

Date of Hearing: July 2, 2025

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Juan Carrillo, Chair

SB 322 (Menjivar) – As Amended June 24, 2025

SENATE VOTE: 34-0

SUBJECT: Urban equestrian inclusion zones

SUMMARY: Allows counties and cities to establish urban equestrian inclusion zones for the purpose of entering into enforceable contracts with landowners to restrict land use to equestrian activities. Specifically, **this bill:**

- 1) Allows a city, county, or city and county, after a public hearing, to establish by ordinance an urban equestrian inclusion zone (equestrian zone) within its boundaries for the purpose of entering into enforceable contracts with landowners, on a voluntary basis, for restricting land use for equestrian activities.
- 2) Requires the boundaries of the equestrian zone to be within an equine or equestrian district designated by a general plan or specific or master plan, which may include a specific narrative reference to a geographically determined area or map of the same. Parcels adjoined and parcels only separated by a street or highway shall be considered to be within an equine or equestrian district.
- 3) Prohibits the boundaries of the equestrian zone from including any parcels included in the inventory of sites for residential development required pursuant to Housing Element Law, as specified.
- 4) Requires the boundaries of the equestrian zone to only include parcels that currently contain, and have contained on an ongoing basis since January 1, 2020, an equestrian activity use.
- 5) Provides that entering into enforceable contracts with landowners for restricting land use for equestrian activities shall be considered a reduction in the intensity of land use pursuant to the Housing Crisis Act of 2019 (Housing Crisis Act) and shall require compliance with the “no net loss” provisions of the Housing Crisis Act, as specified.
- 6) Allows, following the adoption of an ordinance establishing an equestrian zone, a city, county, or city and county to adopt rules and regulations consistent with the city, county, or city and county’s general plan, zoning, and other land use standards, for the implementation and administration of the equestrian zone and of contracts related to that equestrian zone.
- 7) Allows a city, county, or city and county to impose a fee upon contracting landowners for the reasonable costs of implementing and administering contracts.
- 8) Allows, following the adoption of an ordinance establishing an equestrian zone, a city, county, or city and county to enter into a contract with a landowner to enforceably restrict the use of the land subject to the contract to uses consistent with urban equestrian activities and local jurisdiction requirements for public health and safety.

- 9) Requires a contract entered into pursuant to this bill to include, but not be limited to, all of the following provisions:
 - a) An initial term of not less than five years.
 - b) A restriction on property, or combination of contiguous properties that is at least 0.1 acres, and not more than three acres.
 - c) A requirement that the entire property, or combination of contiguous properties, subject to the contract shall be dedicated toward equestrian activity use.
 - d) A prohibition against any dwellings, except a livestock caretaker's dwelling, on the property while under contract.
- 10) Specifies that a contract entered into pursuant to this bill shall not prohibit the use of structures that support equestrian activities, including, but not limited to, stables, barns, covered or uncovered riding areas, feed or hay barns, tool equipment sheds, tack rooms, and instructional space.
- 11) Provides that a city, county, or city and county shall not enter into a new contract or renew an existing contract pursuant to this bill after January 1, 2029. A contract entered into pursuant to this bill on or before January 1, 2029, shall be valid and enforceable for the duration of the contract.
- 12) Provides the following definitions:
 - a) "Equestrian activities" means any activity involving equine.
 - b) "Equestrian activity use" means land or structures where equine activities take place.
- 13) Includes, within the definition of "reducing the intensity of land use" for purposes of the Housing Crisis Act, entering into enforceable contracts with landowners for restricting land use for equestrian activities.
- 14) States that preserving equestrian land use is a matter of statewide concern and is not a municipal affair as that term is used in Section 5 of Article XI of the California Constitution. Therefore, this bill applies to all cities, including charter cities.
- 15) Contains findings and declarations regarding its purpose.

FISCAL EFFECT: According to the Senate Appropriations Committee, pursuant to Senate Rule 28.8, negligible state costs.

