



Homer City Hall
491 E. Pioneer Avenue
Homer, Alaska 99603

www.cityofhomer-ak.gov

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City of Homer Agenda

**Advisory Planning Commission Work Session
Wednesday, July 17, 2019 at 5:30 PM
City Hall Cowles Council Chambers**

CALL TO ORDER, 5:30 P.M.

AGENDA APPROVAL

REGULAR AGENDA

DISCUSSION TOPIC(S)

- [a](#) Beekeeping in the Homer area discussion with Homer beekeepers including guest speaker Linda Gorman, local beekeeper & supplier

COMMENTS OF THE AUDIENCE (3 minute time limit)

COMMISSION COMMENTS

ADJOURNMENT, 6:20 P.M.

June 14, 2019

City of Homer
Planning and Zoning Office

Attention: Travis Brown

RE: Honeybees in Homer

My name is Linda Gorman, owner of Homer Girls Honey. I have been keeping bees in Homer since 2007. I am passionate about honeybees and their keepers. I teach beginning beekeeping in Homer at least once a year. I run a honeybee club and post daily educational information about honeybees on Homer Communications Facebook page.

I am the peninsula distributor for the largest bee supplier in Alaska bringing in 52 packages of bees in 2008, and 81 packages in 2019. I have knowledge of the other bee packages suppliers in Alaska and can address any concerns the commission has on keeping bees in Homer and the growth of wannabe keepers I keep in touch with around 100 keepers on my email list.

In 2018 I brought in 92 packages of bees. A package contains 15,000 bees and one queen. At the height of the nectar flow, typically July a single hive has up to 60 thousand bees in it. With my knowledge of how many people had hives last year in July the honeybee population would have be around 12 million bees in the Homer, North Fork, East End, Dimond Ridge, and Old Sterling areas.

I offer the following written information to the commission on honeybees in Homer and surrounding areas since I am unable to attend your June 19th meeting. Travis Brown has communicated with me with some specific questions which I will address.

Honeybees are generally calm and happy just looking for food for their hive, if you leave them alone, they will leave you alone. I've taught beekeeping in Homer for the past 6 years; my average attendance is 10-15 folks each class. Not all of them go forward and keep bees, but there is a huge interest in bees. I would say 5-8 new keepers give it a try each season. A lot of people try keeping for a couple of years and give it up due to the time issues of maintaining a healthy hive.

Bees really are not that interested in us humans; they may buzz around you, unless you swat at her, she won't bother you. She might land on your shoulder and have a look at you before she moves on. If a person other than the keeper gets close to a hive, the bees would continue to do their business and most generally ignore the human. It comes down to the human behavior. If you mess with a hive they will come after you, as they defend their hives. If you are a block away from a hive, they may check you out, and move on. Honeybees don't sting unnecessary they sting to protect themselves. If they sting, they die. Unlike a wasp that can continue to sting. Dogs, cows, and horses all live will with the bees.

Honeybees go around trees, buildings and other structures, they are focused on the route home. Bees have an internal sense of where they are in relation to their hive and the sun.

When a forager comes out for the first time, she does an orientation flight in front of hive, then takes off in the direction she has been told to go. Bees communicate through what we call dancing. They are deaf, live in the dark and communicate through their pheromones. They don't fly in a group unless they are in a swarm mode. They have 5 eyes; see in ultraviolet light and colors us humans can't see. They have facial recognition of us keepers. 98% of the bees are female worker bees with a life span of 58 days.

Keepers try to protect their hives away from busy urban areas, but you can't restrict a bee from foraging. There are three main types of bees that we keep in Homer. Italians, they fly up to a mile from their hive, Carnies, they fly up to three miles from their hive, and Buckfast can fly five miles from their hive. There are a few Russian hives around and they also fly up to five miles.

