

Advocating for Success: Protecting the Riverside Rancho Equestrian Community of Glendale, California

by Denise Y. O'Meara for ELCR



Riders accessing Griffith Park Equestrian Trails at Riverside Rancho in Glendale, California. Photo Courtesy Jim DeCarli.

Riverside Rancho in the City of Glendale, California is a unique equestrian community, one of several in the Los Angeles area. Silver Spur Stables is a long-time favorite riding facility in this community. Its potential loss to development would impact this equestrian area in many ways. To prevent this, a group of determined individuals started an organization to save Silver Spur Stables from rezoning in favor of a 21-unit condominium complex.

Dr. Jim DeCarli, a resident of Glendale, is a neuro-epidemiologist with a background in urban and regional planning, specializing in environmental and public health. He is also the father of an equestrian daughter who rode at Silver Spurs often. Jim understood the affinity that both equestrians and the residents had for their horse community. This article is based on conversations with Dr. DeCarli

California's Los Angeles Areas Ranchos – A Community Lifestyle

The Glendale, Burbank and Los Angeles rancho areas present a unique urbanized equestrian lifestyle which includes the Los Angeles Equestrian Center and Griffith Park's 55 miles of multi-use (horses, hiking, biking) trails. Within the three Ranchos, horses are at home in backyard stables and have access to Griffith Park via local streets. 80 boarding barns and equine facilities in Los Angeles County make the area California's second highest in horse numbers, and home to summer camps and other youth activities. Several public parks have horse facilities and bridle paths interconnecting the Ranchos.

Burbank Rancho, with its own unique equestrian feel, has years ago taken steps to preserve their equestrian lifestyle through protective ordinances. Riverside Rancho may be moving in this direction.

Atwater Village to the east has recently fought off efforts to redevelop the community through historic preservation of facilities and buildings that are important to residents and to the equestrian lifestyle.



Map Courtesy Save Glendale Riverside Rancho.

The City of Los Angeles is currently building a new equestrian and bicycle bridge to provide a better crossing over the Los Angeles River and freeway to access Griffith Park trails. The bridge was funded by the City of Los Angeles, emphasizing the importance of equestrian trails in this area.

Silver Spur Stables – a Riverside Rancho Community Hub

Silver Spur Stables is located at the center of Riverside Rancho, adjacent to a community equestrian bridge that leads riders into Griffith Park. Within the Park is the Los Angeles Equestrian Center, a large facility that hosts between 40-50 national and international equestrian events per year. There is a strong community support system, and much equestrian traffic utilizing the bridges and access points between the communities.



Silver Spur Stable hosts many family and youth-oriented events, making the stable an important social contributor to the community. Photo Courtesy Jim DeCarli, PhD.

The facility, built in the 1930's, has been a long-time community hub for equestrian events and pursuits. Activities include equine an assisted therapy program serving children and teens from the Watts neighborhood of Los Angeles. And during the recent Malibu fires, the stable became a rescue center for horses and other farm animals in danger.

Many equestrian-related businesses and public use stables are located within a very short distance, as is the Griffith Park

trail system. This proximity has resulted in a strong, equine-based commercial zone for Riverside Rancho. Residents fear that rezoning Silver Spurs for development would lead to the demise of other stables and businesses.

Efforts to Halt Rezoning – What You Can Learn

In 2017, the owner of Silver Spur Stables property joined efforts with a developer and filed an application with the city for rezoning to multi-family. The project would also eliminate the major equine access bridge to Griffith Park trails from Riverside Rancho. Upon learning about the application, a small group of equestrians created a petition requesting that the council not consider rezoning of this facility. This petition was focused only on the “rezoning” and not on the long-term efforts to protect the Riverside Rancho. Jim knew that more would be needed to protect it in the long term.

An examination of existing zoning indicated that adjacent properties are zoned for *low density* residential with an equine overlay. The zoning map and long-term strategic plan state that community services should *serve area residents*, such as an equine overlay. Council members and the mayor's office needed to be apprised of the importance of horses to the City of Glendale.

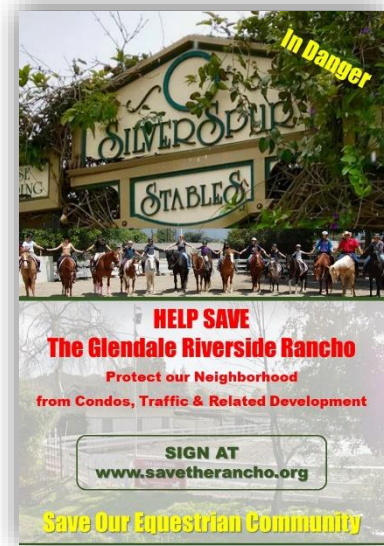
Here are some of the steps that Jim and the newly formed advocacy group took:

- Examined existing zoning and discovered that multi-family development was not an allowed use.

