



Position Statement
Golden Ocala Equestrian Land Sports Complex

Horse Farms Forever® **opposes** the application by Golden Ocala Equestrian Land, L.L.C. and its related entities (collectively, Golden Ocala) to convert 8 parcels totaling 236 acres from a low-density residential land use reserved for the World Equestrian Estates into a high-intensity commercial land use for a regional sports and entertainment complex.

Horse Farms Forever® further **opposes** the applications by Golden Ocala to change the WEC Future Land Use designation to allow non-equestrian sports facilities.

The proposed conversion of residential property designated as the World Equestrian Estates for an intense commercial, non-equestrian sports and entertainment complex and the addition of intense non-equestrian commercial activities in the WEC land use classification runs in direct conflict with the agreements previously made by Golden Ocala to ensure compatibility of the World Equestrian Center complex with the surrounding horse farms and the Farmland Preservation Area.

The role of land use and zoning is to provide *predictability*. In 2017, when Golden Ocala asked the County to change the land use on these parcels from Rural Land to Low Residential, the change was approved subject to conditions. Those conditions prohibited precisely what is being requested now. How does a complete reversal of intent to change low residential land use to intense commercial land use align with *predictability*? The answer: it does not.

The Applications - Proposed Land Use and Zoning Changes

The proposed sports and entertainment complex to be built on the residential lots as part of the World *Equestrian* Center Planned Unit Development has no equestrian-related activities and does not support the horse community in any way. Instead, it includes:

- Outdoor sports fields: 17 multi-purpose fields for soccer, softball and football, and a soccer stadium with increased seating.
- Indoor Facility: 10 full sized courts for basketball and ice hockey, and a full-sized synthetic turf soccer pitch.
- 1 hotel, 2 restaurants and multiple buildings other support buildings.
- Unlimited concerts.

In 2017, Golden Ocala applied to remove almost 1,000 acres from the Farmland Preservation Area to build the World Equestrian Center on 480 acres and to allow for residential development on the remaining acreage. The application included moving the Urban Growth Boundary west to NW 100th Avenue. The County Commission granted the changes conditioned upon the residential World Equestrian Estates serving as a stepdown buffer for the new Farmland Preservation Area boundary.



These proposed applications seek to undo those promises and agreements. More importantly, the applications fail to clear the required hurdles of consistency, compatibility and public interest as detailed in the Comprehensive Plan and Land Development Code.

The Potential Threat - Why it Matters

The Farmland Preservation Area is one of Marion County's Crown Jewels. The other Crown Jewels include the Ocala National Forest, Silver Springs and Rainbow Springs. While these are the work of nature, the Farmland Preservation Area is the work of the community and its elected officials coming together 2 decades ago to recognize and protect almost 200,000 acres in the northwest portion of the county from incompatible development and urban sprawl.

Golden Ocala already took nearly 1,000 acres out of the Farmland Preservation Area for the World Equestrian Center and related projects. In addition, they have encroached to the west of NW 100th Ave., inside the Farmland Preservation Area, with commercial activities supposedly for equestrian-related polo fields. Now, these applications seek to change that use to non-equestrian sports use.

With these applications, Golden Ocala is telling the County that the highest and best use of these parcels is no longer residential use but rather some version of a Disney-like commercial sports complex. If this is approved, then what's next for the remainder of the World Equestrian Estates residential acreage: a theme park and roller coasters?

The Comprehensive Plan & Land Development Code

The applications are from a for-profit developer seeking to build a regional sports and entertainment complex that is an intense commercial use on land with a low residential land use adjoining the Farmland Preservation Area. These parcels were previously inside the FPA until this same organization asked that they be removed to allow the residential equestrian estates that are now sought to be eliminated.

The County's Comprehensive Plan and Land Development Code set very high standards for changes to land use and zoning. The parcels totaling 236-acres owned by Golden Ocala are entitled to their existing land use and zoning. Additionally, based on the representations and promises previously made by Golden Ocala, the neighboring property owners are entitled to an expectation that the low residential land use would remain as such. The developer's new plans do not trump the rights of the neighbors.

The proposed introduction of commercial development on these residential parcels would constitute sprawl and create land use conflicts. It would introduce intense commercial uses incompatible with the rural character and agricultural viability of the surrounding farms and residential parcels.



The Role of Land Use, Zoning and Private Property Rights

The role of the County's Comprehensive Plan and Land Development Code is to ensure a well-planned community by reducing land use conflicts. Land use and zoning classifications are critical components that inherently protect the public health, safety, and welfare. They do so for the greater common good to efficiently plan for growth and the infrastructure needs.

Land use and zoning are the result of the County exercising its sovereign power to govern the use of private property for the common good of all citizens. One way to think of land use and zoning is to compare them to speed limits on roads. While your car can go very fast, the speeds you can drive have been governed for your own safety and the safety of others.

That is, just because you own a fast car doesn't mean you can drive it as fast as you want. In the same regard, just because you own private property doesn't mean you can do whatever you want on it. The land use and zoning classifications control what can be done on the parcel.

Conclusion

The issue with the proposed applications by Golden Ocala is not *what* is proposed, but rather *where* it is proposed. **It's in the wrong place.** These activities belong on land designated and zoned for commercial uses, not residential uses. The County should not allow its Comprehensive Plan policies and Land Development Code guidelines to be changed and molded to meet the ever-changing whims and desires of a private developer.

Horse Farms Forever® Mission

The mission of Horse Farms Forever® is to inspire conservation of horse farms through education, awareness, and idea exchange so as to preserve the character and culture that horses and the Farmland Preservation Area make unique to Marion County. We are watchful of government and others to preserve and protect horse farms and farmland for future generations, especially in the Farmland Preservation Area. We are neither anti-growth nor anti-development, rather encouraging urban growth to remain inside the Urban Growth Boundary.

Horse Farms Forever® is registered with the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services as a charitable organization and approved as a tax-exempt 501 (c)-(3) corporation by the Internal Revenue Service. Horse Farms Forever does not have a political mission. Our status as a 501(c)(3) charitable organization does not allow us to participate or intervene in political activities. The organization will neither advocate on behalf of political candidates nor advocate for the passage of legislation.

Disclosure Statement

The Golden Ocala Golf & Equestrian Club is a founding member of Horse Farms Forever. Over the past 7 years, Horse Farms Forever has contracted with the Golden Ocala Golf & Equestrian Club to host numerous events, including its Spring Speaker Series.