

## What Can Municipalities Do to Reduce the Effects of Urban Heat Islands?

We have a huge task before us—changing local government. Most people simply shudder at the thought. Local government is intimidating, self-enforcing and too often appears to be mostly unresponsive. Somewhere in the backs of our minds is the thought that, “You can’t fight city hall.” While this is mostly true, take heart, we don’t have to fight it, all we have to do is lead it.

There are several important roles in which municipal governments can be effective:

- Legislative: policies and ordinances
- Land use decisions and planning
- Economic incentives and subsidies
- Special projects and programs
- Education

Many of you have experience in the challenge of convincing elected decision makers. Some at the policy level, others have worked on funding issues, including the design of incentives, while the others of you have been more focused on program development and implementation. It is my opinion that, overall, we, including me, have failed to lead our local government. I emphasize that we have failed.

My talk today is not about how the municipalities have failed us in adopting urban heat island initiatives. If that were the case, my remarks at this conference would be brief – the problem is with the municipalities. However, not so.

Instead, my talk today is about how we can create the change we hope for. As I believe Einstein explained, “You cannot find the solution until you understand the problem.”

While local government is not the problem, for many of you...local government is a problem!

As urban heat island initiative proponents, I will begin by sharing a couple of commonly recognized barriers to enlightened governance:

- Agenda crowding; and
- Bureaucratic disorders.

You cannot get on the political agenda? Why? Are there just too many competing interests? Or, is it not a high priority? Or, is there a genuine lack of understanding by elected officials to our issues. Or, it is the bureaucracy – the staff is resistant to advocating for new policies, procedures or practices. One of my elected colleagues puts it this way, “If they do it the way it has always been done, then there is no one to blame.”

Now, for you and I, urban heat island reduction initiatives are second nature to us. They belong on the agenda and should be welcomed by staff and elected officials. The science is in place. The substantiating data is actually quite understandable. The technology is proven and has widespread applicability. The products are on the shelf and ready. Furthermore, costs are not barriers and model programs exist ready to be replicated.

You know our agenda is good and that once adopted it can make important differences in the arena of energy savings, air quality and health dividends. We can identify successful activities in many cities: Toronto, Chicago, Austin, Salt Lake, Baton Rouge and Atlanta. However, we face the fact that heat island initiatives have failed to capture the collective imagination, agenda, or practicality of the economic or political will of the majority of our municipalities.

At either the level of local climate change, or the macro level of energy savings, air quality, or public health, we have failed to sell urban heat island measures as obvious solutions for solving serious urban problems to either our municipalities or the general public. Our agenda remains widely unrecognized: do you find it in newsprint, coffee shop conversation, or dinner table discussions?

Who in the general public understands that concrete roads are superior to asphalt? Cool roofs for residents can make a difference? Or that strategic tree planting programs offer extraordinary benefits? These choices, common to us, have yet to be commonly accepted by municipalities or their populace. However, each of these ideas fits very well into the emerging arena of urban design and development policies that are on the increasingly popular agenda called “smart growth”.

One consideration is for us to propose linking our initiative to the growing acceptance and increasing level of popularity of the smart growth movement. However, I believe the preferred option is for us to understand how to initiate change at the municipal setting – to break through the municipal challenge of “there is one way of doing things and that is how they were done in the past”.

There is a tried and true method of leading city hall. Let me list the eight-step program:

- Do your homework
- Be accurate
- Be consistent
- Know your decision makers
- Convey your message in their terms
- Build bridges, not walls
- Be persistent
- Be lucky

Let me go through each of these and explain what I mean.

**DO YOUR HOMEWORK** – You must be the one that is knowledgeable. That is not just on urban heat Island reduction issues, but also on current municipal issues and priorities.

**BE ACCURATE** – Do not oversell. If you do, it will always catch up with you.

BE CONSISTENT - You have to tell the same story everywhere, if you hope to maintain credibility in the long run.

KNOW YOUR DECISION MAKERS – In preparing for this talk I queried several of my elected colleagues with the question, “What is the catalyst needed to initiate change in local government?”

One colleague shared an interesting observation, that elected officials know that they don't really know about urban heat islands, and consequently they suspect that they may be doing the wrong thing, so they just don't do anything. They do not act. They are unable to give staff clear direction. Without confidence in their knowledge, they can't lead.

In my survey, another colleague mentioned that elected officials need the assurance that they are working on projects generally seen as important. He further elaborated that a successful elected official is one that can recognize a popular issue and, in a timely manner, get out in front of it. However, an elected official with staying power seldom initiates anything. They say this about airline pilots, but it is true with regards to elected officials too, “There are bold politicians and there are old politicians but there are no old, bold politicians.”

