



July 21, 2020

Board of County Commissioners
Clark County, Nevada

Via e-mail: zoningmeeting@clarkcountynv.gov

Re: Agenda Item 15 for New Dewey Strip Holdings, LLC (Application No. UC-20-0139)

Dear Commissioners,

We're writing on behalf of PETA and its more than 6.5 million members and supporters worldwide—including 46,000 in Clark County—and Las Vegas-based CompassionWorks International to request that the Board of County Commissioners deny New Dewey Strip Holdings, LLC's (NDSH) land use application to construct a tent and a structure for caging tigers on the south Las Vegas Strip for use in Jay Owenhouse's magic show, which is scheduled to last for six months.

The Netflix series *Tiger King* recently exposed the cruelty that captive tigers endure when they're used as props. The cub-petting industry churns out baby tigers, tears them from their mothers, and then discards them when they're too large and dangerous to be used as photo props. Owenhouse has obtained tigers from Bhagavan "Doc" Antle, one of the [major tiger breeders](#) featured in *Tiger King*. Authorizing his tiger show would perpetuate this cruel industry.

Wild animals aren't willing participants in magic shows, and it's disingenuous for NDSH to call these animals "sanctuary tigers," when it plans to use them in circus-style performances and store them like props in 30-foot-by-30-foot metal cages. Tigers evolved to be athletic, solitary hunters who roam vast, remote forest territories and love to swim in streams. Keeping them caged next to a circus tent on the busy Las Vegas Strip in the oppressive summer heat—approximately 1,800 feet from one of McCarran International Airport's active runways—is plainly incompatible with their well-being and may violate federal Animal Welfare Act regulations. *See, e.g.*, 9 C.F.R. § 3.127(b). [The 2004 death of a lion](#) who was confined to a sweltering boxcar while it crossed the Mojave Desert in 109-degree heat provides evidence of big cats' inability to handle extreme heat.

Any animal exhibit—and particularly of tigers—comes with significant risks to public safety. Tigers are wild animals who possess tremendous strength and speed and can react unpredictably, especially when confronted with novel environments that may cause stress. They can attack with little or no warning, as Las Vegas knows well from the 2003 attack on Roy Horn during a show. [These attacks](#) can result in death and serious injuries: The animals can puncture and crush a human's skull, vertebrae, larynx, or airway or sever major blood vessels. In [2019](#), Owenhouse himself admitted that both he and his daughter had sustained injuries caused by the tigers, and his daughter's laceration required a doctor to close the wound with super-glue. Last year, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) [cited](#) Owenhouse for risking the safety of a juvenile tiger and the public when he failed to ensure that sufficient distance or a barrier was in place between the tiger and the public. The agency

noted that “[b]ecause of the strength and speed of tigers, there is inherent danger for both the viewing public and the exhibited animal” in such situations. These incidents are unsurprising, given that Owenhouse has no formal training or education in tiger care.

In recognition of the dangers that tigers pose to humans, Clark County Code § 10.18.010(b) prohibits the public exhibition of “inherently dangerous exotic or wild animals,” which includes tigers. Owenhouse’s exhibit, scheduled to last for six months, doesn’t qualify for any of the exemptions in Clark County Code § 10.18.020.

These public safety risks are compounded by the current COVID-19 pandemic. The USDA recently issued an [advisory note](#) urging exhibitors to limit contact between humans and nondomestic cats after [multiple big cats](#) at the Bronx Zoo tested positive for the virus. Owenhouse has expressed no intent to comply with the USDA’s advice, which suggests that exhibitors physically distance themselves from big cats and wear extra protective equipment when working with animals to prevent transmission between them and humans. Indeed, Owenhouse posted a [video on May 24](#) on his YouTube channel in which he’s within inches of two tigers’ faces and even kisses them, indicating a clear disregard for the USDA’s advisory note.

Also included in the NDSH application is a request to allow “temporary signage” depicting one white and one orange tiger that reads, “Animals are family! Help us save the tiger!” But Owenhouse’s magic show has no relationship to tiger conservation efforts and doesn’t even purport to be educational. In fact, in 2014, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service [denied Owenhouse Endangered Species Act permits](#) for two tigers because his magic show didn’t enhance the propagation or survival of the species.

This type of show is outdated and has no place on the Las Vegas Strip, as evidenced by recent decisions made by several Las Vegas landmarks such as Caesars Palace, the MGM Grand, and the Westgate Las Vegas Resort & Casino, which have all [rejected magic acts involving tigers](#). Because this application proposes a magic show that would run afoul of the law, present significant threats to public safety, and cause the needless suffering of three tigers, PETA respectfully urges the Board of County Commissioners to deny NDSH’s land use application for Owenhouse’s dangerous magic show.

Very truly yours,



Jonathan Morris
Counsel, Captive Animal Law Enforcement
PETA Foundation



Carrie LeBlanc, M.A.
Executive Director
CompassionWorks International