



Marcos E. Hasbun
PARTNER
Zuckerman Spaeder LLP

September 22, 2026

VIA EMAIL – [REDACTED]

Rhonda Montoya Hasan
Senior Assistant City Attorney
One East Broward Boulevard, Suite 1320
Ft. Lauderdale, FL 33301

Dear Ms. Hasan:

I represent People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, Inc. (“PETA”). By this letter, PETA requests that the City Attorney’s Office promptly investigate the activities of Stephanie Angel (“Ms. Angel”), who on information and belief is currently operating a petting zoo via one of the following entities—CC Ft. Lauderdale LLC, Capybara Café, and/or Noah’s Ark Sanctuary Inc.—that violates the Ft. Lauderdale City Code (“City Code”) and Unified Land Development Regulations (“ULDR”), and that poses harm to the public as well as to the wild animals themselves, which include capybaras, fennec foxes, African crested porcupines, armadillos and at least one lemur, which is a protected species under the Endangered Species Act.

In this regard, on Thursday, September 17, 2026, Ms. Angel opened the “Capybara Café” in Fort Lauderdale at 744 NW 5th Ave, Unit 1111, Fort Lauderdale, FL 33311. There, members of the public may interact with the above-referenced wild animals. *See <https://capycafeftl.com/index.html>* (advertising a “capybara lounge,” where for \$59 one can “meet and interact with capybaras,” a “private capybara encounter,” where for \$216 up to four individuals can have a “private room experience with capybaras in an intimate setting,” a “capybara + friends encounter,” where for \$99 an individual may spend time with capybaras “plus at least one additional exotic animal ambassador,” and a “sunset safari,” where for \$49 one may interact with “exotic animal ambassadors such as the armadillo, opossum, or fennec fox,” noting that “[w]hich animals you meet may vary.”). In short, this is a wild animal petting zoo.

101 E. KENNEDY BLVD., SUITE 1200, TAMPA, FL 33602-5838 | T 813.221.1010 | F 813.223.7961

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The premises where the Capybara Café operates, 744 NW 5th Ave., is in Zone B-3. Under Zone B-3, the exclusive approved permitted and conditional uses relating to animals are “Pet Store” and “Pet Boarding Facility, Domestic Animals Only.” See ULDR, § § 47-6.13(B)(8)(qq) (“Pet Store”), 47-6.13(B)(9)(v) (“Pet Boarding Facility, Domestic Animals Only”). The City Code defines a “Pet” as “any animal that is kept or maintained for pleasure rather than utility,” and defines a “Pet Store” as “any retail establishment open to the public that sells, or offers for sale pets.” City Code, § 6-1. Capybara Café is neither a “Pet Store” nor a “Pet Boarding Facility” for “Domestic Animals Only.”

Indeed, the City Code defines “Domesticated” animals as “those species of animals that generally live in or about the habitation of humans, including, but not limited to dogs, cats, cows, horses, fowl, sheep, goats and pigs.” City Code, § 6-1. This in contrast to “Wild Animals,” defined as “any animal which can normally be found in a wild state including those feral, exotic, dangerous or nondomestic animals which generally do not live in or about the habitation of humans” City Code, § 6-1. Capybaras, fennec foxes, African crested porcupines, armadillos, and lemurs do not generally live in or about the habitation of humans; these are animals who naturally *avoid* humans and are nondomestic “Wild Animals” under the City Code. By any measure, Capybara cannot lawfully operate a wild animal petting zoo on any premises in Zone B-3.¹ Further, PETA has found no evidence that the Capybara Café has been granted a variance nor would it qualify for one under the City Code, § 47-24.12(A)(4).

When the Capybara Café is not open to the public, the wild animals are transferred to a property located at 3110 SW 15th Ct., Ft. Lauderdale FL 33711, a residential zoning district in Zone RS-6.85B. Capybara Café is currently soliciting employment for a “live in animal care & transport specialist” to care for the wild animals at this location. See Ex. 1, Live-In Animal Care & Transport Specialist, INDEED (last visited Sept. 19, 2026). RS-6.85B zone *does not allow any animal-oriented businesses* whatsoever. Further, the City Code prohibits the keeping or maintaining of any animal in a residential district, unless the animal is a “pet.” City Code, § 6-5. The wild animals maintained at this location are incompatible with human habitation:

¹ The City Code also explicitly prohibits keeping or maintain any animals in nonresidential districts who are not “pets” if the premises is within 75 feet of any inhabited residence or dwelling or place used for human habitation. See City Code, § 6-6.