Our season in Homer is the end of April through mid-October. The nectar flow typically happens in July to mid-August depending on the year. We feed our hives light sugar water in the spring until they find some other sources of food, and again in the fall with heavy sugar water when the bees are in dearth. (no food)

Homer can sustain many hives within the city limits. To my knowledge there are 10 hives around Bayview/hospital area this season. The bulk of the keepers live on Dimond ridge, East Hill, West Hill, Old Sterling, North Fork, Ohlson Mountain, Fitz Creek, Bear Creek, the bench out east as far out as Lusk.

Bees pollinate the flowers, vegetables, fruits and other items we grow in Homer. Bees are very welcome here. The biggest issue is education on the behavior of the bees, like what does a swarm mean? Bees are not dangerous, they are misunderstood. The biggest fear is when people see a swarm of bees. Bees in swarm mode are the calmest you will ever see. You could stick your head in the swarm and they would not sting you. But they are an intimidating force to a lot of people. Swarming can be controlled by the beekeeper, if they do their hive checks every 7-10 days starting in mid-June the possibilities of a swarm is greatly reduced. I do have a list of swarm gathers here in Homer.

The State asks that we register our hives with them; this is for disease control. I send a form out every year to the folks that I deliver bees to, I don't think it is well received. I don't believe Alaska has a qualified

Honeybee Inspector on board either. There is no restriction from the state on keeping bees. Anchorage does have regulations on keeping hives.

There are five bee suppliers in the State; they are required to hold a health certificate for the packages they bring into the state. This is again a health concern.

I am looking forward to having a conversation on bees at your next meeting.

Linda Gorman

Keeper, teacher, speaker, mentor

Rob Lund
235-3608

July 10, 2019
Homer Advisory Planning Commission

Dear Members:

It is my understanding that you will conduct a workshop in which you will address the issue of beekeeping in the City and whether or not keeping bees constitutes a nuisance that should be regulated. I and several other beekeepers in the area are concerned that misinformation about the biology and behavior of honey bees combined with people's natural anxiety concerning stinging insects will result in actions by the City that will compromise the pursuit of responsible apiculture and the availability of the pollination services and local honey that honey bees provide. I hope to have an opportunity to address the Commission during the workshop and help the members understand honey bees and apiculture from the standpoint of a beekeeper with nearly 50 years of experience. I also hope that this letter will allay some of your concerns prior to discussion of the issues during the workshop.

Honey bees rarely sting, even when a person disturbs the colony. Foraging honey bees, the individual insects that people encounter on flowers in their gardens, fruit trees and raspberry patches, are focused on gathering nectar and pollen; there is little evidence that they are generally aware of the presence of humans let alone concerned by them. In fact, it is difficult to force foraging honey bees to sting, even if the bee's life is threatened. Virtually all stinging events are caused by wasps (hornets and yellow jackets); they are typically attributed to

honey bees because most people cannot distinguish between bees and wasps.

Encountering a swarm can be a very alarming experience for most people—a swarm can contain upward of 30,000 bees and form a cluster a foot or so in diameter and eighteen inches or more in length—but swarms are really quit harmless. Honey bees swarm in order to reproduce the colony—when the hive becomes crowded with bees and generously supplied with stored honey and pollen, the queen and about half of the worker bees leave their hive to establish a new home. The remaining half of the worker force and the stored honey and pollen remain to raise a new queen and continue to prepare for winter and continue the activities of their natal hive. After leaving the hive, the swarm will find some place to rest (on the branches of a tree or beneath the eaves of a house, for example) while they send out scouts to find a suitable location for a new home. As such, the bees in a swarm are homeless vagabonds, and lacking a home to defend, they do not behave defensively—bees in a swarm, however intimidating they may appear to be, do not act aggressively, and they will not sting. There are many new beekeepers in Homer, and some of them will lose swarms—this does not constitute a threat to the public, and several local beekeepers have given their contact information to the Homer Police, Fire Department, Animal Control and others in order to ensure that members of the public who are unexpectedly visited by a swarm of bees can get immediate relief from any discomfort that the swarm might cause.

Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions or concerns. I am looking forward to meeting with you during the workshop.

Sincerely,

Rob Lund

RECEIVED

JUL 10 2019

**CITY OF HOMER
PLANNING/ZONING**