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HOW TO BE AN EFFECTIVE ADVOCATE

Whether fighting to preserve open space or to save a historic structure, effective advocacy can make the difference in success or failure.

Successful advocacy requires that you be well prepared, willing to work hard for what you want and strategic in your actions. Following are some tips for successful advocacy:

Begin an Education Process: Get people to understand what the loss of this resource will mean to your community. For example, to illustrate your point, you might show a slide of a simple stone wall along a winding road...then show the slide again, having airbrushed out the wall. Ask which version people liked better.

Involve Others: Join forces with the environmentalists, the business community, the historical society or commission, interest members of the planning and zoning boards, talk to kids. Any effort you can make to broaden the constituency for what you are trying to save is valuable.

Determine Eligibility: If there is plenty of time, you may wish to determine if the building meets the criteria for listing on the NJ Register. Although this does not afford any protection, but will definitely lend credibility to your cause. Contact the State Historic Preservation Office for more information.

Do not Shrink from Economic Reality: Think beyond public subsidy and find a viable use or means to keep the building self-sufficient. The more you do to inform the acquisition process and the future liability, the better the likelihood is that the historic resource will be given a new life. Look for similar case studies. Try to enlist someone to do cost estimates for stabilization or rehabilitation. Establish a small fund to temporarily stabilize the property. Figure out your marketing options.

Form a Group: Would creating a not-for-profit organization facilitate your mission? A 501(c)(3) can be eligible for certain grant funds from various sources where a state agency is not eligible. Depending on the mission of the organization, non-profits may be eligible for private foundation funding as well. Consider if there is enough of a support base to keep the site viable long after the initial enthusiasm wears off.

Consider the Options: Keeping a building in private ownership may be a very realistic option for long-term survival. Having an historic resource separated out from the larger parcel proposed for open space acquisition, albeit with a protective covenant against demolition or incompatible alteration, may be the best way to leverage private investment. Be creative in your approach.

Listen to the Opposition: If no one is listening to you, maybe you have more work to do. Maybe you have not made a reasonable enough case or maybe the options for preservation just are not viable. Often enough the opposition's concerns are legitimate. It's up to you as the advocate to address these concerns.

Do not Personalize: No matter who comes out against your issue or how they show themselves, stick to the issues. Do not stoop to the same levels or slimy tactics. You will need to maintain your credibility for the next time around. Your goal is to preserve historic property.

Condensed from an article written by Dorothy P. Guzzo Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer, in the Summer 2000 edition of Preservation Perspective, the newsletter of Preservation New Jersey.