

10 tips

to tame the Bureaucracy

Lessons learned in getting important issues achieved at agencies

EDITOR'S NOTE: Los Angeles horsewoman Lynn Brown was a leading activist for equestrians for decades, helping horse groups navigate unfamiliar terrain of municipal government when important issues would arise. Most recently, a few weeks before her death Jan. 1, 2021, she was instrumental in educating and securing opposition from local elected Burbank officials over a "proposal" for an aerial tram that would tear out the only public riding arena, Martinez Arena, in Griffith Park.

BY LYNN BROWN / FOR THE HORSETRADER

The adage, "you can't fight City Hall," is not true—you *can!* Some may try and find that the cards seem stacked against them, or that the opposition was better organized. I'd like to provide some suggestions that have worked—and now is the time. These days, preserving equestrian life in many communities requires that its horsepeople to take up the fight.

The first challenge is to be positive, to know you can make a difference. It's not always easy. In our recent battle to preserve the Silver Spur Stables from being demolished and rebuilt as small-lot housing, the task at first seemed impossible. We tackled it anyway, and to our surprise, we won—the individual who had applied to Glendale City Council for a zoning change, suddenly after months of relentless opposition, withdrew his request. If he had been successful in obtaining the zoning change, it would spell the end of all the historic boarding barns and feed stores along Riverside Drive.

Here are some effective tips:

1. BE POSITIVE. An attitude of NOT being able to fight city hall

leads to discouragement, apathy and inaction. Equestrians, like hikers, tend to be solitary folk, used to going out on their own. I have had a hard time getting people to show up to a meeting to bring their concerns forward to land managers, City Hall, and statewide issues affecting trails, trail access and preservation of equestrian horse-keeping. People felt that they couldn't win, so why expend the energy?

Nothing builds success like success. Once a victory is obtained, possibilities open up, and people are more willing to try.

2. KNOW YOUR ELECTED OFFICIALS, and make yourself known in a friendly way—BEFORE asking for any favors from them. Learn to be especially nice to the secretary or staffer who answers the phone. Often the secretary is the one who plans the boss's schedule. That person can be very sympathetic and helpful. If you make an enemy of the staffer, you will be placed in "Appointment-waiting Hell."

3. LEARN THE PROCESS. Know your local bureaucratic process, as each jurisdiction may work differently. Know what you *can* ask for and what you *can't*. Also, know that requests to officials can take time. You have to allow time for your request to be dealt with.

Cities have to follow state law for land use or complicated environmental processes. Find out who's in charge. Gather allies, make friends with them, and remember to always put requests in writing.

4. CULTIVATE CONTACTS NOW. Don't wait—you can't wait until your hair is on fire to run for help.

5. BE A UNIFIED VOICE. A united front is key to effectiveness with decision-makers. Horsepeople defeat themselves by battling among themselves over horse breeds and riding disciplines. Often they fall apart before they even reach the decision-makers.

No matter what the breed of horse or the riding discipline, from Quarter Horses to European dressage horses, they are all equines. Each owner loves their horse/mule, and they practice what their disciplines are. It is unimportant to the public, but often the battle is lost before it even reaches the board or council. Be a unified voice!

6. ALIGN WITH NON-HORSEPEOPLE, TOO. Make friends with non-horse people who may share your concerns. This can be a big help, especially on trail issues. Recruit allies to your cause. If it is just equestrians, bureaucrats can dismiss you ("Oh it's the horse people again—they always complain about everything.") But, if there is a non-horse group like hikers, joggers, mommy-stroller groups, dog walkers and environmentalists, bird watchers, etc., you present a panoply of different people on the same issue. It is much harder for the land managers/bureaucrats to dismiss the issue.

7. GOOD ATTITUDE GETS LIFT. Even if you are upset or angry at what's happening with your issue, the WORST thing you can do is to take the attitude "I pay your salary" with either the land manager or an elected person. You are likely to receive the following answer (either out loud from the person you've pulled rank on or just in the treatment of your issue): "Oh, you want this done when? I'll check my calendar. How about never? Is never good for you?"

8. PRESENT A SOLUTION ALONG WITH A COMPLAINT. When you come to complain, bring a solution. Sometimes, the people you are asking for help might not have a clue as to what could be done. Always be willing to accept a half-victory, instead of a complete defeat. Speaking on an issue is fine, but having it in writing makes it a permanent document for the record.

9. VET YOUR IDEAS WITH AN ALLY FIRST. A political sense is not something we are born with. We learn from others. Check your impulses to phone or write letters to influential people with another ally who might be knowledgeable about your issue and who knows how to achieve goals. To this day, I'll check out a good idea with another person. It has saved me a lot of horrific mistakes, and I learned through the process.

10. ATTEND MEETINGS. Show up at meetings or in a manager's office. I have dragged myself to meetings that I didn't want to attend. You never know who you will meet that will be helpful to your issue. Bring a business card, if you have one, and be sure you collect the cards from the people sitting on the other side of the desk. The card you get from them could be gold—especially if your arguments have made an important impression. Also, if you have a flyer or a printed statement, be sure and leave it behind. At the end of their day, certain busy officials may not remember what you wanted in detail, so your "leave-behind" piece will be helpful.

Don't show up looking as if you just came from mucking the stalls. They'll know you are horsepeople anyway, but it is insulting to the officials when you look like you'd never bathed or put on clean clothes.

At an important meeting, try to take people with you who are well-spoken and not obviously angry. Two or three people who present themselves well can be more effective than a larger group who might burst into tears, get really angry, speak off-point or ramble on with personal stories about their childhood.



Courtesy photo

Got a community issue?

Send your info to:
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