

BEE SAFE ALLIANCE
Advocates for safe and responsible beekeeping in Los Angeles



October 20, 2015

Mayor Eric Garcetti
Los Angeles City Hall
200 North Spring St.
Los Angeles, CA 90012

RE: COUNCIL FILE 12-0785

Dear Honorable Mayor Garcetti:

Please help make Los Angeles a NATIONAL LEADER in responsible urban beekeeping !

You are now in the position to promote responsible beekeeping while providing for maximum public safety and health throughout Los Angeles. Your action is needed to address serious shortcomings in the backyard beekeeping ordinance recently adopted by the City Council.

The proponents of this ordinance had the opportunity to hand pick the best provisions from ordinances enacted in other municipalities, yet failed to understand that some provisions of a beekeeping ordinance must be uniquely tailored to address Los Angeles specific challenges. These include the presence of Africanized Bees, sub-city variations in forage, different cultural practices, and neighborhood physical characteristics. As a result, the adopted ordinance is a "feel good" measure that results in an inadequate and unsafe beekeeping ordinance – for both humans and bees!

The Bee Safe Alliance, a recently formed group Los Angeles community leaders, residents, business owners, parents, teachers, professionals, and volunteers, **ASKS YOU RESPECTFULLY TO PLEASE VETO** the current Beekeeping Ordinance and **return it to council** for revisions to address health and safety concerns of LA's citizens and workers, understanding that enacting a veto is a very unusual practice. (See attached proposed amendments)

Both the Planning Department and our elected Councilmembers have mainly relied upon the input and consul of Honeylove supporters and other backyard bee proponents in the crafting of the City's ordinance and have ignored and discounted the concerns raised by other experienced professionals with differing opinions. Of great concern was the lack of outreach to those whose jobs require entry into properties where bee hives may be kept – leaving them unaware of the potential dangers they face. Sadly, not all bees are friendly and even friendly hives when approached by strangers can pose an immediate danger to those sensitive and to all others perceived to be threatening the hive. (See recent news story regarding bee attack of school crossing guard 10/6/2015.)

Safety Concerns

Currently, the Ordinance:

1. Does **not** acknowledge the need to allow for added distance of hives from any "sensitive uses" such as a **school, church/temple, and certain public spaces**. A five foot distance from the rear or side property lines of hive-harboring homes is all that is required in the ordinance.
2. Does **nothing to address the Africanized bee population** predominant in Southern California (see attached map). Currently beekeepers may keep them in residential properties, unchecked. Many in the field believe that requirements for re-queening Africanized hives are essential to maintaining bees safely in an urbanized setting.

updated 10/21

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3. Does not incorporate a mechanism for a neighbor with demonstrated **anaphylaxis allergic condition** to oppose placement of beehives adjacent to their residence. How should the City balance the desires of potential beekeepers against the health of neighbors? (Statistically 2 % of the population exhibits life-threatening sensitivities to bee stings, which translates to approximately 80,000 Angelenos!)
4. Fails to define the allowable **maximum size or configuration of a hive**, thus, permitting an **unlimited** number of bees (and/or boxes) on any given property. (The ordinance refers only to a maximum number of hives per 2500 square feet but does not place any limits on the size of a hive.)
5. Does not require a posted **sign or notice on a property where bee hives are kept**. Emergency **first responders** such as police, fire, EMT, or service providers such as DWP employees will be in the position of entering properties unaware of beehives and their locations.
6. Does not create a public registry available to those for whom such information is vital for their work and/or health. The County's registry is a confidential data base.

Environmental Concerns

7. The Ordinance **does not allow** California native **non-aggressive** bees to be kept, It specifies only **one** species of imported non-native bees, causing an ecosystem **imbalance** ignoring the importance of bio-diversity. The presence of one species is an increased risk factor for the spread of pathogens targeting one species-Apis Mellifera.
8. The common Bumblebee, docile orchard bee, the necessary leaf cutter bee, the friendly Mason bee, **all** of which have been identified by Los Angeles County bee Inspectors and entomologists as **beneficial pollinators**, yet not included and therefore **banned** by this Ordinance you are being requested to sign.

Administrative and Fiscal Concerns

9. No efforts were made to reach out to and work with the County Agricultural Commissioners office in the crafting of this bill to determine their ability to support the City's new law and language that requires their office to register LA's new beekeepers. The need to develop a registration framework was ignored as was the need to establish a funding mechanism to implement that effort. Enforcement roles have not been defined between City and County nor has a revenue stream been established for enforcement.
10. Realtors and homeowners associations have raised concerns as to the impact of this ordinance on property disclosure requirements and on property values. There are added concerns related to the impact of the ordinance on the ability of local homeowners associations to restrict and/or monitor backyard beekeeping practices in their areas.

