

Site Report and Recommendations
Silver Lake Farms
Los Angeles, California 90039
(Public version. Addresses redacted for privacy)

I. PROFILE

Client: Silver Lake Farms is a trade name for a residentially-based organic flower-growing garden that produces cut flowers for sale at local farmers markets and holds occasional workshops for Los Angeles residents interested in the rudiments of composting, sowing, tending and harvesting flowers and vegetables.

A full description of Silver Lake Farms may be found at its website: www.silverlakefarms.com/. According to the client, Tara Kolla, Silver Lake Farms holds all the necessary current business licenses, has zero employees and qualifies for the City of Los Angeles' small business tax exemption.

Brief: Friction with the neighbors at XXXX and XXXX Blank Avenue concerning Silver Lake Farms' use of their property for commercial purposes in a residential setting prompted the proprietor of Silver Lake Farms to seek advice as to how to allay local concerns about disruption of a residential neighborhood's aesthetics and quietude.

This site report contains observations of the layout of the grounds and recommendations to resolve the conflict. The report is the product of a spot visit conducted less than 24 hours of being contacted, thus avoiding potentially deceptive clean up of the place being done before inspection.

Site: Silver Lake Farms is located at XXXX Blank Avenue at the northwest end of a narrow residential cul-de-sac in a residential 1930s housing tract.

The lot is 20,996 square feet, 1,863 square feet of which is covered by the house footprint. By virtue of its position on a cul-de-sac, it has neighboring homes on four sides, XXXX Blank Avenue to the east, XXXX Blank Street to the west, XXXX Blank Avenue in a markedly upslope position to the south and rental cottages at Blank Avenue to the north.

An irregular, flag-shaped lot shape gives it a total of five shared borders with the four neighboring properties.

The largest shared property line, entailing both east-west and north-south borders, is with XXXX Blank Avenue. According to the client, the owner of XXXX Blank Avenue is the predominant complainant concerning the client's horticultural practice.

A roughly east-west border separates XXXX and XXXX homes from the street. However, XXXX Blank Avenue's north-south border also abuts a narrow slice of land owned by XXX that extends in a sharp upslope-jut, giving XXXX access to Blank Street.

Currently this access is unexploited by XXXX.

XXXX also appears to have this unusual, rear-property access to Angus Street.

The largest continuous perimeter of XXX is a northern abutment to a commercially-zoned property accessed by parallel Rowena Avenue.

The smallest shared property line is with the northeasterly neighbor at XXXX .

An aerial view offering these lines may be accessed at www.zillow.com

Access: Access to XXXX's flower-growing operation is from the driveway, which in turn is accessed from Blank Avenue at the southeastern tip of the lot.

Presentation to the street: A small front garden planted with drought-tolerant ornamental plants and conventional drive way join the street. The planting is in keeping with decorative frontages and the street vernacular. There is no readily visible commercial signage other than on a 2005 Toyota Sienna van.

Views and plantings affecting neighboring homes: A front yard fence next to the driveway of XXXX is the legal 3.5 feet high. Behind it is a small orchard of juvenile fruit trees spaced openly to comply with ordinances prohibiting dense use of plants along fence lines.

Conventional and well-managed ornamental plantings run along the other shared borders.

A hedge of mature Grevillea robustas along the northern property line shield the property and greater community from the commercial sector to the north.

Flower growing operation: Approximately one fifth of the lot, or roughly 4,000 square feet, is used for production of cut flowers. Weedless, netted and mulched rows produce a succession of spring flowers, including ranunculus, sweet peas and anemones and summer crops including loofah sponges, sunflowers and zinnias. With the exception of two rows of sweet pea beds, this production garden is shielded by the house and is not visible from the street.

Noise: According to the client, the garden operation is done by hand. Outside of occasional tree trimming, which would bring in saws, there are no plantings that require conventional weekly visits by mowers, blowers etc.

Dust: The walkways are mulched with wood chips and gravel. The production beds are no-till.

Compost: The compost bins sit at the north-eastern end of the property, separated by a city easement of nine feet from the property line of XXXX Blank Avenue and approximately 40 feet from the house at XXXX.

A hedge of mature privets and juvenile climbing rose bushes conceal the compost bins from the neighboring property. The bins consist of two hand-made, steel and wood-framed structures, each 5.5 feet square and two smaller plastic bins of the type sold in home gardening store and issued for free to home gardeners by the Los Angeles Department of Sanitation.

