honor the commitment made to land conservation in the EPA by opposing this comprehensive plan amendment.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Paul Owens". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Paul Owens
President

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