



Oct.-Nov. 2017

## Useful Community Development... quick notes

**This Month:** Fast Photo Lessons from an Intriguing Industrial Redevelopment, Anti-Burnout Formula for Neighborhood Association Leaders, Tips for Meetings with a Resource Person or Public Official, More

Visit us and explore at <https://www.useful-community-development.org>.

### Lessons from Dubuque: Industrial Area Redevelopment

Last month one of us participated in the Growing Sustainable Communities conference in Dubuque, Iowa, along the western banks of the Mississippi in far northern Iowa, USA. Here are our "five things" from the million square foot Historic Millwork District, where most U.S. window frames were manufactured at the turn of the 20th century.



Especially when a district is this large, include a substantial number of residential units, together with office and non-profit space, businesses catering to needs of likely residents,

and restaurants and bars. As redevelopment progresses, keep a good balance among the uses. If residents have nothing to do, rents stagnate but vacancy climbs; without residents, bars and restaurants suffer on week nights.



Preserve memory of what was once there, wherever possible. Don't wipe out place names or quirky features; consider them part of district character.



Take every opportunity to evoke the particular historic aspects of your redevelopment area, even when adding new functional or decorative elements such as gates.



Instead of being demolished, former industrial catwalks between buildings now become novel outdoor spaces for new residents of loft-style apartments created through use of historic tax credits. Incidentally, phase in those residential units gradually for best success in smaller markets.



Planter boxes and other streetscape elements (even railings) can be customized locally. Again allude to the history of the area, and support local craftsmen at the same time. Read more about the [Historic Millwork District](#) here.

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### **Anti-Burnout Formula for Neighborhood Leaders**

We're finding too little emphasis on keeping neighborhood association leaders fresh and joyful. Our formula is simple to state but tricky to follow. Make these items your priority, even if you have to disregard some tasks that you or your neighbors have been regarding

as urgent.

## **1. Build civility.**

Cultivate civility and respectful conversation on your social media and at your meetings. In fact, insist on it. The penalty for allowing aggression and rudeness is likely to be conflict that will make leaders fade away from volunteering in the neighborhood association and even discourage people from joining.

## **2. Keep the fun fun.**

If your festivals, holiday observations, parties, dinners, and fund raisers are too much work for one or a few people, those few will eventually burn out and find something else to do. Spread the work among as many volunteers as you can handle easily--but don't line up 100 volunteers for something that five can do easily, or you will face another kind of backlash.

## **3. Make the work less work.**

Work smarter, not harder. Build an organizational culture that makes it O.K. to pause to think, or to learn more about the task at hand, before taking action. Network, network, network, as there is very little in neighborhood work that has not been approached successfully and unsuccessfully many times. Probably you can find those who know how to work smarter right in your own city, so it's critical to set aside the time for sharing experiences. Convene a regular monthly or quarterly forum if none exists. Understand root causes of neighborhood decline and progress, using our website or others.

## **4. Find new leaders.**

Even if the nominating committee found enough people to serve as officers this year, there's no guarantee of the same result next year. Devote the necessary time to identifying and cultivating new potential leaders and to helping them succeed in their first tasks as a neighborhood volunteer. Look for new retirees and high school or college students who have some time to give, as well as career changers or people at other life crossroads. Don't assume that someone who has always sat in the background has nothing to give. Ask, and you might be surprised.

These four deceptively simple steps will help you prevent burnout as a community leader, but they must be followed diligently just like any four-ingredient recipe.

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## **Tips for Meetings with a Public Official or Resource Person**

Let's pretend that you made an appointment with an elected official or governmental staff person, or a suggested resource person from a non-profit or business. I'll play the public official or manager, OK?

Usually I try to figure out what you are seeking when we set up the appointment. It might be:

1. You want information.
2. You're trying to hold me accountable.
3. You want to persuade me toward your point of view.
4. You're fishing for a job interview with me.
5. You're only trying to please someone who said you should talk with me.

(Hint: If #4, make sure you combine that with #1 also. If #5, please confine your visit to 20 minutes.)

Regardless of your declared and hidden motivations, here's some advice.

### **1. Come prepared but not over-prepared.**

If I've taken time out of a busy Thursday, there's nothing I hate worse than hearing you struggle for 10 minutes to articulate why you've come and what you hope to gain from talking with me.

On the other hand, it's an equal waste of your time and mine if you arrive with such a careful script that you refuse to budge from it—even when I provide you with surprising new information or start disagreeing with you.

### **2. Be clear with yourself about what you hope to achieve, even if you don't share that with me.**

If you don't have what you want at the forefront of your mind, you're likely to allow the conversation to drift.

Possible outcomes might be:

- a. an offer of specific help or technical assistance
- b. an offer of funding
- c. agreement to build a partnership
- d. specific information (bring a list for yourself)
- e. an overview of a topic, or a new perspective or way to organize your thoughts.
- f. a pledge to think about your issues, introduce a bill, vote for you, investigate your problem, expedite action, speak at your fundraiser, make a donation or award a grant, or revisit a policy or past action.

### **3. Be respectful.**

Too often people think those in positions of power are there to be abused. If you practice treating people as you would like to be treated, you can avoid this error. I might be opposed to your policy today, but could be your policy friend tomorrow.

Let's point out three ways you should show respect:

- a. When you disagree, don't make personal attacks, lose your composure, or layer on harsh verbal abuse. Even in private, try to understand why I may believe and act as I do.
- b. Respect my time. Time is precious to most officials; don't take longer than necessary. Usually end the meeting when you win your first victory; staying longer can actually cause resistance or backpedaling. (Notice this respects your time too.)
- c. Respect the position. There's no need to overplay your hand as a taxpayer or a donor. Don't belittle public service or non-profit work either, if you expect me to help you!

**These might seem really, really self-evident. But speaking from experience, a majority of my visitors violate one or more of these simple guidelines.**

If you're trying to start a neighborhood association, remember to order a download of our [\\$2.99 e-book](#) on that topic.

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New Website Content This Month: Editors answered visitors' questions as follows: [Too Many Apartments and Group Homes](#), [Code Enforcement Letters Not Received](#), [Denial of LED Sign](#), [Where to Find Easement Information](#), [How to Be Sure House Not Covered by Restrictions](#). Coming next month: the first few of our conversations with guest experts.

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