

Winning A Community Challenge

Local communities are periodically faced with threats of various severity. How these are responded to will determine the future character of the community.

Run-of-the-mill problems are usually handled satisfactorily by good quality elected representatives — in fact that's one of their primary responsibilities.

But when the magnitude of the issue is large — and it's a more technical matter besides — legislators can easily be overwhelmed. A key question is: *will they publicly acknowledge that?*

In many cases these individuals are reluctant to admit that an issue is over their head. The reason is simple: *elected officials fear that such an admission will make them look weak and inadequate* — which is not the image they want to portray.

The solution is for citizens to be aware of this deficiency, and then to step-up to fill this void. The idea is to work *with* conscientious representatives, for the betterment of the community.

This outline is about what will be a successful for dealing with more serious challenges — i.e. those that are likely to have substantial financial, social, and/or environmental impacts. Some people will quickly look this over and say “Yes, we did that.” If your campaign was successful, then kudos to you! If it was not, then please look more closely to these recommendations.

1 - The fundamental objective is for citizens to speak up, intelligently.

{It's also important that this be as *one voice*. Legislators can't reasonably be expected to respond to multiple directions, or to those inputs that are not well-thought-out. When the citizens' message is properly conveyed, conscientious representatives will almost always respond appropriately.}

2 - Size does matter, so the more citizens who participate, the better.

{There needs to be an organized effort to get people onboard *and* educated. This includes: **a)** creating an email list, **b)** sponsoring local informational meetings [often experts are available to speak], **c)** reaching out to take advantage of local skills, **d)** setting up a [website](#), **e)** making up ad fliers, **f)** personally meeting with local media, **g)** utilizing the media (e.g. sending letters), **h)** soliciting support from other sympathetic organizations, etc.}

3 - There needs to be quality leadership of this citizen campaign.

{Such people need to: **a)** be organized, **b)** be open-minded, **c)** thoroughly understand the issue, **d)** have a good grasp of Public Relations, **e)** be committed to quality communications and **f)** know how to delegate. Indeed such people are rare, but without quality leadership, the citizens' effort will be severely handicapped.}

4 - A Strategy Plan needs to be formulated and followed.

{Careful thought needs to be given to this. This written *Plan* should be developed by key citizen leaders, and then shared with the group — whose inputs and support should be enthusiastically solicited. The *Plan* should be periodically reviewed and updated, as the campaign unfolds.}

5 - Keep focused on the fact that this is a Public Relations battle.

{The winner will almost always be the side that makes the best case to the **public**. *Having the facts on your side is often not sufficient!* Surprisingly, “how” the message is packaged and communicated, is often more important than content (see [this](#)). Two important PR hints: **a)** be FOR something rather than AGAINST something, and **b)** *Keep it Simple* [KISS].}

6 - Avoid asking for money.

{With judicious utilization of local skills, most campaigns can be successful with volunteer efforts. When expenditures are unavoidable, it is critical to: **a)** keep them to a minimum, **b)** make sure that all monies spent are focused on high-yield efforts, **c)** get agreement from the entire citizen group on such costs ahead of time, and **d)** provide a full accounting to the group, after-the-fact.}

Know your rights. [Home Rule](#) can be significant in certain areas. In any case you should have competent legal help to assist in implementing your *Plan* — although a lawsuit should usually be considered the last resort.

Getting local people registered, and then encouraging them to actually vote, can often be very helpful — particularly when there is a question about the competency or commitment of local legislators.

The key message here:

Good intentions and hard work are admirable and helpful, but they are simply NOT sufficient to win community larger-issue fights.

Let me know any questions on this or suggestions for improvements.