

Public Comment for Upcoming Commission Meeting

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Comments:

My name is Mary Franscell, and my husband and I have been Placitas residents since July 2020. One of the reasons that we chose to live in Placitas was because of the proximity of the wild horses and the chance to see them frequently.

This public comment is against the proposed Ordinance to Ban Feeding of Certain Wildlife. I have several points that I would like to make.

Point #1: The ordinance specifically prohibits the feeding of bison, goats, sheep, kudu, oryx, American pronghorn, elk, deer, horses, and bears. Allan Mills, chief deputy of the Sandoval County Sheriff's Office, stated in a Feb. 3, 2023 Signpost article that he felt action was needed because feeding the horses is causing "horses to get killed, it's causing people's cars to get crashed and it's causing property to be damaged." Clearly Mr. Mills' real purpose in this ordinance is to prevent the feeding of horses, especially since we haven't seen any bison, kudu or oryx lately in Placitas.

A recent search of Sandoval County records shows a total of two horses reported as being killed since Jan. 1, 2020. The most recent one was killed unfortunately just a few weeks ago. I question why we need an ordinance regarding feeding these animals when the problem is really quite limited. A much larger problem in Placitas, especially in the village area where the speed limit is 35 miles per hour, is speeding. The sheriff's department does frequently post deputies out there to monitor speeding, and yet the problem still exists. Multiple people have reported being passed at high rates of speed in non-passing zones on this two-lane road. Speeding could certainly contribute to the killing of animals, whether it be horses, coyotes, birds, or other animals that have been seen dead along the roadway.

I question how banning feeding of the horses would keep them off of the road. Natural grasses, the obvious food of the horses, grow along all the roadways in Placitas. Is the county going to mow more frequently, or poison the grasses so that they don't grow? If not, what will keep the horses off of the roads?

Mr. Mills also stated in the Signpost article that the horse killed in January was "in an area where people have been feeding them." I unfortunately drove by the site that morning when the horse's body was still there. The location was right in front of the Placitas Library. To my knowledge, no one has fed horses there. The horses may have been fed in some of the surrounding neighborhoods but certainly not there right on the main road. If that was happening, it would be very obvious, as there would be many hoofprints, lots of horse droppings, and trampled ground. This is simply not the case in front of the library. So, I am not sure where Mr. Mills is getting his information. It is true that, inexplicably, piles of apples or carrots can sometimes be seen near the roads. I choose to believe that it is well-intentioned but misguided individuals who are leaving the food for the horses in such dangerous locations. When these sort of actions are observed, very quickly most Placitas residents will pick the food up, for we do indeed

want to keep our horses safe. We all agree that any loss of horse life is a tragedy.

The Signpost article further mentions Mr. Mills' claim that horses supposedly go into people's garages to eat hay. Well, frankly, if someone doesn't want a horse in their garage, number one they are probably not going to have hay in their garage, or number two, they will simply close their garage door. I do not believe it is in the purview of Sandoval County to police what people do or do not do on their own land with regard to feeding the horses, especially if it does not involve abuse of or damage to the horses.

Point #2: The ordinance bans FEEDING. Does this mean that we can still put out water for the horses, especially in times of drought? And if we have horses congregated on our property, getting water, will the law enforcement official be verifying that it is simply water that the horses are getting?

Point #3: The ordinance provides for wildlife feeding permits to the tune of \$10/month, or \$120 per year. Permits would have to be renewed monthly, and it is not clear that permits would automatically be granted.

This flat seems like a money grab being made by Sandoval County. Either feeding animals is legal or it's not. To say, "oh, sure, we will let you do it if you pay us" is ridiculous. And furthermore, the amount of paperwork that would be generated by requiring monthly applications makes it clear that what the ordinance is trying to do is simply make it too onerous for people to keep feeding the animals. No one wants to have to reapply monthly, and I am pretty sure that Sandoval County doesn't need more paperwork generated that it is expected to deal with in a prompt manner. Pretty soon, they will give up, which is exactly what it seems like the ordinance is designing to encourage. And what will be done with those \$10 monthly fees? Are they going to help with policing those who feed the horses without a permit? And how will the county know? Are we supposed to display the permits on the horses' watering troughs? I will agree that the horses are an item of debate in Placitas. From the very first week we moved here, my husband and I figured out that some people love the horses and some people don't. Some people feed them, some people don't. The horses and people in Placitas definitely have to work to live together in some sort of harmony, and just like with any of the other wildlife we have – snakes, coyotes, owls, bobcats, and the like – there are adjustments to be made. But I will also submit that they were here first. In our zeal to build and live in this area, we have taken away much of their natural habit and food. It is actually our responsibility to help them and to help ensure their success. It is not acceptable to make it illegal to feed the horses. If someone wants to do so, spending their own money, time and energy to help our precious wildlife, that is their right. I strongly urge that all of you vote against this ordinance.