

BARN RAISINGS

A Newsletter for the Therapeutic Riding Community

SUMMER 2004

Published by Ruth Landsman, Architect and Seth Harry, AIA
Equestrian Facility Master Planning and Design

This is our fourth edition of Barn Raisings, a newsletter for the therapeutic riding community. As we continue in our practice of architectural design and planning of therapeutic riding centers, we will bring you new developments and share our experiences and insight:

As we wind down the summer of 2004, we want to share with you the progress on the design and construction of some of our therapeutic riding projects. This year several of the centers that we have been working with have now embarked on the construction phase of their projects. This newsletter will focus on the permitting process and the required steps that a center must often take in order to get the construction process underway.

QUEST THERAPEUTIC SERVICES BREAKS GROUND

Quest Therapeutic Services, Inc. located in Westchester, Pennsylvania broke ground on their new facility July of this year. The project, however, has been in the making for the past 2 1/2 years.



First, the local approval from the zoning board had to be secured prior to starting on the final design of the project. The existing residential zoning did not allow for a therapeutic riding center as a permitted use by right, and the zoning regulations called for a special exception process to grant the use of a therapeutic riding center in this zone. This process required a public hearing where any one can comment on the proposed special exception to the zoning, and in this case, their local zoning board voted unanimously to deny their request, based upon the

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HOW ZONING AFFECTS THE BUILDING OF A THERAPEUTIC RIDING FACILITY

by Ruth Landsman, Registered Architect

You may think that once you have a site and the money to build the center of your dreams that all you have to do is design your facility and then hire a contractor to build it. However, it is more often the case that your first step will be in determining and securing your zoning approvals and building permits prior to design and construction.

As urban development continues to encroach into the rural areas at the same time as therapeutic riding programs seek to locate themselves as close as possible to their client markets, many jurisdictions are taking a closer look at zoning and building code issues on projects that until recently may simply have been considered an agricultural use.

Also, as therapeutic riding programs increasingly include a broader and more in-depth array of therapeutic services, it is becoming ever more critical to ensure that your project meets all of the applicable regulatory criteria, prior to beginning detail planning and design. In general, it would be prudent to investigate your zoning well before either purchasing a piece of property with the intention of building a new center, or even if you already own the land, before beginning the design process.

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NEWS ROUND-UP

The J.F. Shea Therapeutic Riding Center home of the Fran Joswick riding program has been working with the city of San Juan Capistrano to secure their approvals for their new center. We



have been working with their program for the past few years, producing Schematic Design documents and illustrative renderings, for their fund-raising efforts. Their fund-raising has been very successful and they are now ready to move the drawings to the next level of construction documentation.

The process of regulatory approvals from the town consist of meeting their architectural design guidelines. The town has a say not only in the site plan layout for the facility but also the aesthetics of the buildings, including materials, colors, massing, height, etc. The approval process is first reviewed by their staff at the city and then goes on to reviews by their environmental review agency, outside agencies, such as the Fire Authority and in this case the California Department of Fish and Game and the Army Corp of Engineers, because the property abuts a creek. It is then further reviewed by the Parks and Recreation/Equestrian Commission for trail reviews and the design review committee for site and architectural reviews.

All these approvals must be secured before proceeding with the final design for the facility. Once the design documents have been completed they will then submit them back to the staff in Planning, the Fire Authority, and Building reviews before the final building permit is issued. A local architect also assisted in this permit process.

The J.F. Shea center is doing an admirable job in meeting all the requirements for their review processes and we look forward to them securing all their approvals and moving on with the design of the facility.

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QUEST THERAPEUTIC SERVICES BREAKS GROUND)

objections of a concerned neighbor. They then applied for an appeal and finally Quest was allowed to build their facility, provided they adhere to the conditions as stated in the order from the zoning board. The entire zoning process took 1 1/2 years from the time they requested the special exception to when they won their appeal. During the zoning and appeal process, we provided Quest with a master plan and rendering to illustrate and explain how the final building would be sited on the property and how the building would look, helping to mitigate concerns about the project.

Once the special exception was granted, we finalized the design and then produced the final construction documents. After soliciting for competitive bids, Quest selected a general contractor and signed a contract to begin the construction. We were then ready to submit for a building permit to the Township. Once the building permit was secured, construction began.



They hope to open their new facility by this fall. We want to congratulate Quest on their determination in getting a facility built that will meet their need, located where they can serve their client base best.

