

CPTC Meeting Notes: Responding to Common Concerns

Top Common Concerns (as ranked by attendees) n=20

1. Loss of Community Character
2. Increased traffic
3. Increased demand for resources
4. Analysis Paralysis
5. Displacement
6. Another plan, No action

Additional concerns that you hear in your municipality/work:

- The public's suspicion around any planning process or decision
 - a. Lack of transparency
- NIMBY/No Change Ever
- Environmental concerns/that everything that gets built must be environmentally friendly
- Historical issues and past relationships that overwhelm the current process
- Lack of clarity in the by-laws
- Public health concerns

Notes from the Breakout Groups

Increased Demand for Resources

General Notes

- Need to be deliberate about who is getting data, for what, and what you will do with it. The credibility of that data will always be challenged
- School children – echo effect can still include school population
- Mitigation process for large development projects
- Look at actual enrollment
- A toolkit that includes some of these best practices would help developers prepare responses to these concerns
- Host a preliminary informational public meeting to identify issues upfront
- When concerned residents raise global problem redirect them to the local issues within this process
- Provide a FAQ
- Create case studies for common problems
 - See the Tufts study
 - MMA

Traffic and Parking

General Notes

- Opposition doesn't believe data, but won't produce their own. Put the burden on them to produce it
- Use peer review to generate outside perspectives
- Work closely with the applicant so they are prepared

- Discuss residential parking restrictions to limit new cars/traffic
- Be ready to respond to seasonal traffic issues
- Be aware that Waze can alter routes and impact usage
- Provide perspective about road you are discussing, don't let assumptions and anecdotal information drive the conversation

Strategies for addressing the objection before the meeting

- 3rd party traffic study or a traffic mitigation plan and identify what resources are needed to address potential problems
- Have an open house and invite abutters and business owners to have an upfront dialogue
- Get buy in during the master plan process and then break down barriers after
- Meet with local planner to review the project and to plan for a pre-meeting
- Host a pre-permitting meeting with applicant that includes department heads
 - Review and resolve traffic concerns
 - Prep for Planning Board and ZBA meetings
 - Mitigates the charge that town/city isn't business friendly
- Bring in residents from the beginning
 - Hold house parties
 - Have project Q&A sessions
- Peer review
- Do your homework, understand how new businesses operate in other communities
- Utilize the RPA for data/traffic counters

Meeting activities to address the objection

- Let the master plan goals drive new strategies
 - Don't focus on small stuff
- Have professionals available
 - Municipal engineer and attorney
 - 3rd party reviewer
- Have a plan champion in the audience
- Reference the data that's available
- Run a pilot program
- Chair can and should diffuse situations that could derail a successful meeting
- Remind people what could be down by-right if it's not changed

Community Character

Two types of processes raise "character" concerns:

1. When the municipality is reviewing an application for a controversial project
2. A municipal initiated planning process

1. The review of an application for a controversial project

Who makes has this concern

- Abutters
- The "normal" crowd
- Long-term residents who want the status quo

- Recent arrivals who want to preserve the reasons why they came
- Generational split: young people trend towards change and new opportunities, older residents trend towards the status quo
- Some current businesses want the status quo yet some residents who consider themselves pro-business seek more development
- Class based and socio-economic: People with the time to get engaged versus those who can't

Before the meeting

- Developer reaches out pre-meeting open house but don't tell anyone you're educating them
- Publicize positive reasons why this might be good
- Summarize previous planning products and pre-publicize them
- Publicize the objection

At the meeting

- Discuss how the developer could minimize proposal impacts
- Get all objections out and create plan for addressing them
- Pre-application hearing
- Farm out technical questions to experts
- Keep initial plans limited to lower the cost for developers and keep concerns minimal or raise concerns
- Provide information on applicable laws and policies especially federal
- Create activities that help establish what "character" is
- Offer visuals to show what's allowed if the status quo remains or if the changes happen
- Counter a myopic view of "character" with a more populist view of "character"
- Recruit plan champions who can interact with other stake holders and advocate for change
- Provide historical pictures to identify what this place has been used for over the years

2. A municipal initiated process – a change to zoning or a policy that requires legislative action

Before the meeting

- Conduct a visual preference survey, but don't use local pictures!
- Conduct a site walk with stakeholders
- Identify what residents mean by "good" and what they consider "good"
- Host field trips to surrounding areas that have implemented similar policies/projects
- Engage residents
- Explain how changes will "correct" antiquated rules and perspectives and make them more contemporary
- Identify anticipated outcomes of the planning process
- Multimedia plans and processes

At the meeting

- Plant allies and champions
- Remind yourself that naysayers come with a perspective that has to be addressed
- Provide babysitting if attendees need to bring kids
- Increase your credibility by having both local experts and content experts
- Identify misrepresentations of data or fact

Analysis Paralysis

Strategies for addressing the objection before the meeting

- Communication strategy: use both data and storytelling to paint a complete picture
- Address past misunderstandings or controversies
- Have honest conversations about root issues
- Make communication a priority and if there is push back from superiors explain how the communication void will be filled by someone
- Do your best to control the social media narrative. Try positive informational posts
- Launch a small-scale pilot version of your proposal to try it out then present the analysis
- Make a FAQ that explains the decision making structure. Who makes the decisions on what
- Meet people where they are
- Use engagement tools like videos, social media etc.
- Use bite sized visuals and well-designed info sheets
- Ask people how they want to digest info
- Find influencers and get their support

Meeting activities to address the objection

- Describe scenarios if no action is taking
- Ask why, why, why?
 - Identify the real problem or fear
 - Discover solutions to connecting issues
- Have one on one conversations
- Make sure you have a good chairperson/facilitator to lead the meeting and provide them with a good script/agenda