COMMENTS:

- 1) **Author's Statement.** According to the author, "The Urban Equestrian Inclusion Zones Act is a necessary measure to preserve California's equestrian heritage by allowing cities and counties to accept voluntary land-use contracts for equestrian activities, similar to existing urban agriculture incentives. This bill protects historic ranches, riding trails, and equestrian

communities, such as Norco, Sylmar, Napa Valley, Compton, and Burbank, from being lost to urban development while supporting local economies, tourism, and recreation. By providing the opportunity for land owners to restrict their properties for equestrian use, it promotes sustainable land management without restricting growth. As California addresses its housing crisis, this balanced approach ensures that equine-friendly spaces remain an option, safeguarding the state’s cultural legacy for future generations.”

- 2) **Background.** Numerous communities throughout the state have deep equestrian roots. The introduction of horses by Spanish settlers in the 1760s contributed to the development of early industries, including ranching and agriculture. In the 20th century, more modern equestrian activities became common in some parts of California, including recreational riding and competitive disciplines such as show jumping, dressage, and rodeo. Some communities, such as Avocado Heights, Palmdale, Pellissier Village, Palos Verdes, Shadow Hills, Altadena, Tejon Ranch, Pico Rivera, Lakewood, Rolling Hills, and Norco, established land use regulations (such as general plan policies or zoning ordinances) or other policies to promote development patterns compatible with horse ownership.
- 3) **Other Types of Local Land Use Restrictions.** The Williamson Act, passed in 1965, allows local governments to enter into voluntary contracts with private landowners in order to restrict specific land to agricultural or open space use in exchange for a reduction in property taxes. These ten-year contracts are intended to encourage farmland and open space conservation. Many Williamson Act contracts take place in the unincorporated areas of counties.

Modeled after the Williamson Act, AB 551 (Ting), Chapter 406, Statutes of 2013, enacted the Urban Agriculture Incentive Zone Act, which authorized urban cities and counties to enter into enforceable, voluntary contracts with landowners to convert vacant, unimproved, or blighted parcels to agricultural use in exchange for a reduction in their property taxes. In order to be eligible, the parcel under contract must be located in an urbanized area with a population of over 50,000 residents. The Urban Agriculture Incentive Zone Act defines agricultural use to include all branches of farming, including, but not limited to, the production, cultivation, growing, and harvesting of any agricultural or horticultural products, agricultural education, and the sale of produce through farm stands, among other things.

- 4) **Housing Crisis Act.** Responding to the state’s housing crisis, the Legislature enacted SB 330 (Skinner), Chapter 654, Statutes of 2019, the Housing Crisis Act. Among other things, the Housing Crisis Act set limitations on the ability of cities and counties to reduce the zoned capacity for housing in their jurisdiction and established anti-displacement protections when housing is demolished. SB 8 (Skinner), Chapter 161, Statutes of 2021, extended the sunset on the Housing Crisis Act by five years, to January 1, 2030.

The Housing Crisis Act prohibits an affected city or county from enacting a development policy, standard, or condition that has the effect of reducing or otherwise limiting the intensity of land use on land where housing is an allowable use beneath a specified amount. For affected jurisdictions, the Housing Crisis Act declares actions taken in violation of these provisions to be void. There is a “safe harbor” provision that permits a reduction in the intensity of land use if the jurisdiction concurrently increases the allowable density on other parcels so that there is “no net loss” in residential capacity in the jurisdiction.

- 5) **Housing Element Law.** One important tool in addressing the state’s housing crisis is to ensure that all of the state’s cities and counties appropriately plan for new housing. Such planning is required through the housing element of each community’s General Plan, which outlines a long-term plan for meeting the community’s existing and projected housing needs. Cities and counties are required to update their housing elements every eight years in most of the high population parts of the state, and five years in areas with smaller populations. Localities must adopt a legally valid housing element by their statutory deadline for adoption. Failure to do so can result in certain escalating penalties, including an accelerated deadline for completing rezoning, exposure to the “builder’s remedy,” public or private lawsuits, financial penalties, potential loss of permitting authority, or even court receivership.

