

CF 12-0785- Backyard Beekeeping Ordinance / Wolf in Bee's clothing?

1 message

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Wed, Sep 2, 2015 at 10:10 AM

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Please share these comments with the City Council and enter them into the Council File record for Council File 12-0785 re: Backyard Beekeeping.

Dear Councilmembers:

When the Backyard Beekeeping Ordinance was being promoted to our neighborhood council by representatives of HoneyLove, it was presented as a limited pilot program to be implemented in the Mar Vista community. Mar Vista Community Council stated, in their letter of 11/30/11: *"The MVCC Board therefore recommends the implementation of a Beekeeping Pilot Program in to test safety and develop best practices for future expansion."* Our Westside Neighborhood Council voted to support the effort and we felt that there should be a mechanism available to home beekeepers that would decriminalize the activity and establish prudent guidelines for the regulation and safe practice of backyard beekeeping.

Since that time we have seen this ordinance move with almost unheard of speed. Most neighborhood councils do not know that the thrust of the ordinance has changed. Most communities do not know that there are few regulations that will be required of backyard beekeepers and that the proposed ordinance seeks to allow backyard beekeeping as an accessory use by right. EACH AND EVERY TIME THAT THE DETAILS OF THIS ORDINANCE BECOME KNOWN, serious questions are raised for which adequate answers have not been provided.

While the efforts to craft this ordinance are no doubt well-intended, there remain serious unresolved issues, questions and concerns. There is an urgent need to take a deep breath on this ordinance and to halt its rapid movement through the legislative process so that an open and transparent conversation can take place that addresses the concerns raised. With the current proposed ordinance, the City will have swung a very wide pendulum --- from viewing backyard beekeeping as an illegal activity to throwing the door open to beekeeping in almost every R1 situation.... which will allow for almost unlimited numbers of bees to be kept on a single property. While the ordinance limits the number of hives to two per every 2500 square feet of lot size, **there is no maximum size of a hive** such that multiple frames could be combined thus allowing very, very large hives to be located on residential lots. Those towering hives would not be in violation of the ordinance as currently written. In the ordinance a hive is defined as "a structure for the housing of a bee population", so that although there is a limit to the numbers of hives relative to lot size, there is still the possibility that large numbers of bees (and even a possible honey manufacturing concern) could be located on a single R1 lot.

There is no relationship or recognition as to the community character (very urban, mostly paved vs. rural, hillsides, much open space, etc.) which directly influences the carrying capacity of a given community for bees. There is already a healthy bee population in the city with thousands of calls for bee removal received each year from residents and businesses in Los Angeles. Is there such a thing as "too much of a good thing" when it comes to bee populations? In the drought there are already locations where beekeepers are having to feed their hives honey in order to sustain them. From an environmental point of view, it is important that we recognize that Los Angeles does not have a current bee shortage and its bee population is a healthy and growing one -- naturally. We are not like agricultural areas where aerial pesticide applications wipe out the natural bee populations and visiting bees must be brought in to pollinate crops/trees. What are possible impacts of unregulated hobby hives across the city? Will beekeepers be free to import different bee species into the city? What impact might that have on the health of existing wild urban bee stock? (Certain species used in honey production are more susceptible to mites which, if introduced into our bee population, could have devastating impacts.)

What happens when a beekeeper no longer wishes to tend his/her hive(s)? Should there be guidelines as to what to do or what NOT to do? Beekeeping is not a casual hobby—to be tried and discarded. For that reason, regulations are needed to maintain public safety. Untended hives, abandoned hives and hives not regularly cared for are a nuisance and cannot be permitted. What happens when a hive becomes Africanized? I have "hosted" bee hives in the outside walls of our home for over 25 years. When we purchased our stucco home, the sellers informed us when leaving that the bees were in the wall and would be no trouble at all.... that we would notice them only when the sun shined on the wall and the side yard filled with the aroma of honey. Well, while they did not bother us, they managed to frighten new neighbors that we had who promptly reported us to the city for operating an apiary. (Try to explain to the DBS inspector that the bees were there first and we had nothing to do with the establishment of any hive.) My experience with hosting hives and swarms is quite extensive for, you see, though one may have bees removed (always professionally and always with the intent to relocate the hive), I learned that, in fact, bees can be unpredictable. Friendly hives can be rather suddenly taken over by hostile bees and one's friendly community can become anything but. It would seem important to establish, as part of the ordinance, a set of data to be collected to help to assess impacts that new urban beekeeping might have. Are there noticeable increases in requests for hive removal? Any significant increase in calls for bee-related rescues to public safety responders (LAFD, LAPD)? Record of complaints filed with DBS? It would seem that such data is important not only to evaluate the new pilot program but to be used as a possible basis for any future efforts to legalize beekeeping in other residential settings. Have staff from LAPD, LAFD, DWP and other public safety and communications workers had the opportunity to consider the ordinance and how its implementation might affect their ability to do their jobs? What does the LA County Agricultural Commissioner's office say about the proposed ordinance?

In summary, I would suggest consideration of the following requirements:

- that the applicants for registration as a beekeeper be required to complete a course in beekeeping,
- that all beekeepers show proof of insurance at the time they apply for registration as a beekeeper
- that a registry of beekeepers qualified to collect or destroy swarms /problematic hives be established.
- that a maximum hive size be defined (limits of two hives per stated area does not adequately define/limit the numbers of bees on a given property if the size of the hive is not defined),
- that hives not be allowed within a minimum distance (500, 1000 feet?) of sensitive uses such as schools
- that further refinement of the physical requirements for hive placement be reviewed with public input as current definitions do not adequately address the issues related to bee movement to and from hives.
- that a mechanism be developed within the ordinance that would address evidence of an overpopulation of hives/bees in a given community.
- that a mechanism for the capturing of data related to bee-related paramedic calls, reported injuries, nuisance abatement requests, etc. be created so that any unintended or negative impacts of the ordinance and new urban beekeeping can be measured and taken into account when the pilot program and ordinance have been implemented.
- that notice be provided to neighbors within 500 feet of proposed bee keeping prior to issuance of

permit and a hearing to allow objections by neighbors.

Finally, how should the City balance the interests of beekeepers and future beekeepers against the rights of those who are or who have family members who are highly allergic to bee stings. It is reported that more people die in the U.S. each year from bee stings than they do from much more sensationally reported encounters with wildlife. In July (7/7) a dog was killed by bees and on 8/4 a construction worker lost his life as a result of bees swarming. **There are thousands of LA City residents and people who pass through our city who have potentially life-threatening sensitivities to bee stings.** Many of those individuals (and particularly children) are unaware of their medical condition until after having been sensitized by a sting. Should there be a required notification process for neighbors/property owners within 500 feet of an active backyard hive? Should there be a greater boundary / required distance of backyard hives from sensitive uses such as schools? The diagrams in the proposed ordinance do not adequately address the flight paths of bees given different configurations of hives and their placement and the characteristics of adjacent properties.

It is wonderful that there is a growing movement toward home grown foods and less processed food consumption. The backyard beekeeping ordinance is a "feel good" measure that could do much good and much harm if not properly considered.

WHILE IT IS COMPLETELY REASONABLE TO REMOVE CRIMINAL PENALTIES FOR URBAN BEEKEEPING, HOW THAT IS DONE IS CRITICAL. WE NEED NOT GO FROM ONE SIDE OF THE PENDULUM (criminalization) TO THE OTHER (nearly anything goes).

I respectfully request that the Council refer this ordinance back to the Planning Dept. for additional outreach and work to be done that will result in a more responsible and balanced ordinance.

Thank you for your consideration,

Barbara Broide