- Capybaras are semi-aquatic and require access to pools large enough to submerge themselves, which they habitually soil;
- Lemurs are a social species whose frequent vocal calls are so loud they can be heard over half a mile away;
- Fennec foxes and African crested porcupines are strictly nocturnal and can become distressed by humans' constant interruptions to their sleep;
- Porcupines, for obvious reasons, are dangerous if handled by humans, and can cause severe injury;
- Armadillos are known for carrying and are capable of transmitting leprosy to humans.

There is no way to keep these animals as “pets within a home” without denying them basic species-specific requirements. These are wild animal species that, by nature, are fearful of humans and would naturally *avoid* humans—not generally “live in or about the habitation of humans.” Simply because someone could trap a wild animal in their house does not make that wild animal a “pet.”

It is notable that on September 8, 2026, Fort Lauderdale opened a building code case at 3110 SW 15th Ct. for attempting to construct a “cage and pond” without building permits. *See* Ex. 2 - Building Code Case BE26090056 (Sept. 8, 2026). Given that capybaras are semi-aquatic creatures, the “cage and pond” are likely being built to keep the capybaras *outside* the home, further demonstrating that these animals would not live “within a home.”

On Wednesday, September 16, 2026, PETA sent an urgent request to Chief of Police William Schultz and Development Services Director Anthony Fajardo, requesting that their departments investigate Ms. Angel for operating an unpermitted use in violation of the City Code and ULDR. *See* Ex. 3 - PETA's Request for Enforcement (Sept. 16, 2026). To date, neither agency has been able to provide PETA with evidence of investigation, despite numerous phone calls, emails, and appointment requests.

On September 21, PETA counsel visited the Development Services Division for an appointment with a Community Enhancement and Enforcement Supervisor and to obtain records regarding Capybara Café's business. PETA counsel was denied any

documentation or records in violation of Florida's Public Records Act. Further, Director Fajardo stated that he would not discuss the matter with PETA counsel.

Capybara Café does not have an approved business tax receipt. Instead, that application is "in review" and thus not approved. *See* Ex. 4 - Wholesale Business Tax Receipt (last verified Sept. 22, 2026). Fort Lauderdale Code Enforcement representatives told PETA counsel that the facility had not been inspected and the application had not been approved. Indeed, an inspection would have revealed that the "Capybara Café" is not "a specialty retail and educational concept as a registered nonprofit organization,"² nor is its "primary use [] the sale of branded merchandise, prepackaged food and beverages, and educational materials," as represented in its pending application. *See Id.*

PETA's counsel verbally requested copies of applications for the "Use Fee Only" document issued to Capybara Cafe, the application for a business tax receipt, and records regarding the open building code case, but PETA's counsel was denied these records and told they did not exist or were unavailable. However, upon inquiring with the City Attorney's Office and the Fort Lauderdale Police less than an hour later, PETA's counsel was told that Capybara Café had "all of its permits." Either the permits exist and PETA was denied access to public records, or the permits do *not* exist and the City has been operating under erroneous information, allowing the unlawful operation of an unpermitted business.

Capybara Café raises serious concerns for the community and animal welfare. A concerned citizen visited the Capybara Café on Friday, September 17, 2026 and documented animals who show symptoms of possible viral or communicable disease. Upon reviewing visual evidence from that visit, Wildlife Veterinarian Dr. Mason Payne opined that, among other serious welfare concerns, most of the capybaras were affected by serous nasal discharge which could indicate early upper respiratory infections or environmental contaminants. The stress of public handling could cause immunosuppression, worsening their condition or predisposing them to additional illness.³ A fennec fox was documented exhibiting behavior consistent with possible intestinal parasites such that Dr. Payne recommended a veterinary evaluation. He

² Capybara Café's website represents that the "Capybara Café is owned and operated by Noah's Ark Sanctuary, a nonprofit" "<https://capycafeftl.com/about.html>" The IRS Tax Exempt Organization database does not identify either Capybara Café or Noah's Ark Sanctuary as federally registered nonprofit organizations.

³ PETA can provide this visual evidence upon request; Dr. Payne is available to assist the City Attorney upon request.

also warned that certain intestinal parasites can be spread to humans through contact with an infected animal. Sick and stressed wild animals frequently behave unpredictably, including biting, scratching, and injuring humans and other animals. Exhibiting animals in these conditions risks injuries to the animals themselves and the public. And as previously noted, porcupines can be dangerous to humans, and armadillos can transmit leprosy.

For the above reasons, PETA urges the City Attorney's Office to investigate and take appropriate action to ensure compliance with the City Code and the ULDR, and protect the public and the welfare of the animals being held at the Capybara Café and also at the property located at 3110 SW 15th Ct.

Please let me know when you are available to speak further about this matter with me, and also with PETA counsel Cydnee Bence.

Sincerely,

A solid black rectangular box used to redact the signature of Marcos E. Hasbun.

Marcos E. Hasbun

cc: Cydnee Bence, Esq.

MEH/vmc