



WASHOE COUNTY

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STAFF REPORT

BOARD MEETING DATE: August 25, 2026

DATE: July 24, 2026

TO: Board of County Commissioners

FROM: Kat Oakley, AICP, Planning Manager, Community Services Dept., 775-328-3628, koakley@washoecounty.gov

THROUGH: Kelly Mullin, AICP, Division Director, Planning & Building Division, Community Services Department, 775-328-3619, kmullin@washoecounty.gov

SUBJECT: Introduction and first reading of an ordinance amending Washoe County Code Chapter 110 (Development Code) within Articles 300, 302, 304, 342, 400, 410, 412, and 809. These updates include: adding sections to establish a purpose for Article 342 Agricultural Uses, establish applicability for the same, establish development requirements for equine facilities, and allow incorporation of a director's modification of standards request with an administrative review permit. These updates also include amending various sections to: add Article 342, Agricultural Uses to the Division Three table of contents; remove the commercial stables use type from Table 110.302.05.03; add small, medium, and large equine facility use types to Table 110.302.05.5; update the key to Table 110.302.05.5 to reference administrative review permits, to remove reference to Planning Commission special use permits, and to include a note; remove the commercial stables definition from Article 304, Use Classification System, modify certain definitions to clarify their applicability to equine uses, and add definitions for small, medium, and large equine facilities; update the list of tables in the Division Four table of contents; remove off-street parking requirements for commercial stables and add them for equine facilities; update language related to accessible parking spaces and related development requirements; allow unpaved all-weather surfaces for agricultural uses with 20 or less parking spaces; add reference to agricultural uses in Section 110.412.00 Purpose; exempt equine facilities from Article 412, Landscaping except for parking and loading areas; specify that parking area screening is only required adjacent to the parking or loading area; update time frames for the processing of an administrative review permit; and all matters necessarily connected therewith and pertaining thereto.

And if supported, set a public hearing for the second reading and possible adoption of the ordinance for September 15, 2026 (All Commission Districts.) FOR POSSIBLE ACTION

AGENDA ITEM # _____

SUMMARY

The Board is asked to introduce and conduct a first reading of an ordinance amending Washoe County Code Chapter 110 (Development Code) to update provisions related to equine businesses, updating use types, permitting requirements, and development standards. The proposed code amendments are described in detail beginning on page 3 of this staff report. Additional analysis can be found in Attachment C, Planning Commission staff report.

Washoe County Strategic Objective supported by this item:

Economic Impacts: Meet the needs of our growing community.

PREVIOUS ACTION

July 7, 2026. The Washoe County Planning Commission (PC) reviewed the proposed amendments to Washoe County Code Chapter 110 (Development Code) and voted 5-0 to recommend approval of Development Code Amendment WDCA26-0003 to the Board. In doing so, the Planning Commission made all four possible findings (only one is required) set forth in Washoe County Code Section 110.818.15(e), which are set forth below:

1. Consistency with Master Plan. The proposed development code amendment is in substantial compliance with the policies and action programs of the Washoe County Master Plan;
2. Promotes the Purpose of the Development Code. The proposed development code amendment will not adversely impact the public health, safety or welfare, and will promote the original purposes for the Development Code as expressed in Article 918, Adoption of Development Code;
3. Response to Changed Conditions. The proposed development code amendment responds to changed conditions or further studies that have occurred since the Development Code was adopted by the Board of County Commissioners, and the requested amendment allows for a more desirable utilization of land within the regulatory zones; and
4. No Adverse Affects. The proposed development code amendment will not adversely affect the implementation of the policies and action programs of the Conservation Element or the Population Element of the Washoe County Master Plan.

BACKGROUND

On October 21, 2025, the Washoe County Board of County Commissioners (BCC) prioritized six master plan implementation items, which included an update to the Washoe County Development Code relating to equine businesses that was first prioritized on December 10, 2024. Equine businesses are prevalent in unincorporated Washoe County, with approximately seven applications received for such in the last five years. Equine business owners have expressed that they currently encounter many challenges in permitting their businesses, some of which relate to the Development Code. As such, the BCC directed Planning staff to review existing regulations and identify possible improvements. From 2024-2026, staff conducted significant public outreach and drafted a set of development code amendments (DCA's) designed to minimize permitting obstacles

where feasible while still appropriately considering and mitigating impacts to surrounding properties.

