
Creating an Effective Roar

LivableStreets Alliance | Advocacy Committee | June 27, 2018

Creating an Effective Roar

- Planning as communications
 - What do you want to improve?
 - Tips from planners & officials
 - Before the meeting
 - Telling your story
 - Tips for talking
 - When in doubt
 - Common scenarios
-

Planning as communications



**Who's ever stepped out of
a public meeting and felt
like the comments given
shaped your perception of
that project?**

Planning as communications

- Planning deals with physical infrastructure, but **it operates through conversation**
 - From public notices about projects to Twitter to public meetings, **how stakeholders communicate** can make or break projects!
 - **Perception is key!** Projects are often defined by the mere perceptions developed during a public meeting, and that largely stems from communication
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Planning as communications



Planning as communications

Who speaks at public meetings
really, really matters

Who Participates in Local Government? Evidence from Meeting Minutes

Katherine Levine Einstein*

Maxwell Palmer[†]

David Glick[‡]

January 9, 2018

Abstract

Scholars and policymakers have highlighted institutions that enable community participation as a potential buffer against existing political inequalities. Yet, these venues may be biasing policy discussions in favor of an unrepresentative group of individuals. To explore who participates, we compile a novel data set by coding thousands of instances of citizens speaking at planning and zoning board meetings concerning housing development. We match individuals to a voter file to investigate local political participation in housing and development policy. We find that individuals who are older, male, longtime residents, voters in local elections, and homeowners are significantly more likely to participate in these meetings. These individuals overwhelmingly oppose new housing construction, and cite a wide variety of reasons. These participatory inequalities have important policy implications and may be contributing to rising housing costs.

*Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, Boston University. kleinst@bu.edu.

[†]Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, Boston University. mbpalmer@bu.edu.

[‡]Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, Boston University. dmglck@bu.edu.

Planning as communications

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**When it comes to
communicating at public
meetings, what would you
like to improve?**

Tips from planners & officials



“Acknowledge and recognize the efforts already made as you push for even more.”

&

“Remember there is a context to every project.”

“Keep the tone **positive** and **don't** make it **personal.**”

“Often an advocate’s goals are not necessarily misaligned with a planner’s goals – but there is a reality which is preventing the planner from accomplishing the goals the way you might like. **Find out what the barriers are and target THOSE.**”

“If a planner says something is technically infeasible, unsafe, or a bad idea, *listen and find out why* so you can make clearer points about what you want to accomplish.”

“In general, I thinks it's always helpful to
ask questions and engage in a
conversation **rather than make**
pronouncements.”

“Sometimes getting at an issue from an angle can help reveal what the problem is and can lead to more creative ways of solving the problem.”

“Make a clear ask. What do you want your official(s) to *do*?”

“Especially with respect to Twitter or social media advocacy, posting a photo with no details is not helpful. If you want to make your elected official aware of something, a simple tweet is okay, but if you want to work *with* them to actually reach a solution, calling or emailing is much more effective.

Here's why: your elected official and/or their staff want to build a relationship with you, so that they can assist with future requests, or discuss other neighborhood ideas/concerns/etc. They also will likely want ask for further details about the initial request that they might need to solve it, and that is much more efficient via phone or email.”

“Definitely don't talk too long!”

Before the meeting

- Reflect on why are you at this meeting **What's your relationship to this place?**
 - **Have some background and figures ready to go** (check our emails!)
 - **Understand what's being decided at this meeting** (and try to stay on topic) - call planning office if need-be
 - **Go with a buddy!** Ask LivableStreets
-

Before the meeting

LivableStreets

Connecting People + Places

Andrew --

We need your help to advance Better Buses and Vision Zero in Cambridge! Will you join us on Tuesday evening to advocate for improvements to [Mass Ave between Sidney Street and Memorial Drive](#)?



A rendering demonstrating future conditions on a section of the multi-modal corridor

The City of Cambridge is evaluating "quick build" changes to this portion of Mass Ave to improve safety and reliability for all users, with an emphasis on people walking, biking, and riding buses.

Background

- This section of Mass Ave is one of the corridors with the [highest delays for MBTA buses](#), including the #1 and CT1 routes. MASCO and other institutional shuttle services also depend on this corridor.
- According to the City of Cambridge's [analysis](#), this section of Mass Ave is one of the most notable hot spots for crashes.
- The [Cambridge Bicycle Plan](#) calls for separated bike facilities on part of Mass Ave.