THE HITCHING POST



✓ *Leg Up Farm*

Leg Up Farm (illustrative building elevation shown above), is a proposed multi-disciplinary therapy center, that is moving forward with their facility design. We have been working with the Chairman of this center, Lou Castriota, for the past six years, in conceptualizing the Program, as well as the facility and in assisting with both funding and site acquisition. In that time, *Leg Up* has secured their site for the project, in addition to clearing the many hurdles with the presiding jurisdictions in obtaining the local approvals for the project. A Special Exception was required by the zoning board as well as the submittal of a Sub Division/Land Development Plan to the township.

During this process, we provided *Leg Up* with a conceptual layout of the facility on the site, which was used during the site development approvals process, as well as the basis for the technical site design work.. Now that the Land Development Plan has been accepted and they have their Special Exception we are moving forward with the detailed design of the facility itself.

As the design takes shape, the scope of the project continues to grow as more functions are added to the facility. We are very excited to be a part of this project and look forward to the next design phase of *Leg Up Farm*.

✓ *Great and Small*

Great and Small riding program moved to their new location in Boyds, Maryland at a county owned Horse Park. The park consists of a 100 acre farm donated to the county in 1997 by William M. Rickman. The facility was intended to be developed as a private/public partnership between the County and the non-profit Therapy Program operator, fulfilling a mandate to establish a therapeutic riding program at the park.

We have been working this past year on the design for modifications and alterations to the existing equestrian facility to accommodate the specific needs of a therapeutic riding center. The construction documents were completed, permits have been secured, and work has begun. The permit process was unique in that the new work consisted primarily of modifications to an existing building and was therefore reviewed under a different set of standards than had the building been designed and built new today.

Everyone is eager to see *Great and Small* operating from the Rickman Farm Horse Park, and to continue to grow as a therapeutic riding program serving a broad range of needs within the community.

(Continued from cover - **How Zoning Affects the Building of a Therapeutic Riding Center**)

Building and Zoning regulations are enacted for the purpose of preserving and promoting the health, safety and welfare of the community, as well as for protecting property values from the impact of undesirable uses. The zoning regulations guide future growth and development in the areas where they have jurisdiction, in towns, cities, counties, etc. Zoning regulations are often part of a regional comprehensive plan, and are updated periodically to reflect changes in population, transportation improvements, and/or changes in the character of an area (say from agricultural to residential subdivisions).

Zoning officials also have the right to enforce the zoning rules, and may take action against violations brought to their attention, including the right to prevent the construction, or require the removal of, any structure which is in violation of those rules.

Zoning regulations usually consist of various zoning districts, such as rural, residential, commercial, business, manufacturing, and historic.



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Your site will most likely be designated as lying within a recognized zoning district classification. Within each of these districts the zoning stipulates the various restrictions, for example: uses permitted as a matter of right, accessory uses, bulk requirements, and subdivision requirements. The “uses” refer to the kinds of activities, occupations, businesses or operations that may be

permitted to take place on a particular tract of land. Uses that are not permitted as a matter of right, may often still be allowed on a parcel when a “special use” or “special exception use” is granted. Special use approvals are received from the Board of Appeals for a specific location and site plan based upon standards that are stipulated in the zoning regulations. This process is very often used for therapeutic riding centers which, because of their unique purpose, are generally not listed in the zoning regulations as a use permitted by a matter of right.

The two most important aspects of zoning for building a therapeutic riding center on a parcel are the permitted uses and the bulk regulations, which dictate building setbacks, height and footprint limitations, etc.. Many therapeutic riding facilities will require special considerations to achieve compatibility with existing or planned developments around them. If it is determined that a “special use” or “special exception use” is required by your jurisdiction, than you will typically need to prepare an overall site plan and Master Plan of the proposed facility to present your project to the Zoning Board of Appeals.

Because the burden of making your case is always upon the applicant, it is critically important to present a credible and compelling design proposal, particularly as a public hearing is often part of the process, inviting local residents to air opinions about the proposal which could affect the decision to grant approval. The Board of Appeals may also attach special conditions to the proposed use in light of those comments or other considerations.

Zoning is intrinsically important to planning a new facility or modifying an existing facility. Remember also that zoning approvals do not give you a building permit, which requires a different process, and focuses on the facility itself. Regardless,, a building permit will not be issued until you have secured your zoning approvals.

It is important to go into the process with all the information at hand. Do your research properly and there should not be too many surprises, in planning a new facility or modifying an existing facility.