

January 30th, 2019

Re: Proposed Equestrian Facility at Trott Brook Farm  
Location: 17902 Saint Francis Boulevard Ramsey, Minnesota  
From: Dale/Tammy Wills and Centra Homes

## **1. The Vision**

Social challenges facing children and teens have grown exponentially in the past several years. While issues like peer pressure, low self-esteem and social anxiety have been around a long time, recently their prevalence has reached epidemic proportions. Fueled by technology, social media and an increasingly polarized world, anxiety and depression are on the rise.

Raising six children in the early 2000s, Dale and Tammy Wills understand these challenges well. Through skills gained in their successful property development company Centra Homes, they now find themselves in a position to help.

Research has shown improved mental health for children can be fostered by offering safe outlets for kids to express themselves, explore, learn emotional awareness and build resilience. The Wills' hope to create a program using horses as the hands-on avenue for this growth. The new program will help students enhance self-esteem and build problem-solving skills while increasing empathy and social responsibility by learning to ride and care for horses.

The Wills' plan to develop their new program in Ramsey at the Trott Brook Farm. In addition to skill-building, the program will offer volunteer opportunities to help establish meaningful relationships as participants learn to work with and care for horses in community with others.

## **2. The Program**

Through the new program, youth will have the ability to sign up for weekly lessons with a professional trainer as well as volunteer to assist with feeding and grooming the animals. They will begin their journey by learning how to care for horses then progress to tacking and riding. Participants will have the ability to choose to pursue riding in either a western or English discipline. Western riding includes familiar events such as barrel racing while English riding primarily consists of horse jumping.

## **3. Trott Brook Farm**

The new program would be headquartered at Trott Brook Farm located at 17902 Saint Francis Boulevard Ramsey, Minnesota. The property currently operates as a farm with a family home. However the location has roots in equestrian events of the past having hosted Cross Country Equestrian events for many years until 2009. An event that attracted as many as 160 horses and participants annually.

The property consists of approximately 137 acres and is on the edge of the Ramsey city limits with 56 of those acres located in Nowthen and 81 acres located in Ramsey. Ford Brook which eventually feeds into Trott Brook meanders through the center of the property.

A home and barn constructed in 1937 are the main features of the property today and the intent is for both structures to remain in operation. Additional construction is planned for the site.

#### **4. Structures**

The proposed plan will restore and expand on the equestrian heritage of the property and is designed to be built over a five-year period. Once complete, the property would be designed to support as many as 30 horses for lessons and boarding. This would be a ratio of 4.5 acres per horse.

The completed plan would consist of five additional structures.

- Two indoor riding arenas
- A barn for indoor horse stalls
- A barn to store hay and equipment
- A newly constructed home for the Wills family

The two riding arenas would be built from "ClearSpan" materials. This option creates natural light and warmth, reducing the need for artificial light and heat. These structures are generally 20 degrees warmer than the outside temperature in the winter months and 10 degrees cooler in the summer months. As a result, the structures require significantly less electricity and gas to maintain, are more inviting and healthier for horse and rider. The material is similar to that which is used in construction of a greenhouse. The stables and barn would have exterior finishes of steel with two tones to create visual interest.

It is intended that Dale and Tammy Wills will move into the existing farm home soon after closing. After the stables and the first arena are built, they plan to begin construction on the new home. Upon completion, the existing farmhouse would be used by one of Dale and Tammy's adult children and family or a farm caretaker. The new home would access the property from Potassium Street and the existing facilities would continue to access the property from Highway 47.

## **5. Shows/Events**

An important component to the program will be allowing students to showcase their talents. To this end it is anticipated there would be four shows held on the property per year. The shows would allow students to work toward a common goal as they develop and leverage their new skills. It is anticipated the events will draw family to support those competing. Attendance at these events would be free of charge and open to the community.

## **6. Boarding**

It is anticipated that a portion of participants may have the desire to continue to build on their new skills and develop a relationship with their own horse. Because of this, a limited number of spaces will be made available to those desiring to purchase a horse for themselves to stable at the facility.

## **7. Logistics**

The primary access to the property is from St Francis Blvd/Highway 47. Directly in front of the property is a two-lane road with a posted speed limit of 55 mph. Just to the north of the property, there is a turn lane and passing lane to access eastbound 179th Lane heading away from the property. South of the property there is a turn lane and passing lane for access to westbound 177th Lane. All of the surrounding properties consist of acreage lots in both Ramsey and Nowthen.

