

Taming the Public

It's a fact— you can never make 100% of the public happy with any new development, and marina projects are no exception. Chances are, someone will be concerned about the marina's impact on any number of things, like water quality, manatees, or shellfish, to name just a few. And when the public doesn't get enough information about how a project can impact their lives, they can become extremely ornery in the process.

By law, marina owners are required to go through a public notice process. After a marina has been planned and the market assessed, federal regulatory agencies require the owner to submit an application for a permit to build or expand the facility. Application packages include detailed forms and drawings to illustrate the plans, and regulators provide a forum for the public to comment on the application. But committing to more than just bare-bones communication with the community makes for a much smoother process.

As marina owners and developers have found, the public notice process can make or break a marina project. Very rarely does anyone comment positively — expect negative comments, and plenty of them. But sometimes the public raises concerns that can be mitigated. Marina owners and planners can tweak a design or make other changes that will benefit certain groups. Select and pertinent studies can assuage environmental concerns. Regulatory agencies then compile all the comments from the public notice

process and consider them along with their own evaluation.

Here are some tips for making sure your dealings with the public regarding a marina are as productive as possible:

- o **Do your homework.** Before you even prepare your application package, conduct some research to find out who the key players are and what issues they might fo-



cus on. It's essential to know the right person to make the right presentation to at the right time. You may have to con-

duct specific studies or target specific individuals. Don't lose credibility for overlooking a key step. It's rarely beneficial to submit an application to federal regulators without doing the groundwork, and in fact, it can be detrimental to the project. →

PREEMPTIVE STRIKE FOR PUBLIC BUY-IN

Meeting with special interest groups before it's even required goes a long way in establishing credibility. As a general rule, the public opposes things they don't understand, but if you give them the opportunity to have a say in what's happening, it helps create the buy-in.

People want to know how they'll be affected by a new marina project. Hosting meetings with local representatives, affected parties, and activist groups early on in the process can be key. Community meetings go beyond just distributing information—they provide a more interactive forum where people can voice concerns and ask questions. It also allows marina owners and operators to distribute information about the project, before rumors and misunderstandings can circulate.

Identify and engage stakeholder groups. Some marina owners take the public — notice process one step further by identifying and meeting with specific groups boaters, developers, fisherman, and the general public will likely have different views about the project. Despite a different focus within each group, marina owners can determine common elements — both positive and negative — and work from there. Many times, certain groups will support the concept and assist in the consensus process via “backyard discussions.”

It's all about attempting to reach a targeted compromise, while recognizing that you may never reach a total consensus. But the more people you meet with and the more expectations you manage, the more likely you'll be able to create a sense of buy-in. ☉



Applied Technology & Management, Inc. (ATM) is an environmental, coastal, and water resources engineering firm. Our experienced staff has grown to over 70 professionals with a common goal - to forge long-term relationships with our clients.

Offices

2770 NW 43rd Street
Suite B
Gainesville, FL 32606
(352) 375-8700
(352) 375-0995 Fax

PO Box 20336
Charleston, SC 29413
(843) 884-8750
(843) 884-8935 Fax

2315 Beach Boulevard
Suite 203
Jacksonville, FL 32250
(904) 249-8009
(904) 249-8007 Fax

400 S. Australian Avenue
Suite 855
West Palm Beach, FL 33401
(561) 659-0041
(561) 659-3733 Fax

6001 Chatham Center Drive
Suite 150
Savannah, GA 31405
(912) 238-3002
(912) 238-0882 Fax

PO Box 24156
Hilton Head Island, SC 29925
(843) 837-9525
(843) 837-9526 Fax

201 North Front Street
Suite 508
Wilmington, NC 28401
(910) 762-0800
(910) 762-6250 Fax

The Waterfront

A bi-monthly publication of Applied Technology & Management, Inc.

(continued from front page)

o **Act early.** The most detailed and accurate information about your project comes directly from you— don't leave the public to form their own opinions based on rumors and speculation. Communicating your plans to the community and soliciting their responses early in the process shows them that you value their opinions. Explain what's going on in layman's terms— it'll help develop a rapport. The community may still not like your project, but at least you're up-front with them before saying it's a done deal.

o **Involve select groups.** There are lots of special interest groups in the world these days, and ignoring their input can prove disastrous. Approach community, political, and environmental organizations early on to learn about the views that may play a role later in the process. You'll be better equipped to respond to the issues they may raise. Don't pit yourself against special interest groups— or you'll be in for a rough ride. They might be concerned

about a manatee issue or water quality, and you need to be prepared to deal with a lot of their questions in a constructive way.

o **Look on the bright side.** Instead of looking at the public notice process as a burden, think of ways it can be beneficial to your project. Keep an open mind. Use community interaction as a way to promote your project and acquire valuable market research. You can find out about amenities boaters are looking for and ways to personalize the facility. You might also receive some good ideas about design concepts and feedback to affirm your approach.

Instead of looking at the public notice process as a burden, think of the ways it can be beneficial to the project.

The public notice process gives you the opportunity to present your plan to the community in the best light possible, so view it as an opportunity. It's true that you can't make everyone happy, but if you don't educate the public, you'll be forced to deal with the backlash. o

In the News...

Insurance Rates on the Rise?

The September 11 terrorist attacks, coupled with a sluggish economy, may drive up insurance rates in the commercial marine industry. And marinas and boat dealers are likely to be hardest hit. According to Global Marine Insurance, commercial insurance rates jumped 30% to 50% even before the World Trade Center tragedy, and rate increases are likely to continue as companies are pushed to cut unprofitable lines.

In a recent article in Boating Industry International Online, Mike Smith, president of Global Marine Insurance, said, "Marine lenders and others in the marine trade should anticipate and prepare for the new exposures that world instability is forcing on everyone."

Marine companies estimate rate increases for boat and yacht insurance in the 5% to 10% range. But the renewal of many insurance treaties at the end of the year could drive rates even higher. Marina and boat dealers insurance could see rate increases up to 50%. o

CALENDAR

December 11-13, 2001
2001 Marine Trades Expo and Conference
Charleston, SC
For more information, visit www.ncmta.com.

January 2-6, 2002
Atlanta Boat Show
Atlanta, GA
For more information, contact Holly Price at (305) 535-1760.

January 19-27, 2002
Chesapeake Bay Boat Show
Baltimore, MD
For more information, visit www.boatshows.com.