

# West Palm residents fume over proposed equestrian waste recycling plant

[Tony Doris](#) , [Kristina Webb](#) | Palm Beach Post

Plans for a suburban [West Palm Beach](#) recycling plant to process 60,000 tons of horse shovelings a year are stalled temporarily to give the proposer time to explain its merits to alarmed neighbors.

A representative for Horizon 880-HPAB, the proposer, said Tuesday he has asked the Palm Beach County Zoning Board to hold off until Nov. 5 on an approval hearing for the \$7 million to \$8 million project. The matter had been scheduled for Oct. 1.

The plant, slated for a light industrial zone just west of Florida's Turnpike on N Benoist Farms Road, is designed to relieve a waste overload for [Wellington](#) and other equestrian areas. The proposed use requires a zoning change, to "General Industrial," and ultimate approval by the county commission.

The 5.25-acre site in suburban [West Palm Beach](#), on land owned by the county's Solid Waste Authority, is between Southern Boulevard and Belvedere Road. Opponents note that several housing developments and schools populate the areas just across those arteries, potentially within sniffing distance.

"It's clear that Wellington and other horse communities feel free to treat residents of West Palm Beach as people to be, quite literally, dumped on," Dianne Bassett, a resident of [West Palm Beach](#)'s Baywinds community, wrote to County Commissioner Gregg Weiss.

But Kevin McGinley, president of Land Research Management Inc., said Tuesday that they have nothing to worry about. The operation would be entirely indoors, with little conceivable way for odors to escape, he said.

"It's not a manure treatment plant," he said. "It's an equestrian waste recycling facility."



Local haulers with covered trucks would collect the material, a combination of manure and pine chips used for horse bedding, and unload it within the 1-story, 48,000-square-foot facility, he said. There it would be processed, with chips recycled and resold for new stable bedding and water steamed out for reuse in irrigation.

"Everything is enclosed and even the building itself is actually three separated buildings, isolated from each other by walls. And the building where we accept the residual waste is isolated from the drying portion of the building...", McGinley said. "There is no stockpiling of the horse residual waste," he said.

He said he'll be using the weeks ahead to convince the public that the facility would benefit the community by providing a low-cost way to dispose of the equestrian industry's waste and protect the environment from harmful runoff and odors.

County Commissioner Gregg Weiss said Tuesday he'll weigh the proposal's touted benefits with residents' concerns when the matter comes before the commission.

"I want to make sure that this project does not negatively affect my constituents' quality of life," Weiss said.

"I'm aware that equestrian waste is currently impacting our environment by leaching into canals, entering our water system and ending up in Grassy Waters, the Lake Worth Lagoon and the Everglades. So, I believe, if done right, this project could benefit our environment and local economy.

"But clearly, residents are worried and they need an opportunity to address their concerns with the company. My office has asked the applicant to do outreach and it is my understanding that they are planning on doing that."

Wellington officials argue that equestrian waste is a problem countywide, not just in their village, and that the county needs to resolve the matter.

While the village hosts thous of horses during the equestrian season, roughly October to April, there are other year-round equestrian communities in Palm Beach County in Loxahatchee Groves, The Acreage, suburban Delray Beach and Boynton Beach, Jupiter Farms and other unincorporated areas.

One of the largest end-users of horse waste in Palm Beach County is U.S. Sugar Corp., for its fields west of Wellington. But U.S. Sugar told Wellington last year that it no longer will take any manure after the end of this coming season.

Manure hauled to those fields would be slathered over acres and acres of land that then would sit fallow for eight to 10 months. But the company found that spreading the stinky substance for the past few years didn't provide much agricultural benefit, Wellington's assistant Planning, Zoning and Building director, Mike O'Dell, said. "Taking a large tract of land out of production for them is money out of their pocket," O'Dell said.

Anticipating that decision from U.S. Sugar, several years ago Wellington evaluated its options. O'Dell and Mayor Anne Gerwig drove recently to the Brighton Indian Reservation in Glades County, which can take 40,000 tons to 60,000 tons of manure a year to use for composting.

Even with the county's Solid Waste Authority incinerator, the Brighton reservation and the Horizon recycling plant on board, O'Dell said village staff estimate the county will need two or three more disposal sites.

McGinley's calculations agree. He anticipates that his plant could handle only 60,000 tons of the roughly 200,000 to 300,000 tons the county's horse population generates each year.

That comes as no consolation to the residents of Baywinds, Breakers West and other communities, who say they're organizing, emailing their commissioners and talking about hiring lawyers.

Baywinds resident George Singer said the plan amounts to manure from wealthy Wellington residents' horses being carted to a less affluent neighborhood, the technology is untested and there are other locations that make more sense.

"The upshot is, we don't want it in our backyard," Singer said. "We're not horse country. Wellington and The Acreage are."

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