- Met with city council members to communicate how the Riverside Rancho and surrounding equestrian communities would be affected by the rezoning, advocating for horses in the community by providing information on the benefits of horses and the equestrian lifestyle to Glendale.
- Formed a new organization, *Save Glendale Riverside Rancho*, focused on advocating for the protection of the Silver Spur Stables property and the equine community, businesses and the equestrian lifestyle of Glendale Riverside Rancho in the context of surrounding equestrian communities. The new organization acts as a ‘home base’ for advocacy activities, meetings, outreach and information. The organization:

- Is a grassroots group, communicating and acting for horse land and facilities with the entire community, recording the outcry from the community;
- Follows weekly City Council meetings
- Publishes a periodic newsletter and flyers
- Utilizes social media (twitter was especially effective)
- Performs community-wide, house to house advocacy (this has been more effective than most other means of communication)
- Focuses on input regarding equine service and supply businesses, environmental issues, health and safety issues, traffic, pedestrian and equine safety.
- Helped government agencies to understand the importance of the horse community and the full negative impact of granting this zone change, including:
 - Loss of equestrian lifestyle and community identity
 - Loss of access to the Griffith Park trail system
 - Loss of outdoor recreational and community activity, affecting the health and wellbeing of equestrians, inner city youth, families and the community in general
 - Loss of an economic engine with facilities and businesses closing as rezoning continues
 - Recognized the real cost of development infrastructure, borne by the community
 - Loss of tourism dollars

- Jim developed a new website for the advocacy organization to host information about efforts to protect not only Silver Spur Stables but the equestrian community of Glendale Riverside Rancho, including updates, the organization’s mission and vision, and collaborations: <http://saveglendaleriversiderancho.com/>.
- A new, two-part petition was created and submitted:
 - Part 1: Prevent the zone change from equine commercial to multi-family residential. When a majority of area residents vocally opposed the zone change, the property owner withdrew the application.
 - Part 2 – Special District request, see below.



Flyers distributed by Save Glendale Riverside Rancho as part of their information and advocacy campaign. Image courtesy Save Glendale Riverside Rancho.

What's Next?

Even though the rezoning application has been withdrawn by the Silver Spur Stable property owner, the threat of development is never very far away. This is why an ongoing local advocacy effort is so important. Since the withdrawal, and as of mid-2019, the owner has not maintained the property, previously valued at \$1.2M. The property has not been leased, so continues to decline.

- The second part of the petition includes a request to have the area placed under a Special District designation which would “make the Riverside Rancho an economic asset to the City of Glendale, while preserving its history and culture.” The process for this designation would include:
 - Meeting with City Council Members and educating them individually
 - Get on the agenda for council session discussions/presentations
 - Highlighting the economic benefits of horses and the equestrian businesses
 - Request impact studies to be done
 - Introduce concept plans produced by USC Cal-Polytechnical students
 - Establish Victory Blvd. as the Rancho Village. Use traffic calming and special design standards
 - Introduce concept plans for traffic calming and design standards
 - Discuss the existing barns and facilities, commercial and industrial buildings and older buildings that need to be refurbished.
 - Explore local Community College equine program facilities and opportunities

Even though the zoning application was withdrawn, the threat of development could very well arise again. It is an ongoing process that will require continued advocacy and monitoring, and collaboration with area organizations and agencies.

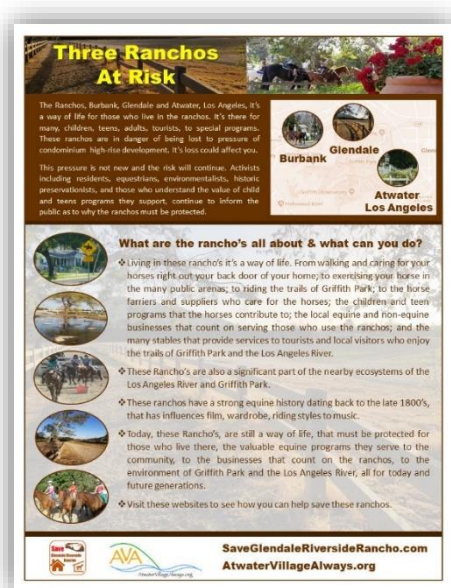


Image Courtesy Save Glendale Riverside Rancho

A Long-Term Process

This is an ongoing process that will require continued advocacy and monitoring. By collaborating with area organizations and agencies, efforts to permanently protect the Glendale, Riverside Rancho should not go unrewarded. Among the organizations and agencies that *Save Glendale Riverside Rancho* has partnered with include Friends of Griffith Park, Friends of the Los Angeles River, the Cities of Glendale, Burbank and Los Angeles, and Atwater Village Equestrian District, amongst others. These collaborations and others like them are essential to current and future success in the protection of the equestrian lifestyle.

Want to know more? Visit elcr.org and learn about:

Planning and Zoning - <https://elcr.org/conservation-resources/community-land-use-planning/>

Benefits of Horses to Your Community -

<https://elcr.org/conservation-resources/equine-economic-impact/>