

## **Tips for Working with Adjacent Neighbors during Development**

By Steve Spain and Valerie Hoff  
TLA Engineering & Planning, Inc.

You have narrowed down your selection process; it is time to move forward on your property decision. While planning your due diligence, do not forget consideration of the neighbors that will likely come with it. Their perception of how you may impact their lives and property could end up having a significant impact on your development plans.

If you have decided on a property that unfortunately has development concerns from the adjacent neighbors, or worse, discovered retroactively that you are thus afflicted, *do not despair*. Adjacent neighbors with differing opinions on your property's development will require additional time and effort but it can be successfully accomplished.

The key is to provide them opportunities to express their concerns, listen to them carefully and, to the degree possible, address their issue(s). If you cannot reach that level of agreement with all of the neighbors, the majority of those still unhappy will diminish based on their perception of your honest effort to communicate.

Large group meetings prior to approval hearings are frequently the best way to reach your neighbors. Keep it face to face and avoid using PowerPoint, which is often perceived as too slick and is decidedly less personal. Always use high quality graphics and do not focus strictly on your project, but address the benefits to your neighbors.

Graphics are the best way to convey and emphasize the design details that can resolve their concerns. Do this by clearly showing the relationship between your project and each neighboring property. For example, TLA Engineering & Planning uses aerial photos as a base for such graphics since everyone loves to see their own property from the air. They can provide a nice curiosity and distraction for those who may otherwise be complaining.

The key elements are to keep it personal and provide them an opportunity to express themselves. Do remember to follow up with those still loudly objecting by holding a one-on-one meeting. You may not be able to satisfy everyone but the fact that you made an honest effort will not go unnoticed with the elected officials approving your project.

*TLA Engineering & Planning, Inc. is a land planning and civil engineering firm dedicated to providing a full-range of services to private and public clients. Established in 1985, the firm specializes in planning, permitting, design and managing public and private projects that range from small to large, simple to complex. Experience earned over many years and across all varieties of projects provides the necessary foundation for a wide range of capabilities. Each project is undertaken with an eye toward providing solutions that allow plans and project to proceed smoothly. TLA's extensive experience with regulatory agencies has proven useful to many organizations throughout the Northern California region.*