



Kitsap County Department of Community Development

MEMORANDUM

Year of the Rural – Horse Facilities and Uses

Date: August 14, 2025

From: Keri Sallee, Long Range Planner

Description: DCD is reviewing horse facilities as part of the 2025 Year of the Rural comprehensive plan update process, for potential revisions to the Kitsap County Code.

(A) What are Horse Facilities and Uses?

Horse facilities and uses encompass a spectrum of equine-related activities and improvements, ranging from small private horse-keeping to intensive, commercial operations. For commercial operations, principle uses include boarding stables, riding academies and lesson programs, horse training centers, breeding operations, and equestrian show venues with indoor or outdoor arenas and seating for large events.

Common “accessory” and support components include barns and stables, paddocks and pastures, covered or uncovered arenas and round pens, trail connections, spectator seating and public-address systems, site lighting, manure storage and handling areas, feed and bedding storage (including hay barns and feed warehouses), wash racks and quarantine/turnout areas, trailer and truck parking, and on-site signage. Some facilities also offer limited feed and tack retail incidental to the primary equestrian use. Temporary event infrastructure (e.g., tents, vendors, portable restrooms) may also accompany permitted shows or clinics.

Across western Washington jurisdictions, how these uses are classified and permitted generally depends on scale and intensity. Relevant factors include the number of horses, frequency and size of lessons or events, hours of operation, lighting and amplified sound, traffic and trailer parking demand, proximity to residential uses, proximity to critical areas, and compatibility with rural character. Most counties regulate them as agricultural and/or recreational uses, applying standards for setbacks, screening, parking and circulation, lighting, and manure and stormwater management; more intensive facilities and event venues typically require discretionary review as conditional use permits. Subsequent sections detail how these concepts are applied in in code and policy.

(B) Background: Older Kitsap County Code and Projects

1. Previous Kitsap County Code Requirements.

Staff considered the County's Zoning Code from 1999 to today. In 1999, "Commercial stables" was listed as a conditional use in several rural designations (Rural Use Table 320.020). Special-use standards were provided for animal-related facilities: commercial stables were required to be at least 200 feet from any property line, on-site truck access and parking required to be designed to prevent dust, noise, and drainage impacts, and "Private stables and paddocks" were required to be at least 50 feet from property lines with similar nuisance-prevention controls.

These private/commercial stable categories and their special-use setbacks were removed as part of a comprehensive Title 17 update in 2006 (Ord. 367-2006; recodified 2008 by Ord. 415-2008). This update adopted Chapter 17.381 "Allowed Uses", replacing the prior "Provisions Applying to Special Uses" model. From that point forward, equestrian activity was addressed within broader agricultural and recreational categories, with later development standards housed in Chapter 17.455 (Agriculture).

2. Pre-2006 Horse Facility Permits.

Staff located two horse facility special use permits that were issued under pre-2006 zoning code regulations: Highpoint Stables (1995) and the Clover Valley Riding Center (1996). Both of these were commercial boarding, training, and riding lesson facilities in the South Kitsap area, approximately 10 acres in size. The facilities included riding arenas, barns and horse stalls, pasture areas, parking areas, and other site improvements.

These applications were reviewed as Unclassified Use Permits (KCC 17.60 at that time), against the standards for assessing compatibility with surrounding uses, traffic, noise, and environmental impacts (KCC.17.60.040). The conditions of approval for both projects included:

- Limit on number of horses: 20 (Highpoint) to 25 (Clover Valley).
- Hours of operation restrictions to limit evening and early-morning noise.
- Requirements for dust control, manure management, and stormwater handling.
- Compliance with Health District requirements for potable water supply and waste disposal.
- Restrictions on location and hour of arena lighting use to reduce glare for neighbors.
- Requirement for site plan adherence, with any future expansion to require additional review.
- Obtain farm plan approval from the Kitsap Conservation District.

As indicated in the staff reports and decisions, the limit on number of horses was required to control the intensity of the permitted use, thereby maintaining rural residential character of the neighborhood and limiting potential impacts to nearby properties from traffic, noise, and

manure management operations.

(C) Current Kitsap County Code

Horse-related facilities in Kitsap County are currently regulated across multiple sections of the County code:

- “Equestrian facility” is defined in KCC 17.455.030.
- Primary agricultural uses, including equestrian facilities, must comply with the Agriculture Code (KCC 17.415.040), which sets specific standards for agricultural operations.
- Manure storage or processing in Critical Aquifer Recharge Areas (CARA) is prohibited by KCC 19.600.620(5), and KCC 22.600.160 (Shoreline Master Program) regulates confined animal feeding operations and stockpiles of manure within shoreline jurisdiction.
- KCC 12.08.160 identifies manure as a regulated pollutant under stormwater management rules.

Generally, under the current Kitsap County Code a farm plan is not required for stables or other animal-husbandry uses when the property has no mapped critical areas and the property owner is not pursuing an open-space designation.

(D) Accessory/Additional Uses with Horse Facilities

Accessory uses associated with horse facilities, such as feed and tack sales/storage, are regulated differently across western Washington counties:

- In Snohomish County, “Storage, retail sales livestock feed” is defined in SCC 30.91S.585 and permitted only in conjunction with a livestock auction facility (SCC 30.22.110).
- Pierce County recognizes hay or feed storage as an accessory farm structure under PCC 18A.33.260, with related standards in PCC 18A.35.
- King County’s “Feed store” definition (KCC 21A.06.340) allows sales of livestock feed, hay, and veterinary supplies within limits set by KCC 21A.08.070, including a maximum 3,500 square feet of covered sales area, a minimum site size of 4.5 acres, and requirements related to sales mix.