We acknowledge the efforts of the Planning Department and those working to codify the practice of backyard beekeeping. However, by failing to address the ordinance's shortcomings, they unwittingly endanger the future success of such efforts as well as the health of our native bees whom they wish to protect. We seek your support in strengthening the ordinance – not as a disapproval of Councilmembers or staff. They did their best while wandering into a foreign environment of beekeeping, guided by well-intentioned hobbyists and bee enthusiasts.

We are attaching additional provisions for inclusion in the Ordinance.

We fear that later amendments to the Ordinance will be a long time in coming. We hope that you will initiate the changes now that are so desperately needed. Please contact us if you have any questions. We would be happy to help.

Sincerely,

Dael Wilcox - Spokesperson
BEE SAFE ALLIANCE
BeeSafeAlliance@gmail.com

SUGGESTED AMENDMENT PROVISIONS TO EXISTING PROPOSED ORDINANCE

(recommended by Bee Safe Alliance)

(h) Written documentation over a medical doctor's signature certifying that the medical condition caused by bee sting to a resident in the site vicinity would constitute a higher than normal health hazard will constitute sufficient cause to withdraw the privilege of urban beekeeping from any specific property.

(i) Abnormally aggressive behavior by honeybees defending their hive beyond the property lines may constitute sufficient cause to withdraw the privilege of urban beekeeping from any specific property.

(j) A sign provided at time of registration and any other updated versions by City shall be placed at all entrances to the property, unobscured from view, at a height from 3 to 5 feet from ground, announcing the presence of beehives on the property.

(k) The maximum number of honeybees allowed in any one bee colony would be the equivalent to 7 deep Langstroth Hive frames, which shall be inspected by a qualified person in no less than ambient temperature of 75 degrees Fahrenheit and wind speed no greater than 5 m.p.h.

PLEASE NOTE THE FOLLOWING PROCEDURAL CONCERNS:

1. Only one neighborhood council voted to support the current ordinance as written.
2. Earlier votes from Neighborhood Councils in support of a backyard beekeeping ordinance were passed to establish a **PILOT PROGRAM initially proposed by and for the Mar Vista community**. The NC votes taken did not consider the granting of backyard beekeeping as a "by right" entitlement for all R1 properties across the City.
3. The City's Staff Report states that a petition supporting the ordinance was submitted with over 8000 signatures. A Public Document Request reveals only 850 submitted signatures and, of those, only 183 were actually from LA City signers!
4. The City's Staff Report relies upon the expertise of an East Coast "Biologist" as the professional consultant/expert. There are no Africanized bees in the northeast. No local California or Southern California entomologists or plant pathologists were contacted.
5. The Los Angeles County Agricultural Inspector's Bureau and the Bee Inspection Unit within it were not consulted or asked for input.
6. There is no evidence of collaboration with the Dept. of Animal Services as directed in the Council's motion.
7. The March 2015 public Hearing held on this ordinance was not noticed or posted to the public as required by LAMC. P.12.31.F.1.

RIVERSIDE: Bee attack sends crossing guard to hospital



BY RICHARD BROOKS / STAFF WRITER /Riverside Press Enterprise

Published: Oct. 6, 2015 Updated: 8:12 p.m.

Bees attacked a crossing guard near a Riverside school, sending her to a hospital for treatment of about 10 stings on her neck and face, city fire officials said.

“There were only a few of them” Capt. Tim Odebralski said of the bees. “But they were very aggressive.”

The attack was reported at 1:49 p.m. Tuesday, Oct. 6, near the southwest corner of Harrison Elementary School at Harrison Street and Bellavista Avenue. No children were injured.

The victim is a woman in her 50s who was still on her feet and fending off the bees when fire crews arrived, Odebralski said.

While firefighters were donning special protective gear, he said, two of them were stung.

There was no indication that the woman was allergic to bee stings, he said, and she was conscious and alert when taken to a hospital as a precautionary measure.

It’s unclear what prompted the attack.

➔ “She was at a stop sign. Maybe (the bees) were attracted by the bright red of the ... sign,” Odebralski said.

Officials believe the bees may have come from a bee box belonging to a neighborhood resident whose property is within the length of a football field from the intersection.

“We’re going to look into whether they have the proper permits for it,” Odebralski said.

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<http://www.pe.com/articles/bees-782673-bee-attack.html>