

O P - E D

Prep public before breaking ground

As in politics, all real estate is local. Few issues can inspire (or provoke) the passions of a community as quickly or as deeply. Land use is a particularly heated topic on Long Island, where the preservation of open space, the development of affordable housing, the rezoning of commercial property, the siting of power plants and the planning of city-sized projects bump up against the competing needs and sensibilities of homeowners, local businesses and taxpayers as a whole.

As recently reported in this newspaper, real estate developers are increasingly relying on public relations to help manage these challenges. Whether marketing a new property or “putting out a fire,” public relations is uniquely suited to the real estate setting because real estate projects come with built-in stakeholders. There is no such thing as a development without supporters and naysayers. Neighbors, zoning and planning boards, taxing authorities, preser-

vationists, community activists and editorial boards all have opinions about land use in their towns. In all cases, the solution requires engaging stakeholders in constructive dialog. And that’s what public relations does best.

This puts real estate public relations in stark contrast to, say, consumer products or even business services, where the target market may not initially have an intrinsic stake in the product or service being offered. There, the challenge is creating a stake or interest among prospective customers, stockholders or other market segments. But in real estate, the motivated interest of the market pre-exists, so the communications needs are well defined from the outset. What this means for the savvy developer or property manager is that the opportunity to influence public reception to a project is there at the outset, well before ground is broken.

Tactically, a strategic public relations program in the real

estate world has the same core components as a program designed for any other industry. These components may include media relations, community engagement, government liaison, tenant (customer) communications, crisis management or others. Publicity, direct marketing, advertising, interactive communications, social-media networking, public presentation, special events and other executions may be encompassed as appropriate.

The key to a successful outreach, as with any well-conceived public relations program, is to design communications strategies that establish the project’s benefits to the community and ensure a credible, reliable, accurate portrayal of the facts, while minimizing the impact of the rumor mill or the influence of any self-interested parties.

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