



Citizen Advocacy Center Letter to the Editor  
In response to Daily Herald 2.17.11 article on Lisle's propose changes to zoning  
public hearings  
2.17.11

**Effective Formula To Shut Out Civic Engagement:**

The 2010 Illinois Civic Health Index documented that only 26.3% of residents performed at least one political act other than voting last year. Of the 26.3%, only 11.2% had contacted a public official. A paltry 9.6% attended a public meeting. How could Illinois' democracy be so weak? Here's one theory:

**Step #1:** Remove civic education from schools so the public has little skill, knowledge, and confidence to participate in the democratic process.

**Step #2:** Use government resources to pass anti-democratic policies to strategically prevent public participation. Make sure messaging emphasizes: "maintaining order," "clarifying the law," and "preserving government resources."

**Step #3:** Refer to citizen campaigns in anti-democratic policy discussion to illustrate system "abuse."

**Example:** Lisle and DuPage County. At the beginning of Navistar's public hearing for a \$250 million project, citizens asked questions regarding public health, safety, and government process. When government entities refused to be responsive, citizens launched an expansive organizing effort. In an attempt to discredit citizens, petulant government officials such as former DuPage County Board Chairman, Bob Schillerstrom, issued a press release calling them "misinformed and paranoid." The project was approved, but only after the State of Illinois intervened and took citizens' concerns seriously.

In apparent bitterness over successful citizen use of civic, legal, and community organizing skills, Lisle wants to pass rules for public hearings on zoning petitions that create "the haves" and "the have-nots" with respect to participation, using Step #2 and #3. Simultaneously, DuPage County endorsed State legislation that mirrors Lisle's rules for the same reasons so that in every municipality and county in the entire state, there is strategic restriction on who can participate (HB 1055 and HB 1056).

No wonder less than 12% of the population is engaged on public policy issues. The formula is very effective. Illinois citizens deserve better.

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