

A New Community: 3,500 Homes, Commercial, Industrial, Medical

Business Challenge/Environment

Our client needed to rezone 600 acres of agriculture-zoned land to allow development of a master-planned community including 3,500 homes, retail, commercial, light industrial and medical uses. Relentless opposition had dragged out the permitting process for more than 11 years. The zoning application faced multiple public hearings before a vote by the city council. Opponents, led by the Sierra Club, ran radio advertising against the project, an online petition drive, and door-to-door canvassing in an all-out campaign to kill the project.

Outcome

We generated more than 900 individual expressions of support for the project to each city councilor over seven weeks, including 63 signed letters sent to each councilor in the final two weeks before the vote. The city council voted 9-0 to approve the rezoning for the new community.

Our Approach

We expanded support for the project beyond the ‘usual suspects’ of labor and developers — and made certain that city councilors heard from constituents who wanted the new community built. At the same time, we leveraged the existing support base by broadening its message beyond union-oriented calls for new construction jobs.

- We created websites — including one for the existing hospital near the site — that allowed residents to send emails of support to city councilors. We then drove traffic to the sites using supporter lists and polling results.
- We reached out to individuals who would benefit indirectly from the project, such as supporters of new housing opportunities and area residents who would use or work at the new medical center.
- We organized and scripted hearing testimony to broaden the message and effectiveness of labor supporters.
- We created a powerful ‘video petition’ that allowed citizens to express support in focused messages shot on cell phones and edited into a fast-paced demonstration of community support.
- We conducted canvassing in neighborhoods closest to the site to produce letters of support from residents who were most affected to the city council members.
- We did email and telephone outreach to identified supporters in the data base we built prior to each of four public hearings to produce speakers and broaden the ‘voice’ of support for the project.

CASE STUDY