CURRENT REGULATIONS

Currently, all equine businesses in Washoe County are classified as “commercial stables,” which is a commercial use type generally requiring a special use permit (SUP). The Warm Springs planning area has special provisions related to equestrian uses, allowing such uses on properties with a single-family dwelling with required permitting based on horses per acre. In all other areas of the County where allowed, commercial stables currently require a special use permit and are subject to all commercial development standards, including those related to parking, landscaping, lighting, and operating out of a commercial structure.

PROPOSED AMENDMENTS

Proposed changes are summarized below. A draft ordinance showing all code amendments is attached as Attachment A.

Use Type Classifications

One consistent public sentiment throughout the update process was that Washoe County’s current “one size fits all” approach to regulating equine businesses results in an unnecessarily big burden on smaller businesses. Staff is therefore proposing to eliminate the existing “commercial stables” definition and to instead define three tiers of equine facilities, differentiated based on size. The three tiers include any type of equine use—including horse boarding, horse training, lessons, and equine-assisted therapy—and are divided as follows:

- Small equine facility – 1 through 8 horses
- Medium equine facility – 9 through 20 horses
- Large equine facility – 21 or more horses

While public input indicates that number of horses does not always correlate with the extent of the business activities and impacts, exploration of other potential thresholds revealed that number of horses is the best clearly definable and observable proxy. Other updates were made to use type classifications, including:

- Modifications to certain commercial recreation use types to clarify the exclusion or inclusion of certain equine uses, such as horse racing
- Reclassification of equine uses from commercial to agricultural

Permitting Requirements

In all areas of Washoe County except for Warm Springs, commercial stables currently require a special use permit. Proposed changes to use type definitions to establish three different tiers of equine facilities based on size also allow for differentiation of permitting requirements for each tier. In general, it is proposed within most regulatory zones that small equine facilities be allowed by right, medium by administrative review permit, and large by special use permit. Low density suburban (LDS) has more stringent permitting requirements due to smaller parcel sizes and higher density residential development, except for equine facilities with less than three horses, which will continue to be allowed by right. Equine facilities are not proposed to be allowed in different zones than those in which commercial stables are currently permitted. Table 1 below shows the proposed

permitting requirements for areas outside of Warm Springs. Warm Springs commercial stable requirements are not proposed to be modified.

Use Type	LDR	MDR	HDR	LDS/LDS2	TC	PR	GR	GRA
Small Equine Facility	A	A	A	AR	S ₂	AR	A	A
Medium Equine Facility	AR	AR	AR	S ₂	S ₂	AR	AR*	AR
Large Equine Facility	S ₂	S ₂	S ₂	S ₂	S ₂	AR	S ₂	S ₂
Key: -- = Not allowed; A = Allowed; AR = Administrative Review; P = Administrative Permit; PR = Park Commission Approval pursuant to Section 110.104.40(c); S ₂ = Board of Adjustment Special Use Permit Note: *See Section 110.342.10(k) for alternate permitting requirements.								

Table 1 Permitting Requirements

Agricultural Use Standards

In order to create standards specific to agricultural uses, including equine facilities, a new Article 342 is proposed. In addition to sections establishing the purpose and applicability of the article, the draft changes include several requirements and allowances specific to equine facilities, including:

- Requiring equine facilities to specify their scope of activity during the permitting and licensing process, including activities, volume of customers, and infrastructure such as buildings
- Establishing a minimum lot size of 35,000 square feet
- Precluding livestock shelters in setback areas
- Requiring businesses to produce documents such as boarding contracts if needed in the course of investigating a complaint
- Hours of operation from 7:00 a.m. through 9:00 p.m.
- Additional review and mitigation as needed for impacts to source water or regulated waterways
- Allowance for the use of temporary bathroom facilities for small and medium equine facilities not operating out of a structure
- Alternate landscaping requirements, including buffers along streets and buffers adjoining residential uses when such uses are within 100 feet of the equine facility
- Allowances for medium equine facilities by right on General Rural (GR) parcels that are at least 35 acres when such facilities are located at least 100 feet from adjoining property lines and on parcels zoned Low Density Suburban (LDS) when less than three horses are associated with the business
- Standards related to compliance with animal welfare regulations and coordination with Washoe County Regional Animal Services

