

Summary of Springtree Ranch Planned Unit Development Response to Comments

September 30, 2024 1200

This document presents a summary of Springtree Ranch LLC's detailed response to feedback regarding their proposed Planned Unit Development (PUD) comprehensive plan map amendment application and also summarizes the revisions and amendments to the original submittal. The revised application is submitted as a non-project request, aims to rezone a portion the property from Agricultural 5 to Planned Unit Development. This would allow for the creation of three smaller residential parcels and one larger parcel for continuing historical and current ranching operations. The proposal attempts to balance the owner's need for residential development with the preservation of the ranch's agricultural heritage while directly addressing concerns from Kittitas County, state agencies, and the public.

Revisions to the Proposed PUD

The applicant has modified the original proposal, aiming to minimize potential impacts and address community feedback:

Reduced Project Size: The PUD area is decreased from 27.27 acres to 22.27 acres, creating a 5-acre buffer along the western property line. This buffer remains zoned as Agricultural 5 to lessen the impact on nearby residential properties.

Reduced Density Increase: The original submittal for the proposed plan unit development was for a four-unit density increase through the Transfer of Development Rights (TDR). This increase has now been eliminated from the proposal. The total density of the revised proposal for the Planned Unit Development (PUD) zone is four units, which is consistent with the allowable density under the underlying zoning regulations.

Traffic Mitigation: In response to traffic congestion on Nelson Siding Road, particularly on Sunday afternoons in summer, the applicant has committed to not holding events or gatherings during these peak times until traffic solutions are in place.

Addressing Key Concerns

The document offers detailed answers to comments from various parties. Notable points include:

Cultural Resource Survey: Despite requests, the applicant considers a survey unnecessary due to the property's extensive farming and logging history without any cultural resource findings. However, an Unintentional Disturbance Plan will be in effect before construction.

Water Usage: The applicant has access to sufficient water resources from the Big Water Bank and Reecer Creek Water Bank to support the proposed development. Additional needs will be met by acquiring more water rights or implementing mitigation, in compliance with Kittitas County Code Chapters 13.35.020 and 13.35.027.

Transportation Concurrency: The project is exempt from Transportation Impact Analysis (TIA) and concurrency evaluations because the projected traffic increase is minimal, only 18.88 daily trips, falling below the county's threshold for analysis.

Right to Farm Protections: The applicant emphasizes the legal protections for equestrian operations on the property under Washington State law (RCW 7.48) and the Kittitas County Code (KCC 17.74). These frameworks recognize equestrian activities as protected agricultural pursuits and provide safeguards against nuisance claims from surrounding residential development.

Addressing Concerns about Rural Character: Recognizing concerns about the PUD's impact on the rural character of the Nelson Siding area, the applicant stresses the PUD's design balances residential development with preserving the area's agricultural heritage:

Preserving Usable Open Space: The PUD includes provisions for usable open spaces, ensuring that a substantial portion of the land remains dedicated to agricultural use and doesn't solely become residential.

Historical Context: Springtree Ranch, as an equestrian farm for over 40 years, predates much of the neighboring residential development. The PUD aims to protect this established agricultural activity and its historical significance to the area.

Compliance with Regulations: The PUD adheres to density regulations outlined in the Kittitas County Code, ensuring development scale and impact remain consistent with the surrounding rural environment.

History of Springtree Ranch and the Nelson Siding Area

The document provides a historical overview of both Springtree Ranch and the Nelson Siding area, placing the proposed PUD within the context of land use and development patterns. This history includes:

Springtree Ranch's Establishment: The establishment as an ongoing agricultural operation, including equestrian activities, and residential use starting in 1983.

Impact of the 2021/2022 Winter Storm: The significant damage inflicted by the winter storm on the ranch's infrastructure, including the indoor arena and hay barn, necessitated rebuilding efforts and factored into the PUD proposal.

Urbanization of Nelson Siding: The area's shift from a primarily agricultural landscape with fewer than 20 homesteads in the mid-20th century to an increasingly urbanized environment with over 600 residential parcels today.

Rebuttal to Rodger Olson's Comments: The document provides a point-by-point rebuttal to the concerns raised by adjacent property owner Rodger Olson, frequently referencing the Right to Farm protections, the historical context of the ranch's operation predating Olson's ownership, and the PUD's adherence to Kittitas County codes and regulations.

Addressing the Local Residents' Petition: Section 13 of the document is dedicated to addressing a petition from local residents about the proposed PUD. This section addresses each concern raised, providing explanations and justifications for various aspects of the project.

Equestrian Activities and the Right to Farm: Residents express concern about existing and planned equestrian activities, particularly the operation of riding arenas and potential increases in traffic and noise from events. The applicant emphasizes these activities are protected under Kittitas County Right to Farm Code 17.74, which identifies equine activities as agricultural pursuits. The applicant points to the long history of these operations, pre-dating all of the surrounding residential developments, and asserts their right to continue these activities under the proposed PUD.

Parking and Traffic Concerns: Concerns are raised about parking provisions for events, with fears of overflow onto Nelson Siding Road. The applicant clarifies that all parking will be contained within the PUD boundaries, with no parking permitted on Nelson Siding Road. Although specific parking locations are not finalized (as it is a non-project action), the applicant states these will be determined during final development, following Kittitas County regulations. Regarding increased traffic, while acknowledging growth on Nelson Siding Road, the applicant attributes this primarily to the area's significant residential development over the past 20 years, not the Ranch's activities. They believe the PUD, with its limited increase in residential density, won't meaningfully affect traffic levels.

Derelict House and Property Maintenance: The petition raises issues about a house on Parcel 376334 and the presence of derelict vehicles and trash. The applicant explains the house was damaged by previous occupants and winter storms and will be demolished and possibly replaced morning during the PUD process. Concerning the vehicles, they clarify that all licensed vehicles adhere to regulations and that remaining trash/debris will be managed following county code.

Transparency and Compliance: Residents express concern that the PUD might circumvent zoning regulations. The applicant clarifies that this proposal is a distinct rezoning process from a previously approved Cluster Subdivision that they chose not to

pursue. This PUD application follows a different legal path and does not aim to bypass previous decisions.

The applicant provides detailed answers about future development, including the location of new homes, lot sizes, and water supply. They explain that specifics will be detailed in the Final Development Plan, ensuring transparency and adherence to county requirements.