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Neighbor complains: Lions and tigers and bears, oh my!

By MARK WAITE
PVT

A conditional use permit was approved by the Pahrump Regional Planning Commission Wednesday for an exotic animal owner who wants to keep up to a dozen animals in a remote part of northwest Pahrump Valley, despite the objections of two neighbors.

The applicants were identified only as Eden Oasis LLC and Bayyan Multimedia Corp. RPC member Dan Schinhofen questioned their consultant, Dave Richards of CivilWise Services, who confirmed Darryl Yates was involved in the venture.

Some time ago he had requested permission to locate his animals off Thousandaire Boulevard east of Homestead Road but pulled the application from a previous RPC agenda.

Schinhofen cast the sole vote against the permit, saying he was aware of Yates' prior history without elaborating.

The 80-acre property is located in an RE-2 zone on Warren Street, just north of Irene Street, which requires a minimum of two gross acres per parcel, where large animals may be kept with the issuance of a conditional use permit.

Richards' letter states the facility will be designed to be harmonious with the area and not hazardous or disturbing to neighbors.

"The use will not be detrimental to any persons, property or welfare because of excess traffic, noise, etc. The facility is not intended for public use or access," Richards states.

Zuzana Kukol, a neighbor who raises tigers, a lion, a cougar and other exotic cats as well as hybrid wolves in an area enclosed with double fences, and her partner, Scott Shoemaker, a member of the Nye County Animal Advisory Board representing owners of "special conditions

animals," said they advised the applicant on drawing up plans.

They call for four holding pens surrounding a circular training and exercise play area, all within an enclosed area. Richards said a dome or cone will provide shade in what he called a very expensive holding facility.

"It's a double pen, so if they escape their own enclosure they're again in a secondary enclosure around the entire facility. We're including a cooling system in the form of mist systems and shading to keep the animals comfortable. Each animal enclosure will have its own cave or covered area where they can escape from sunlight. The animals will be well cared for with all the necessary inspections," Richards said.

RPC Chairman Mark Kimball said he didn't think Yates could have picked a better location. Kimball became defensive about the county's lengthy planning process for what are termed "special conditions animals" in light of concerns by two neighbors.

Nancy Goodson, representing Financial Sales Management, said her company has owned land in the vicinity for 30 years which is being eyed for a retirement home.

"It sounds nice when you say it's just a residential area and there's just going to be some exotic animals. Well, it's 12 lions and tigers and it's going to be in my back yard. I'm a little unhappy about that. It's not that they're necessarily dangerous and the enclosures won't be safe enough, but that's a lot of animals," Goodson said.

She told the board, "Bring your grandchildren with somebody pacing them on the other side and tell me there's no problem. You guys really need to think about it."

The presence of the lions and tigers would spook horses and make the property difficult to sell, Goodson said. It would require a lot of meat shipments to the home, she said.

Kimball took exception to her remarks. He took credit for insisting on the conditional use permit process to keep exotic animals so neighbors could be informed. It requires an inspection by Nye County Emergency Services and the Animal Control Department.

"There are areas where you could have just gone, picked a piece of ground and put lions there. We wanted to make sure that wasn't the case. There's going to be site development requirements that really require real professional fencing, real professional caging. This isn't going to be somebody who has a cage in the back yard and just lets them run around," Kimball said.

Kukol said, "We are supporting these people because we are already there. We will help them to get their conditional use permit and get their caging in compliance with regulations."

Garaldine Meyers, who flew into the area to support Goodson, said she understands there are already exotic animals in the vicinity but complained about permitting 12 more.

"Even though we have something grandfathered in doesn't necessarily mean that we have to approve more," she said.

Meyers said there are terrible tragedies when animals escape from zoos.

"You're talking about a zoo here. It's unbelievable to me you guys are arguing about the road being chip sealed. I think we have a real problem, something that should be thought about," she said. "What happens if a lion or tiger gets out and kills somebody? Who is going to be responsible for that?"

Neighbor Jerry Povidlo said Kukol takes better care of her animals than people care for their dogs in Pahrump. Povidlo said her animals are quiet, with the exception occurring when a house was being burglarized in the neighborhood and Kukol's lion began roaring.

Neighbors complained and the authorities nabbed the burglar.

Kimball told the two women, "a very, very lengthy and thorough public process was spent over a two-year period to even get to the point of allowing a conditional use permit" for exotic animals.

"We knew nothing about it," Goodson said.

Schinhofen asked if just one person would take care of all 12 animals.

"That's Mr. Yates, if he lives," Kimball joked.

In all seriousness, Kimball added, "This isn't just some willynilly, kneejerk thing we're doing here. It's been thought out a lot."

"Code compliance still follows up complaints, so does animal control. Everybody needs to be vigilant, including this applicant," he said.

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