



## Overcome Neighborhood Objections During a Rezoning and Win the Battle!

*By: Denise Browning, SCMD, Faison*

In most every zoning battle it gets down to the “big developer” against the “neighbors.” In Charlotte, we had a zoning battle for the expansion of the 1.2 million square foot SouthPark mall. A group known as the SouthPark Coalition began a campaign against the mall and claimed to represent 30 neighborhoods. As members of the community ourselves and through talking to many supporters we realized this group did not really represent 30 neighborhoods, or much of anything else. Still, the media really played up their side and gave them unfounded strength. Through several effective steps we were able to change this misperception and prove they did not represent the majority.

Our initial step was to contact the leaders of every neighborhood association, including the 30 that were purportedly part of the “coalition.” This took many hours on the phone, but we were able to find out what neighborhoods seemed to be supportive and where we needed to target our communication efforts. While talking with the neighborhood leaders we arranged to attend as many of their annual meetings as possible. In some cases the neighborhoods scheduled a special meeting just for this issue.

Our most effective tactic was the creation of an information suite. We took a vacant in-line space at SouthPark and spent a great deal of time with our developer and architect to prepare a concise self-guided visual display of the redevelopment plan. As neighbors and customers wandered into the suite, they could walk through all the steps of our development, see all the beautiful renderings and find out all the hard facts. When the suite first opened we staffed it with our management team. It remained open for 18-month. We gained valuable information that helped us determine the exact issues at hand, we also realized how much community support we truly had. Most importantly, neighbors who had been given misguided information from our opposition saw the project for what it really was and walked away generally in support of the project.

Because of these direct efforts to communicate with as many neighbors as possible, we won our city council vote 11-0!

### Zoning Battles: How to get the community's support

- The project must be a good project and good for the community
- Identify your opponents/ Identify their “issues”
- Assess the level of opposition vs. support
- Typically opponents are a vocal minority attempting to impose their will on the silent majority. “Waking up” the majority and getting them to offer vocal support is critical.
- Create a series of newsletters that specifically target opponent's issues
- People tend to oppose because they don't understand the facts, your job is to educate them and then persuade them to be vocal about their support
- Obtain a listing of neighborhood leaders from your city office
- Contact all neighborhood leaders personally and find out where they (and perhaps their neighborhood) stand on the issues
- Create an “information suite” utilizing vacant space or common area



- Ask to speak at all neighborhood annual meetings
- Invite critical neighborhoods to a community meeting
- Target your community leaders that have influence with your city council
- Know where your city council stands and which members of the Council your supporters should target
- Monitor news coverage
- Keep a supporters "petition" signed by visitors to your information suite
- Keep in constant contact with neighborhood leaders throughout the process
- Yard signs/meeting signs

Don't get discouraged; this can be a lengthy process.