If they don't hear or see a mandate from the general public, they stay the course with what they know. To initiate change, he recommended that you work with people in your industry or association – roofing, paving, shade trees – and win their approval first. Winning their approval means endorsements beyond the leadership – it must include the membership of the group or association.

Another colleague suggested that a successful approach is to bring the best urban heat island reduction policies and programs from other municipalities to yours. These policies and programs, already accepted by other cities and towns, are more likely to be favorably reviewed and revised for applicability to your municipality.

To sum up this point, know your decision makers:

- What do they know or what education do they need?
- What do they care about?
- What is their time pressure?
- What are their fears? Let me clue you in, they/we have a fear of public failure.
- Are there budget pressures?

I spent quite a bit of time on this section because I think it is the hardest to master, but the most important. Elected officials are ordinary people with an out of the ordinary perspective on the world - understand it and you will create change.

An elected official's world is unique. I once heard it described as response to what they confront everyday, "at city hall the days last forever and the months are gone before you know it." Only the truly focused elected officials keep their agenda, the rest are overcome by the agendas of the bureaucracy.

Now, back to the eight-step program.

CONVEY YOUR MESSAGE IN THEIR TERMS – Make it understandable to your listener. For example, in the USA don't explain temperature in Celsius to anyone over 25.

BUILD BRIDGES NOT WALLS - One problem to overcome is that when one looks from the outside it appears very difficult and intimidating to influence change in municipal government. That frustration can run high and blame can be assigned readily to the municipality that seemingly does not care or know better. A colleague pointed this out and concluded by asking, "How long does it make you feel good to blame someone else?"

So rather than build walls, convene a stakeholders group to study, test and advocate. We employed this method in Sacramento under the guidelines of US EPA Pilot Cities Initiative. We convened over a dozen entities from our electrical utility to the State Air

Resources Board, Cement Association, and Local Council of Governments. This group worked very hard for several years promoting cool community measures and policies.

We have not convened a meeting of this group in over a year. However, I recently checked in with many of the member groups and was absolutely impressed by our members' ability to influence the process back at their respective departments and agencies. To share a few examples, the City Planning Department has upgraded its parking lot shade ordinance, the local air district has written measures into their development guidelines, and the local utility adopted a light roof incentive program.

**BE PERSISTENT** - Seek the advice of decision makers. Ask what they think you should do to further your cause.

**BE LUCKY** – While this sounds hard, it really isn't. We all make our luck by being prepared to capitalize on opportunities when they pop up.

I never expected that Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory would find that Sacramento was uniquely positioned to help solve its air quality non-attainment problem by the widespread and comprehensive application of shade trees and cool roofs. Following the normal political process, the Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory findings would have been presented to the respective elected councils and boards with a request to staff for a report back. Hopefully, the report back from staff would call for a plan of action. But we desired more than just hope.

To that end, the Sacramento Tree Foundation created a regional urban forest strategic planning effort that has enlisted 26 municipalities in our six-county region. Each municipality has signed on to a regional compact with a shared vision and stated goals; each has appointed an elected official to sit on the steering committee; each contributed financially to the project. With the shared goal of solving our air quality problem, this regional effort has raised over \$100,000. A regional approach to double the tree canopy and manage the urban forest to maximize economic, environmental and other public

benefits is currently underway. After technical review, this document will be presented at a series of community and stakeholder workshops in order to gain broad support for a plan of action.

In summary, in addressing the question of municipal challenges one thing is certain – there is no single approach or answer. It may require a series of small steps or success may come by a hop, skip and a jump, the important feature is utilizing all the above principles of advocacy.

I will conclude my remarks with some personal observations. My experience lands me with one foot in the urban heat island reduction arena as Executive Director of the Sacramento Tree Foundation, and the other foot in the political arena as an elected Councilman for the City of Sacramento, the capitol of California. In Sacramento, each council member is elected by district, consisting of approximately 50,000 citizens.

In researching this paper, I asked myself how effective I have been in having my city adopt heat island reduction measures. My response mirrored much of what I have shared – that is, I immediately thought of the challenges.

I have had to think seriously about my core values as a council member and as a nonprofit executive director. I take the fact seriously that Sacramento is a non-attainment air quality region. I thought about my environmental ethic that attempts to weight the health of the environment into my daily decision making process. I explored my role as a council member and my core value to promote the health of my community. .

My plan of action is to become a better, more consistent, more eloquent advocate with elected colleagues and staff members, to reconvene our cool communities steering committee, and to strive for the adoption of meaningful, comprehensive urban head island reduction measures in Sacramento and our region.

It is my hope that each of you chooses to begin, or continue, to work closely with your elected officials and municipal staff, for we share something in common. We clearly understand that heat island mitigation initiatives can make real, discernable differences.

Our municipal challenge is for us to continue to educate, continue to model, continue to advocate the incredible opportunities afforded by shade trees, cool roofs and light surfaces.