GETTING ALONG WITH YOUR CITY COUNCIL

William Fulton, Sonoma State University, December 5, 2009
Eastern Sprawl
California Sprawl
Eastern Density
California Density
Planning Realities In California Today

1. Types of households and what they need are changing

2. Land and housing are really expensive

3. Traffic is terrible and will only get worse
What’s Going On

1. Developers are more interested in infill, mixed-use, etc.

2. Regional visioning approaches are getting more traction

3. On-the ground implementation is really tough
1. There’s a real estate bust going on!

2. Elected officials are always going to be focused on fiscal concerns

3. Elected officials are always going to be focused on political pressures.
Roles Are Important

- You Serve As:
  - Policy advisors to electeds
  - *Quasi-judicial body* interpreting existing policy

- Electeds Serve As:
  - Policy *makers*
  - *Appeals body for your quasi-judicial decisions*
How to Make It Work

1. **Remember your role**: Your usual role is to *apply* policies to a particular situation.

2. **Stay in touch**: Your council wants to know *why you*

3. **Pay Attention!** The way your council acts on appeals might be sending you a message.
1. Knowing your General Plan & other policy documents

2. Tethering your decisions to those policies

3. Appreciating economic and political context in which decisions are made.
1. **Not knowing the policy documents**

2. **Making rules and preferences up as you go along**

3. **Not paying attention to the messages they are sending you!**
Three Rules

1. You town is not unique

2. There is no other town absolutely identical to yours that has faced exactly the same problems and solved them all

3. You can’t buy political will on eBay
What Creates Political Will

- A set of underlying community values

- A willingness to invest in a common vision – so there’s always something to point to or fall back on.

- Pressure from voters or organized constituencies
What Creates Political Will

- A true belief in your community
- Elected officials who are willing to nurture all these things.
Good Things To remember

- Talking to your constituents about realistic choices for the future
- Drawing a clear line from vision to policy to code to decision
- Finding partners – major institutions