Other Changes

Changes are proposed throughout the Development Code that will impact equine facilities and other types of uses. Proposed amendments improve regulations and processes more broadly for agricultural and other uses, including by:

- Requiring parking and loading area landscape buffers only adjacent to the parking area, rather than along the entire adjoining property line
- Allowing an unpaved all-weather surface for agricultural uses with 20 or less parking spaces
- Modifying administrative permit review timelines to accommodate more complex reviews, such as those for equine facilities

FISCAL IMPACT

No fiscal impact.

PUBLIC OUTREACH

Public outreach for the equine business code update began in 2024 with an online survey, webinar, and series of in-person open house events. This initial public outreach, referred to as Phase 0 public outreach, was focused on seeking feedback on different types of equine business regulations, including on number of horses, permitting requirements, and development standards. Over 100 citizens attended the open house events and the online survey received over 1,800 responses (see the full [summary of Phase 0 Outreach](#)). The input from Phase 0 helped inform the menu of policy options to consider in drafting code amendments.

Phase 1 public outreach took place in the beginning of 2026 and included two in-person kickoff events and one online webinar. The focus of this phase of outreach was to share the project plan and process, present findings from Phase 0 outreach, and to seek input on different types and needs of equine businesses in the County. Approximately 48 citizens attended and comments covered many topics including the types of equine business models in Washoe County, suggestions for appropriate thresholds for different tiers of equine businesses, comments regarding challenges with other agency regulations, and comments regarding other development standards. The [Phase 1 Public Outreach Report](#) summarizes comments received. These comments informed the initial draft of amendments.

Phase 2 public outreach occurred March-April of 2026 and focused on the public review of draft amendments. Phase 2 outreach included one online webinar, an online survey, and eight scheduled focus groups in four different locations. Approximately 20 citizens participated in the webinar and focus groups, and 54 citizens responded to the online survey. Comments once again covered a range of topics but most commonly focused on challenges with tier thresholds based on number of customers, concerns about landscaping and other requirements, and support for proposed standards related to parking, manure management, and water protection. The [Phase 2 Public Outreach Report](#) summarizes comments received. Based on these comments, staff created a revised draft.

The last phase of public outreach occurred in May of 2026 and provided an opportunity for citizens to view and comment on the revised draft. Feedback was solicited through an online survey. The survey received 18 responses, which showed support for the change to define the tiers of equine businesses by number of horses rather than customers. There

was also strong support for other draft revisions, including modifications to landscaping requirements. On some of the changes, such as allowing review of a director's modification of standards with an administrative review permit, responses were split or neutral. Survey responses are included in Exhibit B of Attachment C. Some final revisions were made in response to survey input, including clarifying how horses under one year old and other equine species are counted in relation to permitting thresholds and additional language regarding compliance with animal welfare regulations. A list of changes made in response to Phase 2 outreach can be found in Attachment C.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Board of County Commissioners introduce and conduct a first reading of the attached ordinance amending Washoe County Code Chapter 110 (Development Code) in Divisions Three, Four, and Eight, as set forth in WDCA26-0003. If supported, the Board is asked to set the public hearing for second reading and possible adoption of the Ordinance for September 15, 2026.

POSSIBLE MOTION

Any member of the Board may introduce and conduct the first reading of the proposed ordinance. However, a possible motion would be:

“Move to introduce and conduct a first reading of Bill Number [insert Bill number provided by the County Clerk], which is an ordinance amending Washoe County Code Chapter 110 (Development Code) within Articles 300, 302, 304, 342, 400, 410, 412, and 809 as shown in Attachment A.

Further move to schedule a public hearing for the second reading and possible adoption of the ordinance for September 15, 2026.”

Attachments:

- A. Working Copy of Proposed Ordinance
- B. Planning Commission Action Order and Resolution No. 26-10
- C. Planning Commission Staff Report for WDCA26-0003
- D. Planning Commission Staff Presentation
- E. Recording July 7, 2026 Planning Commission Public Hearing