



PRINCIPLES OF WINNING COMMUNITY VOTES

Wendy Sweetser, The Trustees of Reservations' Highland Communities Initiative

1. Articulate your goal

- Pass the CPA!
- Support key projects in town, like community housing, senior center, land protection, etc
- Bring the community together in a positive way.

2. Present the Right Question

- See www.communitypreservation.org for sample ballot language.
- Consider the surcharge level, exemptions, and fiscal impact per household.
- Think about the timing of the election and what else is on the ballot (i.e. override).

3. Identify Your Supporters

- Assemble a group of campaign volunteers that is as diverse as possible and represent all CPA uses.
- Don't feel that you need to educate and persuade the whole community.
- Ways to find supporters:
 - 1) Meeting with other groups, Rod and Gun, etc
 - 2) Going to high traffic areas like the dump, town store, etc
 - 3) Making events fun and including food
 - 4) Hosting neighborhood coffees
 - 5) Other?
- Identify voters – How many votes do we need to win?
 - 1) Get the list of registered voters from the town clerk
 - 2) Get the average turnout for the past few comparable elections
 - 3) 50% + 1 vote is all you need

4. Craft a Message Using the Four C's

- In order to win the vote, you will need to effectively tell your story in such a way that any reasonable person has only one choice—to side with you! Your story should be a **C**oncise, **C**ompelling, and **C**onsistent message that **C**ontrols the issue.
- Make sure your description of the CPA is as simple as possible and jargon-free.
- A rule of thumb in advertising is that people need to hear a message 9 times before it sinks in—so stick to the same message, and keep repeating it.
- Be proactive in talking to the media. Make friends with your local reporter.
- In addition, you need an appropriate public face for the campaign. The messenger can be even more important than the message. Choose presenters who are respected by other community members and who are ready to rebut, respond, and reassure.

5. Communicate Effectively

- Stay on message! Choose several of the CPA's selling points.
- Share information that people can absorb—don't overwhelm them, especially with numbers.
- Make the message personal.
- To be compelling, use stories as much as possible, including stories about the projects your community could complete with the CPA.

6. Use Influential Support – Who will publicly support the CPA?

- Community groups (Library, Rod and Gun club, Council on Aging, PTA, Garden Club)
- Elected officials (Selectboard, Finance Committee, Planning Board, etc)
- Influential Individuals – every town has them.

7. Don't go it alone! Build Your Group through Your Campaign

- The more people involved in the campaign, the more the workload can be shared. Try to reach out to diverse members of the community and ASK for their help.

8. Create a Buzz that Peaks at Town Meeting

- Increase your tactics to build your momentum up until Election Day. Coordinate media outreach and any visibility tactics so it peaks at the end of the campaign, without time for the opposition to respond.

9. Get Out the Vote

- Get people to commit to supporting the CPA
- Send them mail: An informational flyer and/or a postcard 1 week before the vote
- Calls: The night before or day of the election and remind them to get out and vote
- Organize rides if necessary
- Letters to the editor: 1 week before the election or Town Meeting

10. Be Aware of the Opposition

- Try to predict the criticisms to the CPA and address them upfront. But don't waste your valuable time and energy getting into a debate with people you know will never support the CPA.
- Make your efforts one step more personal than the opposition's.
- Stick to your message. Don't let the opposition control how you talk about CPA.

11. Evaluate

- Always take the time to step back and evaluate your effort and change tactics when appropriate.

Adapted from *Toxic Actions* and *Discovering the Activation Point* by Andy Goodman.

