Effective Communication for Planning Commissioners

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Understanding Roles

- Key to Communication Effectiveness
- Clarifies relationships
Roles of Elected Body

- Sets Policy
- Appoints Planning Commission
- Decides Legislative Actions
- Hear appeals
- Establishes General Procedures
- Balances relationships between Planning Commission, Staff and Public
- Political Perspective
Roles of Commission

- Duties will vary by jurisdiction but reviews and acts on planning & developments projects
- Advisory to elected body on legislative actions
- Also balances relationships between elected body, staff and the public
- Broad Community perspective
Role of Staff

- Acts in a fair, ethical and consistent manner
- Provides background information & staff reports including professional analysis & recommendation
- Answers technical questions
- Facilitator at times
- Technical Policy perspective
Public Role

- Presents local knowledge
- Becomes informed on project & process
- Focus on issues before the Commission
- Need to be connected to process to develop solutions
- Local community/neighborhood perspective
Elected Body Communication Tools

- Meet with Commission annually
  - Review relationships
  - Review any major policy issue
- Require Commission to have Rules and Regulations
- Encourage Commission to ask for direction if a question or inconsistency arises
- Stays focus on policy – lets Commission sorts out details
Communication tools for Planning Commission

- Be attentive, ask clarifying questions
- Let people know you are listening
- Listen to what is really being said
- Separate the people from the position
- Focus on subject under consideration
- Maintain an open flow of ideas
- Remain objective
- Express yourself clearly and concisely
Public Hearing Communications

- Understand process
- Educate public about process
  - Use of videos
  - Handouts by Institute of Local Government
- Emphasis on evidence & decision making record
- Share information offered prior to hearing and knowledge gained outside of hearing
- Transparency
- Listen and acknowledge understanding of comment made
- Explain basis for decision – why? BECAUSE
- Refer to factual evidence (written or oral)
Communication with staff

- Review staff reports before meetings
- Ask your questions before meeting – don’t surprise them – allows more time to research answer
- If policy is not working – suggest change is needed
- If you disagree with recommendation – focus on issues and not the person making the recommendation
- Allow staff to facilitate discussion
External Communications with the Public

Why important?

- More informed residents
- Better identification of public values and ideas
- Enhanced community buy-in and support
- Faster project implementation with less need to revisit
- More trust
- High rate of community participation and leadership development
External Communication Methods

- Public Forums (e.g. public workshops, charettes, design forums, planning committees, citizen academies, etc.)
  - Provide impartial background information, materials and/or models
  - Encourages exchange of various points of views & trade-offs
  - Encourages changes in participants’ thinking
  - Results in more informed understanding of issues/topics
  - Seeks as much common ground or consensus
External Communication Methods

- The Result for Public Forums is:

  INFORM > CONSULT > INVOLVE > COLLABORATE > EMPOWER

- Multi-stakeholder dispute resolution
  - Negotiation & consensus building

- Community Problem Solving
Promoting Civility in Public Meetings

- Embrace Diverse Points of View
- Everyone Gets a Chance to Share Their Views
- With Rights Comes Responsibilities
- Avoid Debates & Interruptions
- Reduce Uncertainty – Explain Process
- Importance of Listening
- Be Compassionate about Fear Factor/Heckling & Applause not allowed
- Separate People from the Problem
- Use Titles
- Take a Break
- Walk the Talk

(Tip Sheet from Institute for Local Government (ILG) www.ca-ilg.org)
THE TEN COMMANDMENTS OF PUBLIC CIVILITY

1. Thou shalt not rudely interrupt a colleague midsentence; nor "speak over" a colleague while she/he is speaking. Example: You can watch and learn from Meet the Press; but cancel any rerun of Crossfire.

2. Thou shalt not assume that shrillness of tone is a substitute for substantive dialogue.

3. Thou shalt treat the members of the public with the same courtesy as you would if they were members of your body—and perhaps more importantly, require that they treat you and your colleagues the same way.

4. Thou shalt not resort to "zingers" designed solely to embarrass your target.
THE TEN COMMANDMENTS OF PUBLIC CIVILITY

5. Thou shalt, where possible, explore areas of common ground where legitimate disagreements exist, in an effort to move forward on matters of public importance.

6. Thou shalt not allow legitimate critique of policy and practice to become a personal attack aimed at the person who devised the policy or implements the practice.

7. Thou shalt always recognize that your colleagues were also elected *(appointed)*, just as you were, and deserve the same level of respect for having run and won.

8. Thou shalt not ridicule or belittle a colleague, or a member of the public, simply because he or she disagrees with you on an issue.
THE TEN COMMANDMENTS OF PUBLIC CIVILITY®

- 9. Thou shalt not pretend something is much more important than it really is, simply to score points with an audience.
- 10. Thou shalt always remember that it is okay to agree to disagree, and that reasonable people can indeed disagree reasonably.

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