Skagit, Whatcom, Thurston, Jefferson, and Clallam Counties do not include specific provisions for tack or feed sales, instead regulating them under general agricultural supply or retail categories.

In Kitsap County, there is no separate definition for tack or feed sales. These activities would be required to meet the standards for retail or agricultural uses applicable to the zoning district, and comply with the standards in KCC Chapter 17.455.

(E) State Law and Court Decisions

Washington State law establishes that horses are livestock and that caring for them constitutes animal husbandry. Under RCW 7.48.310(2), “agricultural activity” expressly includes animal husbandry, which encompasses boarding, training, feeding, grooming, exercising, sheltering, and related horse care. RCW 7.48.305(1) provides that these activities are presumed not to be a nuisance if they are conducted using good agricultural practices, do not have a substantial adverse effect on public health or safety, and comply with applicable laws.

However, these so-called “right-to-farm” protections do not shield poor practices from enforcement. For example, RCW 90.48.080 prohibits discharges of pollutants, including manure runoff, into state waters. Relevant case law confirms that the right-to-farm statutes function only as a limited nuisance defense, and do not preempt local zoning, environmental regulations, or public safety laws.

(F) Previous KCC Requirements/Code Requirements of Other Counties

The reviewed western Washington counties all employ similar tools to manage equestrian uses, including standards for minimum site area, maximum intensity thresholds, setbacks and screening to protect adjacent uses, parking and access management, lighting controls, and waste/stormwater safeguards. These standards are summarized in the table below, along with previous (1999) and current (2025) Kitsap County code:

Horse Facilities Regulation – Kitsap County and Other Counties

Jurisdiction	Definition & Classification	Permit Requirements	Notable Standards & Conditions
2025 Kitsap County	KCC 17.455.030 (Equestrian facility)	KCC 17.455.050, references KCC 17.455.020 (Table 1).	Kitsap Health District drinking water regulations require minimum separation of manure piles and animal enclosures from public/private water supplies; BMPs govern animal densities; structures (including barns and storage) must meet setbacks in KCC 17.455.080.
Snohomish County	SCC 30.91E.250; SCC 30.91E.255	SCC 30.22.110, note (72)	Mini-equestrian centers: ≥5-acre site; covered arena size cap (stabling excluded); shielded lighting; setbacks for arenas/structures; parking per SCC 30.26.035. Larger equestrian centers generally

Jurisdiction	Definition & Classification	Permit Requirements	Notable Standards & Conditions
			require a CUP with additional conditions.
Skagit County	SCC 14.16.320(4) (dd)	Special Use Permit per SCC 14.16	Special use conditions include setbacks and dimensional limits, traffic/parking plans, landscaping/screening, and environmental performance standards (noise, dust, runoff) under SCC 14.16.600–.900.
Whatcom County	WCC 20.36; WCC 20.40	CUP per district	Supplementary requirements in WCC 20.80 address drainage and stormwater management, access/parking, outdoor lighting and noise, and critical-areas compliance, in addition to district standards.
Thurston County	TCC 22.04.510	Special Use Permit per TCC 20.54.065	Special use standards under TCC 20.54.070 address minimum site characteristics, setbacks and visual screening from adjoining uses, parking/circulation plans, lighting controls, and manure/waste management and operating conditions.
Pierce County	PCC 18A.33.260	CUP per PCC 18A.75.030	CUP conditions may include screening/buffering, setbacks from adjacent residential uses, traffic/parking management (PCC 18A.35), and consistency with community-plan development standards.
King County	KCC 21A.06.1220	Allowed in RA (KCC 21A.08.050.B.14); CUP for large arenas	Covered riding arenas regulated by KCC 21A.30.030; arenas above an area threshold require CUP (stabling excluded from arena area). Standards address setbacks, height, and lighting.
Jefferson County	JCC 18.20.350	Per JCC 18.15 and overlay	SRT/agritourism performance standards regulate visitor capacity, parking area design, event frequency and hours, noise, and compatibility with rural character; overlay

Jurisdiction	Definition & Classification	Permit Requirements	Notable Standards & Conditions
			approvals may apply.
Clallam County	CCC 33.03.010	District-specific per CCC 33.10	District-specific standards address setbacks/buffering, access and parking, drainage/stormwater, and environmental protections within Title 33.

(G) KCC Update Recommendations

Based on this review of Kitsap County’s current provisions, state law, and practices in other Washington counties, staff have several recommendations:

- Provide definitions of different types of horse-related facilities in KCC 17.110, potentially distinguishing between small-scale and large-scale operations by adopting different standards based on size and intensity.
- Adopt permit types for horse-related facilities (ACUP, CUP) in KCC Title 17 based on facility size, intensity, accessory uses, compatibility with adjacent residential areas and rural character, and proximity to critical areas.
- Adopt development standards for arenas, lighting, parking, and setbacks in KCC Title 17 to address the specific impacts of equestrian uses.
- Adopt standards in KCC Chapter 17.455 for accessory uses such as tack and feed sales, with thresholds linked to facility scale and zoning district. Alternatively, the County can separately enforce requirements for retail and storage activities under existing land use and zoning codes, as co-primary uses.
- Align manure management and water protection requirements in KCC 17.455 and KCC Title 19 with best practices according to state law and guidance, and provide these as potential conditions of approval.
- Include cross-references in KCC Chapter 17.455 to relevant state statutes (RCW 7.48.305, RCW 16.52.011, RCW 90.48.080), to reinforce compliance obligations and to clarify the limits of right-to-farm protections.