



RECOVERY HOUSING BEST PRACTICES

# HOW TO HANDLE NIMBYism

HELPFUL TIPS FROM THE FLETCHER GROUP RCOE



## "NOT IN MY BACKYARD!"

NIMBY stands for "Not In My Backyard" and "NIMBYism" typically refers to development opponents fearful of a loss in property value.

A common tactic is to portray developers as outsiders profiting at the expense of locals. Personal attacks can be particularly hurtful in rural areas where everyone knows everyone. In extreme cases, NIMBYism can even go BANANA's, as in "Build Absolutely Nothing Anywhere Near Anything."

Though fear can be at odds with reality and used to exploit stigma, NIMBYism can present significant challenges to Recovery Housing, causing costly design changes, construction delays, and permit denials.

That's why the RCORP-Rural Center of Excellence on SUD Recovery at the Fletcher Group created this brochure—to help you respond wisely, effectively, and proactively should your Recovery Residence ever be accused of introducing criminal activity or otherwise harming its neighbors.

### A METHODOLOGY AND CHECKLIST

For an effective,  
proactive response

# BEST PRACTICES

## *Prepare Early*

Work slowly and carefully, especially at the beginning, building momentum steadily over time. The outcome depends as much on what you do before NIMBYism kicks in as it does after.

## *Address Legitimate Concerns*

Respond earnestly to all concerns. Opposition that persists can then be characterized as inappropriate, arbitrary, or capricious.

## *Recruit Allies*

Local knowledge is the key to success so honor and defer to local stakeholders. They're your only way of thoroughly understanding the unique culture, history, and people of the community.

## *Start Now*

Begin as soon as possible to identify and bring onboard the community leaders who can mobilize support. While you're at it, identify potential opponents. Everyone likes being recognized and understood. Try to understand the values, beliefs and goals of both supporters and opponents.

## *Local Leadership*

It's important that well-known and well-trusted leaders be the official "face" of your development in order to prevent allegations that outsiders are manipulating and profiting from locals.



## *Organize*

Enlist your allies to form an official NIMBY Committee. Because they're best equipped to keep the lines of communication open and anticipate local concerns, ask the committee to:

- Build an argument why the community should support the project
- Develop and manage a community engagement strategy that involves locals in the planning process
- Identify and enlist community partners to address all concerns raised by residents
- Create and maintain a positive profile in the community

# BEST PRACTICES

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## *Anticipate*

It's easy to be an armchair quarterback; much harder to anticipate barriers and prepare to meet them. That being said, it's clear that the more prepared you are, the fewer surprises you'll run into later.

## *Showcase Success*

Document positive outcomes with facts and data, but remember that video and in-person testimonials from residents and local officials—police officers, mayors, judges and health officials—are even more powerful.

## *Stress Public Safety*

Proactively explain how you'll be a responsible owner and a good neighbor because of the structure provided within the facility and the accountability demanded of residents. Counter accusations of drug dealing, violence, and crime by showing how management will make the facility the least likely place in town to find those things.

## *Take the High Road*

Like recovery itself, the creation of Recovery Housing is a "long game." Though detractors may strike you as irrational, treat them with respect. It can help to know their position as well as they do, even if you don't agree.



## *Communicate*

Identify your key messages, repeat them often, and use a wide range of media to get your message out.

## *Media Relations*

Reporters are not the enemy people make them out to be. They make mistakes, but it's usually because they're asked to write about topics they're unfamiliar with. Request and help local journalists write a series of in-depth articles based on interviews with people in recovery. When your project is announced later, readers will be far more likely to endorse it and the reporter will be far less likely to misinform or polarize.

# BEST PRACTICES

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## *Public Meetings*

It's easier for moderators to maintain an environment of mutual respect on Zoom. Public meetings are another story, especially if someone is there to hijack the mic and intimidate participants. Publish clear rules in advance and take steps to ensure they'll be enforced.

## *Don't Play Their Game*

We hope it never comes to this, but what should you do if angrily attacked by NIMBYs at a public meeting?

**Rule Number One:** Don't play their game. It's natural to think you need to win the argument, but arguing and defending yourself is a trap that can legitimize and amplify stigmatizing claims and erroneous information. Repeating your opponent's talking points and labels (for example, saying "they're not criminals") can actually reinforce the attacker's words. And violent discord can have a negative effect by reinforcing the idea that winning is everything.

## *Stay Calm*

It's hard to do while being attacked, but remaining calm and respectful is not surrender. It can actually deprive attackers of what they want. In the Social Media world, it's called "negative social potency"—the joy of harming others. They don't get it if you don't show it.



## *Remain Hopeful*

Last but not least, remember that a respectful draw can be a victory. Even if you didn't get what you came for, participants saw that you were professional, principled, polite, and level-headed—someone they know they can work with when the bell sounds for the next round. Though being immersed in a NIMBY controversy can be confusing, frustrating, infuriating, even depressing, it's still an opportunity to build awareness, understanding, and support. Living to fight another day is not the worst outcome, especially if you learn from it.