

Civic engagement key to NIMBY

By **BOB KOSLOW**
BUSINESS WRITER

DAYTONA BEACH — Grass-roots efforts by local citizens killed a proposed community redevelopment area in DeBary and an Interstate 95 interchange at Pioneer Trail in New Smyrna Beach.

Though both were controversial projects, public and private money are wasted on good and bad projects often before local citizens are brought into the public discussion and are already vocally opposed. That has to change to foster quality developments, said a NIMBY expert and public relations consultant.

"Every week, in hundreds of cities across the country there are part-time elected officials rejecting site plans and zoning requests impacting the bottom lines of numerous private corporations," Patrick Slevin told elected officials, planners and developers Friday during a lunch sponsored by the Volusia County Association of Responsible Developers.

Vocal minorities have gotten so much attention that now eight of 10 Americans oppose new development, Slevin said. Three-quarters of Americans think the review and decision processes at city hall are unfair and half of Floridians think local governments have not effectively managed growth.

"We have gone from a NIMBY nation to a BANANA republic," he said.

NIMBY means Not In My Back Yard and BANANA stands for Build Absolutely Nothing Anywhere Near Anyone.

NIMBYism is fostered by misperceptions, lack of knowledge, fear of change and frustration, Slevin said.

Corporations need to work harder to build project support even before incurring application costs, Slevin said. Having an aggressive civic-engagement plan early in the project process helps unite the community, enable elected officials to vote yes, avoid heated public hearings and saves money.

Civic engagement involves more than the traditional town-hall meetings, letter writing, Web-site development and focus groups. It includes identifying the community leaders at many levels, meeting them and gaining support.

City leaders also can use the meetings to ensure the developers are actively pursuing civic engagements before public hearings where it's too late for negotiation and compromise.

"If you do these practices, 50 percent of the NIMBY conflicts won't happen," Slevin said. "If you do it right, have the right people putting their reputation on the line for something that is important for their community, that is where you build the social capital. That is where civic engagement is a win-win for everyone."

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