Among other things, the housing element must demonstrate how the community plans to accommodate its share of its region’s housing needs allocation. To do so, each community establishes an inventory of sites designated for new residential development that is sufficient to accommodate its fair share. Where a community does not already contain the existing capacity to accommodate its fair share, it must undertake a rezoning program to accommodate the housing planned for in the housing element.

Local governments must maintain an adequacy of residential development sites throughout the entire planning cycle and not take actions that reduce or permit the reduction of residential density for any parcel in its housing element that has been identified to meet its share of its regional housing needs allocation (RHNA). This “no net loss” requirement, similar to the requirement in the Housing Crisis Act, does permit a loss in density on such a site as long as the local government identifies and makes available additional sites to cover the lost portion of RHNA.

- 6) **Bill Summary.** This bill allows counties and cities to establish equestrian zones, via ordinance, for the purpose of entering into enforceable contracts with landowners, on a voluntary basis, to restrict land use to equestrian activities. The boundaries of the equestrian zone must be within an equine or equestrian district designated by a general plan or specific or master plan, and must only include parcels that currently contain, and have contained on an ongoing basis since January 1, 2020, an equestrian activity use.

This bill allows counties and cities to adopt rules and regulations consistent with the general plan, zoning, and other land use standards for the implementation and administration of the equestrian zone and of contracts related to that equestrian zone. Counties and cities may impose a fee upon contracting landowners for the reasonable costs of implementing and administering contracts.

Any contract entered into pursuant to this bill must include all of the following:

- a) An initial term of not less than five years.
- b) A restriction on property, or combination of contiguous properties that is at least 0.1 acres, and not more than three acres.
- c) A requirement that the entire property, or combination of contiguous properties, subject to the contract shall be dedicated toward equestrian activity use.

- d) A prohibition against any dwellings, except a livestock caretaker's dwelling, on the property while under contract.

A contract entered into pursuant to this bill must not prohibit the use of structures that support equestrian activities, such as stables, barns, covered or uncovered riding areas, feed or hay barns, tool equipment sheds, tack rooms, and instructional space.

A county or city shall not enter into a new contract or renew an existing contract pursuant to this bill after January 1, 2029. A contract entered into pursuant to this bill on or before January 1, 2029, shall be valid and enforceable for the duration of the contract.

The equestrian zone must not include any parcels that are included in the inventory of sites for residential development that is required pursuant to Housing Element Law. Entering into enforceable contracts that restrict land use for equestrian activities shall be considered a reduction in the intensity of land use pursuant the Housing Crisis Act, and shall require compliance with the "no net loss" provisions of the Housing Crisis Act. This bill includes, within the definition of "reducing the intensity of land use" for purposes of the Housing Crisis Act, entering into enforceable contracts to restrict land use to equestrian activities.

This bill is sponsored by the author.

- 7) **Arguments in Support.** The California State Horsemen's Association writes, "California's equestrian communities contribute to our state's identity and offer numerous environmental, educational, and economic benefits. Unfortunately, increasing urbanization and land-use pressures have put these spaces at risk. SB 322 offers a proactive solution by allowing local governments to voluntarily designate and protect land for equestrian purposes, ensuring that these important spaces remain accessible for future generations. SB 322 aligns with our goals of promoting smart urban planning, protecting green spaces and equestrian trails as open recreational space, and fostering a sustainable balance between development and heritage preservation. By enacting SB 322, we can safeguard equestrian activities while maintaining flexibility for local governments to tailor zoning regulations to their specific needs."

- 8) **Arguments in Opposition.** None on file.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

California State Horsemen's Association
Equestrian Trails Incorporated
Foothill Trails District Neighborhood Council
Monteverde Ranch Equestrian Center
3 individuals

Opposition

None on file

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