

FAQ for CAFA Website

June, 2011

Roughly how many members belong to the Community Alliance for Fairgrounds Accountability? There are thousands in the community that are concerned about the impacts of events at the Santa Cruz County Fairgrounds. Our group CAFA (Community Alliance for Fairgrounds Accountability) is made up of volunteers and has approximately 100 active members that are represented by about 20 core members.

When was CAFA formed? CAFA was formed early this year (2011), by a large group of residents living near and far from the fairgrounds, consisting of recent home owners as well as those from families that have lived here for over a century, and from many socioeconomic walks of life.

Who is your group's attorney? We are represented by Wittwer & Parkin, LLP, a local and highly esteemed land use and environmental law firm.

How long have you lived at your current residence? We assume you are asking this question because some argue that anyone who moved to the area after the racetrack began operating should have to just accept the noise, even though its volume and frequency have increased significantly. First of all, CAFA has provided information to the Race Promoter and has been trying to work with him to use new and improved technology (mufflers and sound obstacles) to reduce the noise impacts. Secondly, there are neighbors who have lived near the Fairgrounds prior to the racetrack who have testified to the Fair Board that the recent noise levels have become intolerable. CAFA believes progress can be made regarding this area of concern and is trying to work with the Fair Board and the Race Promoter to this end.

Was there a point when there was a noticeable change in the noise from the racetrack? There was a noticeable change in the last few years: all our neighbors noticed an increase in volume and frequency of the races.

How has the racetrack changed? As to the claim that nothing has changed about the Fairgrounds raceway, in the last few years numerous neighbors noticed an increase in the number of races as well as the increase in loudness of the races. How can this be explained? A brief search indicated changes at the racetrack:

1. A tally of races made in January, 2000, showed that from 1994 to 1999, the average # of races scheduled per season was 26.7 (the season went from the first of April through September). Due to rainouts and cancellations the average # of races actually held from 1994 through 1999 was 24 per season.

When the current promoter took over the speedway in 2006, the schedule was extended two months to include March and October. Since 2006, about two races were added each year, culminating in the initial 2011 schedule containing a total of 40

racers. The number of races actually held per season since 2007 has averaged 30 (according to the race promoter). That is an increase of 25% in the actual number of races held per season since 10 years ago. The race promoter has recently changed the schedule, for this year only, to 30 races and insists that is the number he plans to have with guaranteed rainout days. There is nothing in his contract that limits the number of races he can have.

2. As to the increase in race noise, there are a number of recent changes including widening and banking the track. Widening and banking a track will allow for faster (and noisier) cars. An article in the Santa Cruz Sentinel (3/17/2007) by Isaiah Guzman, quotes “The track has been widened to 75 feet this year, a move promoter John Prentice hopes will make for more side-by-side racing”.
3. In the minutes of the Fairgrounds Board of Directors (Nov. 2008), John Prentice reports “Racetrack repairs have been made, and 990 tons of dirt have been moved...” Can you really move two million pounds of dirt without changing the track?

Is CAFA against the Fairgrounds? We are pro-fairgrounds and for public notice, transparency, and open meetings to address concerns about expanded and intensified use of the Fairgrounds now being actively proposed. To the extent that laws applicable to such expansion (and some existing operations) are being violated, affected residents and businesses should not be vilified for exercising their First Amendment rights (or other legal rights) to remedy such violations. Yes, there are businesses being adversely affected by the expansion plans already being carried out in a piecemeal fashion. CAFA members (including several business owners being adversely affected) are actively supportive of the County Fair. Many of the problems (including those affecting businesses) can be solved by simply following the laws requiring governmental transparency and environmental protection.

What gives you the right to tell the Fairgrounds and racetrack promoter what to do? (Yes, we have been asked this question more than once!) First of all, the 1st Amendment gives anyone the right to speak freely. Secondly, CAFA is not telling the Fairgrounds and racetrack promoter what to do; rather we think that the Fairgrounds and racetrack promoter owe the community the simple respect of being a good neighbor. Following CEQA (California Environmental Quality Act) and laws regarding transparency, open meetings, and public notice will go a long way in minimizing the impact of additional events and intensifying existing ones.

If what is going on at the Fairgrounds and the racetrack bothers you so much, why don't you just move away? We like it here, and things were fine when we moved in. Activities at the Fairgrounds have gotten more frequent and louder in recent years. The Fairgrounds recently announced its intention to increase the number of events and intensify the use of existing facilities. We'd like to stay in our homes and we think that if the Fairgrounds wants to be a good neighbor, it will work with the community and the environment as it expands.

What does CAFA hope to accomplish? We would like the Fairgrounds to follow a Master Plan that encompasses all events, existing and proposed, held there. This Master Plan must

accompany environmental review that would identify all potential and existing impacts and involve mitigation of these impacts. The Master Plan and Environmental Review process would involve transparency, open meetings and public notice so that the community is involved. As part of the process, we would like the Fairgrounds to adopt a good-neighbor noise policy based on County guidelines as adopted by the Santa Cruz County Master Plan. This approach would establish a sustainable, enjoyable and neighbor-friendly Fairground for years to come.