



# **HOW TO BECOME THE GREAT PLANNING COMMISSIONER**

**Sonoma State University**

**32<sup>nd</sup> Planning Commissioners Conference**

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# *UNDERSTAND YOUR ROLE*

- Unique position
- Bring broad community Perspective
- Citizen involvement
- Balance interests – not political and not purely technical



## *PREPARE WELL FOR COMMISSION MEETINGS*

- Read and understand the staff report
- Visit the sites under consideration (upon advice from your legal counsel)
- Contact staff with questions if you have them



## *HAVE A BIAS FOR ACTION*

- Decisions are the value you add to the planning process
- Prepare for the meeting with the intent of making a decision
- Avoid unnecessary continuances, a burden to all interested parties



## *DON'T BLINDSIDE STAFF WITH DIFFICULT QUESTIONS AT THE MEETING*

- Let staff know prior to the meeting if you have concerns so they can prepare
- Follow the protocol for contacting staff, either through the director or with the staff members directly
- Do expect good staff work and recommendations



# *BE CIVIL TO EACH OTHER SO THE PUBLIC WILL BE CIVIL TO YOU*

- Your example establishes the tone for the meeting
- Be respectful



# *SEEK TO UNDERSTAND EACH OTHER'S POSITIONS AND OPINIONS*

- Listen carefully to what is being said
- One of your objectives should be to identify points of consensus
- Ask clarifying questions to make sure you understand what is being said



# VIEW EVERY MEETING AS AN OPPORTUNITY TO EDUCATE AND COMMUNICATE

- Communications key to building relationships with public
- This may be the first (and/or last) meeting they will attend
- Explain the process and the purpose of the meeting
- Explain what can the commission do and what the commission cannot do
- It will establish or reinforce their view of local government





*ESTABLISH NEW POLICY OR POLICY MODIFICATION  
SEPARATELY FROM INDIVIDUAL PROJECTS*

- No individual project should dictate your long range goals
- Need to look at the broader ramification in setting new policy



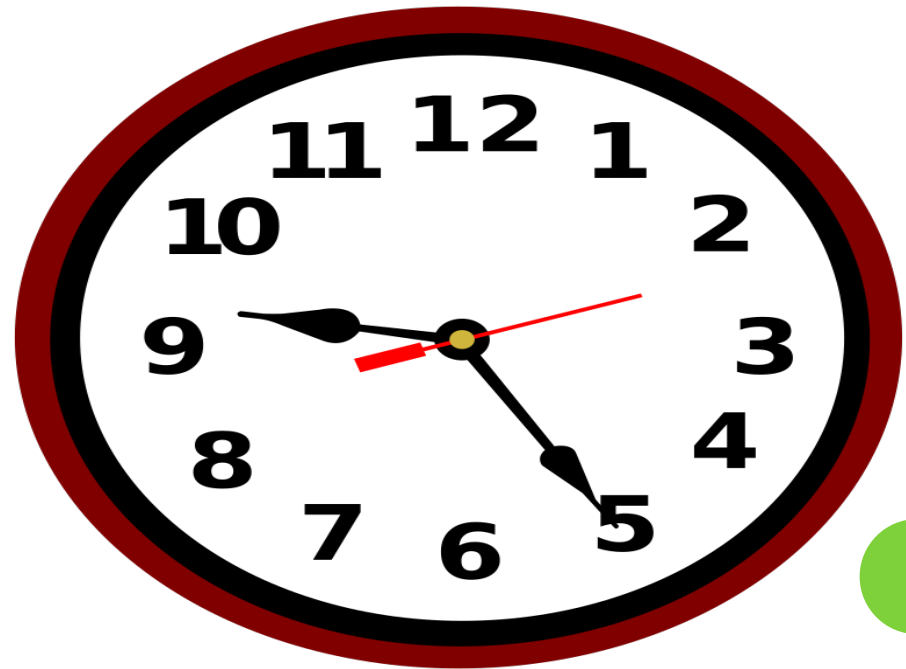
# *EXPLAIN YOUR RATIONALE, BUT DON'T LECTURE THE PUBLIC*

- The public will be more accepting of broad concepts if presented in a different format and venue



# *KEEP THE MEETING TEMPO THE SAME AT THE END AS AT THE BEGINNING*

- Citizens who waited through earlier items deserve the same courtesy as those heard earlier



*STRIVE FOR CONSISTENCY, BUT  
ACKNOWLEDGE UNIQUE SITUATIONS IN  
PROJECTS*

- Not every decision sets precedent



# *MAKE YOUR FINAL ACTION CLEAR TO THE PUBLIC*

- The public should leave the meeting clearly understanding what you did



# *COMMUNICATE WITH THE CITY COUNCIL FREQUENTLY*

- Joint study sessions to discuss key issues
- Send policy questions to Council if needed



# *PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE*

- Who are you planning for?
- Are your community needs being met?
- Who will be residents in years to come?

