

CITIZEN PARTICIPATION

It is essential in a democracy that citizens help keep their council informed. Yet, most people do not communicate with those who represent them in government. In order to be true representatives of the village, village officials need to know the thinking of the residents on issues upon which decisions will be made.

Is there an issue or Concern to You? Organize!

Forming a group is often more effective than individual efforts. A group is far more visible and carries more weight.

Organize a group of friends or neighbors around a specific issue or concern to all of you. Set your goals...identify your plan ...divide the work.

It is best for the group to meet informally or socially with your president or trustees to inform them of your goals.

Personal Contacts

1. Know where or when to contact your council. The best time to contact a member of your council would be in the evening hours.
2. If you have genuine knowledge of a certain issue, share it with your council representatives.
3. Be constructive. If you have a suggestion, it is important that you a) have a clear idea of what you want b) your reasons for your suggestion c) your reasons for the suggestion with good strong facts.
4. It is easy, particularly when dealing with a trustee who may disagree with you, to become angry and frustrated. If you disagree, a calm, reasonable attitude and a set of well-prepared reasons for your position may change his or her mind on the issue. It is never wise to get into arguments which generally escalate and is of no advantage to either party.
5. Let council explain their views...listen without interrupting ...they often have resources to which you may not have access.
Take a few notes about their comments, noting any questions they have. Understanding their views and where they come from on the issue will help your organization develop counterarguments.
6. Don't demand a commitment before the facts are in. Give your council a fair chance to examine all sides of an issue.

Letter Writing and E-Mail

A Personal letter or message via e-mail may be the most effective way of contacting your representatives.

1. Be Brief.
2. Be Constructive.
3. Determine your priority concerns.
4. Express your appreciation. Your council members are human too and seldom receive a "thank you" for a job well done.

Remember, even a few letters or e-mails to one trustee can have an important impact.

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