II. REMARKS:

Boundary issues: Apprehension about future development of the finger of land owned by XXXX but extending behind the lot of XXXX may be an underlying cause of the problems between XXXX and XXXX. If it isn't an issue now, it has all the hallmarks of becoming one. Frank and constructive discussion about how it may be developed should be held between the neighbors to avoid conflict in future.

Production gardens: The flower growing operation runs along the northern abutment and is not visible to neighboring properties, though it is of display grade. It is on par with the renowned sweet pea garden of Renee Shepherd, also set in a residential area, in Santa Cruz, California.

Pollution: The standard noise pollution emanating from conventional home gardens is 52 hours a year of 360-decibel noise. By eschewing plantings requiring two stroke motorized lawn mowers, edgers and leaf blowers, XXXX Blank Avenue produces a net benefit to the community of 52 hours of quiet a year.

Additional gains in air quality and dust abatement are achieved through the practice of no-till gardening in the production garden, mulching of pathways and avoidance of emissions from two-stroke engines of motorized garden equipment. This was evinced by an unusual absence of soot and dust on the ornamental plants bordering the property.

Conservation: XXXX Blank Avenue far exceeds water conservation standards now being promoted by the City of Los Angeles Department of Water & Power and the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California through absence of lawn, the use of mulch, the selection of regionally appropriate Mediterranean and native plants and its spot (rather than broadcast) irrigation.

There are no obvious sources for dry season irrigation run-off.

Wet season run-off is abated by redirection of water from the home's downspouts into trenches concealed by gravel, achieving 100% on-site percolation into the soil and water table recharge promoted by the Los Angeles Bureau of Sanitation and the local water authorities.

Compost management: The compost bins are neat, odorless, far below permitted capacity and vermin free. They exceed the standards now being promoted by the Los Angeles Bureau of Sanitation as an urban model to reduce landfill. Composting of manure amendments rather than the conventional direct application to lawn as topsoil eliminates a common source of odor and nitrogen run-off into the San Pedro and Santa Monica Bays.

Woodpile management: The tarpaulin-covered woodpile is visible from XXXX. While legal and neatly arranged, it may be considered an eyesore. It would be prudent to move it to a secluded spot.

Garden workshops: Silver Lake Farm at XXXX Blank Avenue is an environmental and horticultural model run to such a high standard that it is an ideal venue for garden workshops.

According to the client, the hosting of seven garden workshops for groups of approximately 15 people held in the spring of 2008 provoked complaint and no commercial workshops have been held at this location since then.

It is the opinion of this consultant that groups of this size, assembled in socially acceptable hours and at respectful hours and intervals should be no different than any other domestic meeting of enthusiasts, be they Tupperware parties, gatherings of quilting clubs, sewing circles or community garden club meetings.

Parking on the cul-de-sac is clearly tight, so visitors should be encouraged to park outside of it and walk to the house. The clients say this has been the case.

III. CONCLUSION:

Silver Lake Farm at XXXX Blank Avenue presents as an urban home but functions as a farm. The presentation of the home and farm is respectful and not only meets but also exceeds standards for residential grounds management, environmental good practice, home composting and the street standard for grooming and beauty.

The willingness of neighbors to accept that behind this residential urban frontage a farm exists in their midst and that this is a socially and environmentally beneficial thing may require a learning curve.

However, given the quietness and attractiveness of Silver Lake Farm at XXXX Blank Avenue, it seems implausible that complaints from its neighbors, in particular the occupants of XXXX, are to do with horticulture or garden workshops.

Rather, it seems far more likely that this is a case of neighbors who simply don't get along and who share a long and unusually configured shared boundary-line.

IV: RECOMMENDATIONS:

Plans for development by either neighbor at XXXX or XXXX Shadowlawn Avenue along the property line extending to Angus Street should be addressed.

Given the tenor of relations, before attempting this, the residents of XXXX and XXXX Blank Avenue seem excellent candidates for mediation. Because the dispute with the neighbors at XXXX and XXXX now threatens to embroil any number of neighbors, city agencies and the courts, I strongly recommend referral of the sum of grievances to the Senior Lead Officer, and for him or her to in turn arrange for a preemptive session with a City mediator.

About the author: Emily Green, 53, is an environment writer specializing in agricultural science, water efficiency and land management. She has consulted the Los Angeles Unified School District on a model garden school project at 24th Street Elementary School and been called as an expert witness about urban agricultural capacity by the California State Board of Food and Agriculture. She is recipient of commendations and awards by the British Association for the Advancement of Science, the Glenfiddich Awards, the James Beard Society, the American Society of Food Journalists and is published by the Oxford University Press. She is also a regular contributor on horticulture for the Los Angeles Times.

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Signed copy to follow by post

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