Several streets are presently stubbed into the property:

- Southern Border: Potassium Street to the east and Sodium Street to the west
- Western Border: 179th Lane
- Northern Border: 183rd Avenue (Nowthen)

## **8. Access**

Due to the volume of traffic on Highway 47 and the concerns that arise as a result, it is proposed that the access for the new facilities would originate off of Potassium Street at the southern border. It is anticipated that traffic from students and trainers will be approximately 16 cars per day, spread out over four hour periods on high volume days with the exception of four annual events.

## 9. Manure Issue Mitigation

In livestock farming operations, one concern that often arises concerns smells and insects related to the volume of manure generated by the animals. The primary cause of smell and insects is poorly managed systems creating wet and stagnant holding pens for the waste. The intent of the manure management system proposed below is to greatly reduce these concerns:

- **Horse stalls**

Stalls will be cleared of manure daily. This is for the welfare of the horses as well as previously stated concerns

- **Paddocks**

Paddocks are areas which horses can be turned out for exercise from stalls as well as living space for horses. These will be cleared of excess manure on a regular basis as needed to prevent smells and insects. This manure will be transferred to the composting area.

- **Temporary Holding Area**

A new temporary holding area for manure will be located between the two indoor riding arenas. This area will have a concrete bottom approximately three feet in ground and be covered. It will slope up to ground level raising slightly above the grade with a roof covering extending beyond the high point. This will prevent any potential run off to the surrounding area as well as rain intrusion. This area will be cleared regularly and transferred to the composting area.

- **Composting area**

Horse manure can be difficult to manage because horses do not fully digest seeds that they ingest. As a result, when the manure is spread those seeds will germinate and grow where spread. Consequently, many crop farmers do not want to fertilize with horse manure as these seeds can contaminate the crop planted. Composting is often the most desirable way to manage manure and protect our environment. When manure is composted properly the seeds burn and will no longer germinate. Additionally, the volume of the manure will reduce by as much as 50%.

Proper composting requires the ability to regulate moisture content. The composting area will be located on the north east side of the property, east of the bend in the existing driveway. This area will have a concrete bottom and covering to prevent runoff and rain from infiltrating. Once the manure is properly composted it is then a desirable fertilizer and will be removed for the benefit of local farmers and gardeners.

## 10. Stormwater Runoff Mitigation

In order to support stormwater runoff, this plan makes use of the existing drainage swale and will incorporate culverts where the new driveway crosses the swale.

Note: Accommodating the existing drainage will require a variance of the 100' lot frontage requirement on the south end of the property where Potassium Street has an existing cul-de-sac. This variance is being sought because the alternative of relocating the existing cul-de-sac onto the property would disrupt the natural drainage for existing residents and could result in a flooding concern for neighboring homes

## 11. Parking

Hard surface parking will be located to the west of the new proposed arenas and stables. A total of 26 parking stalls will be included. The parking will consist of hard surface parking such as class five road base. The need for this many stalls will be infrequent as the common need will be for 2-4 stalls in the afternoon. Parking for larger events would be in pasture areas for parking that consist of short periods during the day of the event.

## 12. Wills Family/ Centra Homes

Dale Wills is the President and Owner of Centra Homes, a Coon-Rapids based residential builder. Centra has completed projects totaling in excess of \$40,000,000 this year, and recently broke ground on the 40-home **Cottages at the COR** project in Ramsey.

Dale has extensive experience in property development and is excited to apply his "day job" expertise to a new passion project at Trott Brook Farm. He and his wife Tammy have been married for 25 years and have six grown children.

## 13. Feedback and Changes

This plan reflects several enhancements to the initial proposal put forth earlier in January.

These revisions were driven by feedback received via the following:

- January 3, 2019 Open House attended by approximately 30 residents
- January 3, 2019 City Planning Commission Meeting
- January 22, 2019 Ramsey City Council Meeting
- Ramsey City Staff Input
- Follow-up conversations with some of the residents who attended the open house

Based on feedback, the revised proposal has re-orientated several key components of the equestrian operations to the east side of the lot (from the center).

Benefits of this change include:

- Increased setbacks from approx. 200' to approx. 350'
- Improved aesthetics, View from south restored for existing residents by moving the two arenas deeper onto the property and orienting arenas side by side rather than continuous.
- Increased number of parking stalls from 21 to 26
- Relocation of the composting site further north on the property
- Retention of existing stormwater runoff (see Stormwater Runoff Mitigation section)

#### **14. Potential Frontage Variance**

As mentioned in the Stormwater Runoff Mitigation section, this plan would require a variance of the 100' lot frontage requirement on the south of the property. This would accommodate the existing cul-de-sac located on Potassium Street. This variance would help ensure that the existing grading will continue to direct runoff for current residents.