Scroll to the bottom!

Let us know if you want to
other background info

Tips for talking



Tips for talking

- **Take notes** (if they're helpful to you)
 - **“Wait and see”** approach
 - **Organize your points** - keep them to three themes max
 - **Personalize your comments** in a quick introduction but don't get too personal
 - **Talk slowly and project** (use a microphone if it's available)
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Tips for talking

- **Don't get bogged down responding to certain people**
 - In general, **appeal to the people in the room who are reasonable** and **speak to the problems the planners are working to address**
 - **Asking questions is always a good idea** - can be helpful to create skepticism on fishy comments and "get at that angle"
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When in doubt

- **Keep it short!** If you want to express your point of view but it's already been stated, you can always **“echo”**
 - It's important to just **express support**
 - **Listen, listen, listen!**
 - Talk with planners / officials and opponents **after the meeting**
 - Ask what the deadline is for **submitting written comments**
-

When in doubt



Write a poem!

Common scenarios

Countering:

*“I’ve lived on this street for 1,000 years.
My grandfather built this street.”*

Common scenarios

Some thoughts:

- **“Belonging”** is complex, especially in a place that’s experiencing change
 - Do not contribute to a **“us vs. them”** mentality
 - Rather, talk about your experiences belonging to this place - **how do you contribute and what does that mean to you? (volunteering, work, etc.)**
 - **Appeal to a common future**, rather than the past
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Common scenarios

Countering:

*“Car drivers pay for roads.
Cyclists, pedestrians, and transit riders don’t contribute.”*

Common scenarios

Some points you could respond with . . . politely

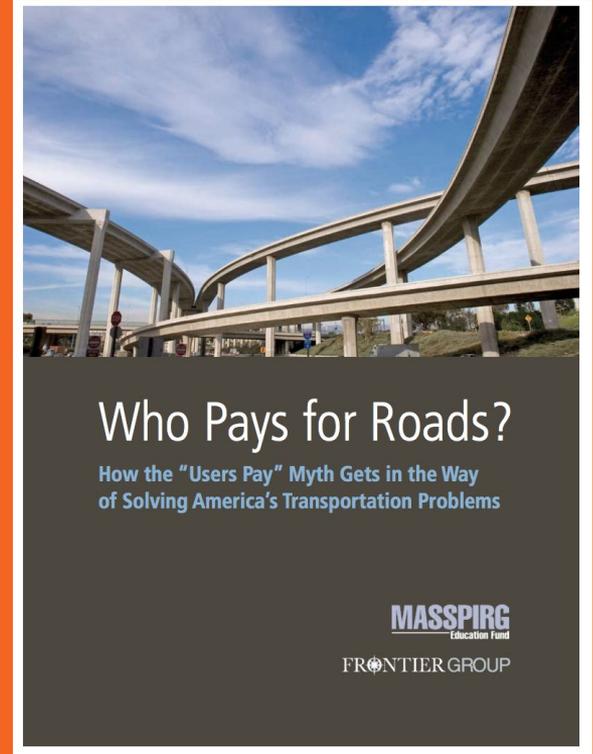
- **Counter the “user myth”** - gas tax and other fees cover only a fraction of the costs for road construction
 - **Income and sales taxes** also go toward roads
 - More sustainable modes **impose negligible costs** onto roads compared to cars and trucks
-

Common scenarios

“Gas taxes and other fees paid by drivers now cover less than half of road construction and maintenance costs nationally – down from more than 70 percent in the 1960s – with the balance coming chiefly from income, sales and property taxes and other levies on general taxpayers.”

“General taxpayers at all levels of government now subsidize highway construction and maintenance to the tune of \$69 billion per year – an amount exceeding the expenditure of general tax funds to support transit, bicycling, walking and passenger rail combined.”

“Regardless of how much they drive, the average American household bears an annual financial burden of more than \$1,100 in taxes and indirect costs from driving – over and above any gas taxes or other fees they pay that are connected with driving.”



Common scenarios

Countering:

“You don’t live on this street!”

Common scenarios

Some points you could respond with . . . politely

- Our streets are our largest public space asset, so they don't belong to any one person or group (we all contribute to their funding, too)
 - **We all have to get where we're going**, and streets are critical to that network. Talk about other ways you depend on this street
 - We're also stewards of our built environment for **future generations**
-

Other scenarios you've encountered?

Questions?
