

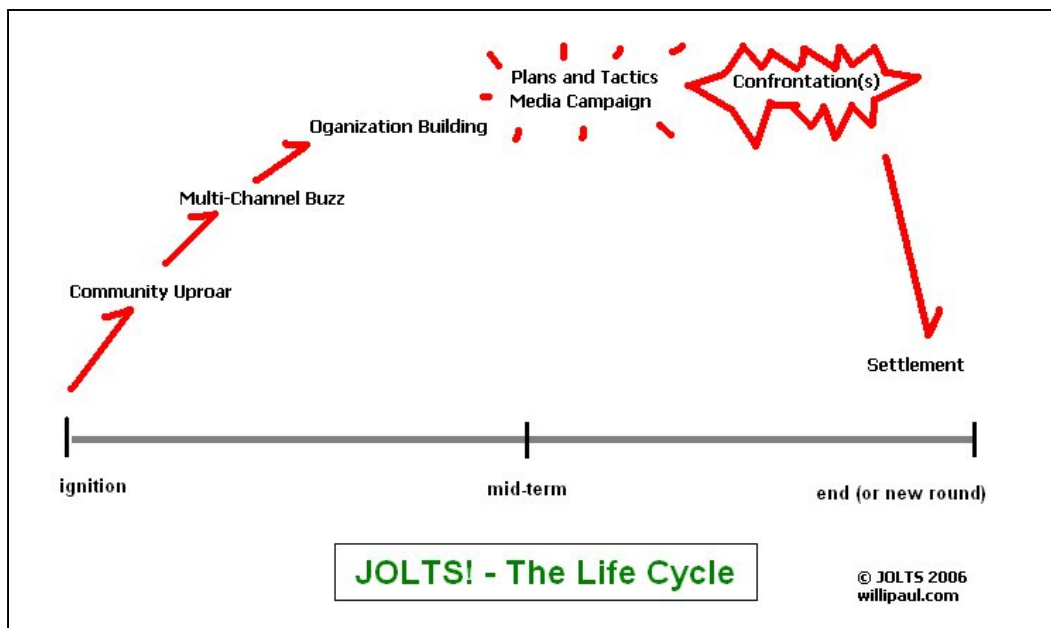
JOLTS! Public Participation on Steroids

Not public planning but citizens reacting; volatile and chaotic. A partisan dash to capture the media.

JOLTS often involve a small group or neighborhood-based, single issue political action that do not following a traditional city planning process (and are often at odds with City planning and zoning bodies), and have much different time lines and strategies for messaging and winning hearts, causes and cases. Here the common citizen is often the “planner” and the “expert”, given available resources and aptitude. Trigger issues include local pollution, land use fights, spot zoning, lack of public involvement and environmental justice dog fights. Clearly, many JOLTS in the Bay Area are not “win-win” in nature – but champion a “win at all costs” strategy. JOLTS are not designed to be sustainable but more akin to short-term “action plays,” politically motivated first and foremost and motivated by multiple group self interests. Private practitioners need to be aware of how JOLTS work with - and against - the communication channels, agendas and rules of local governments and the people they serve.

Two models of public participation

The first is the traditional lead agency - developer - public process that is linear and with fixed a time schedule. The second is the JOLTS! process, with its unpredictable starts and stops, outcomes and participants.



Examples of current Bay Area JOLTS

cleanaircoalition.net
<http://cleanaircoalition.net>

East Bay citizens are defending their right to enjoy their lives and property, and intend to make Pacific Steel Casting Corporation STOP polluting their air and pay them for being subjected to PSC's nasty emissions! PSC is causing a nuisance

as defined by California State Law Public Nuisance 3479 and is liable for damages to anyone who has been adversely affected by this nuisance. PSC has until March 2 to present a plan to completely abate its toxic waste.

Neighbors of Ashby BART

<http://nabart.com/>

Many Berkeley residents have complained that city council members were not allowing public input during the grant application process for the proposed transit village at the Ashby BART station. They are not taking this position because they are opposed to developing the BART site. Many would agree that something needs to be done at the site, but if anything is developed at the BART station, members demand a full and open community process. The proposal has been tabled for now.

Neighbors Against Irresponsible Logging (N.A.I.L.)

<http://www.mountainresource.org/nail>

In a surprise twist, San Jose Water Company has withdrawn its plan to log 1,000 acres on the Los Gatos Creek watershed. Released late last year, the logging plan exposed potential risks the timber harvest could pose to fire safety, water quality and the lifestyle of over 4,000 people living near the logging zone. This is a huge victory for residents opposed to the proposal, who formed NAIL (Neighbors Against Irresponsible Logging) and then went on to put one in the coffin of the company's plan, at least for the time being. In the past four months, NAIL members have collected over 2,000 petition signatures, presented their concerns to county supervisors and held community meetings with hundreds attending. San Jose Water said it will resubmit the logging proposal in the spring of 2006. Meanwhile, NAIL is taking this opportunity to plug for an alternative, urging San Jose Water to seek a conservation easement on its property.

Three Questions for Private Practitioners

<p>1) What can a Private Practitioner do to try to keep abreast of these efforts, and when should a consultant care about them?</p>	<p>First, keep abreast of the Internet and informal buzz in the community. JOLTS can form overnight and usually are “packaged” in a web site soon thereafter! The Practitioner needs to know when these citizen bands are organizing to be able to respond! It is not likely that a Private Practitioner will get involved in a JOLT – either as a member or a paid hire – or as a legal expert.</p>
<p>2) What factors should Private Practitioners consider when deciding how to advise his or her city manager in dealing with a JOLT?</p>	<p>Private Practitioners need to understand the key issues and the history of the situation, who the players are, and how the stakeholders will interact. Is the government body generating a counter media campaign to get its message out there? Is the JOLT too hot to take a side? Surely the consultant needs to know when a JOLT evolves into a full bore political mandate! JOLTS can be a sign of the “next big thing!”</p>
<p>3) What are some do's and don'ts in dealing with JOLTS?</p>	<p>Do: If possible, reach out to both sides early and give support and resources where possible. Do: facilitate the debate and support the JOLT process with meeting space and technical input. Don't: ignore or trivialize the JOLT. Do not see a JOLT as a one-time deal; there could be many stages or rounds to the process!</p>

JOLTS are wild fires of public reactions on and off the Internet; hyper-political three act plays that need to be watched very carefully for smoke signals or flare ups. In contrast, groups like Berkeley's PlanBerkeley.org have adopted a more low key, sustainable and traditional approach to civic participation and local urban land use issues.

Please see the JOLTS web site (<http://JOLTS.org>) in the coming weeks for more insight into this alchemic process!

Credit:

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