



# SECRETS OF THE NIMBY

---

Seven Secrets They Don't Want You to Know  
(PART I of II)

***“Secrets of the NIMBY is an exclusive two-part special report that will forever change how corporate executives, developers, and landowners will view and engage NIMBY (Not-In-My-Back-Yard) activism in America.”***

- Patrick Slevin, Slevin Group, Inc.



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



**Patrick Slevin** is a recognized NIMBY expert, speaker, and corporate consultant who has received national acclaim for his civic engagement campaigns. Mr. Slevin has been profiled by *Campaigns & Elections Magazine* as one of the country's top political "**Movers & Shakers**". The public relations industry awarded Mr. Slevin its highest honor, the prestigious *PRSA Silver Anvil Award of Excellence*, for his issues & crisis management work. In 1996, Mr. Slevin was elected the youngest mayor in the history of Safety Harbor, Florida at the age of 27.

Corporate executives, developers, and landowners have benefited from Mr. Slevin's political leadership and divergent experience as a former mayor, **Fortune 500** executive, presidential campaign spokesman, national trade association media director and corporate consultant. Mr. Slevin has successfully secured social and political support for controversial projects at city hall and the ballot box on behalf of big box retailers, hoteliers, shopping centers, mining/aggregates, REITs, big builders, master planners, gaming, insurance, and solid waste.

Mr. Slevin leads the Slevin Group, Inc., which he founded in 2002. The Slevin Group's national operations are headquartered in Tallahassee, Florida.

## THE SLEVIN GROUP SERVICES

The Slevin Group is the most trusted firm in the nation at helping clients win community and political support for their real estate interests. The Slevin Group seamlessly works with your existing "A-Team" of partners, lawyers, planners, marketers and scientists to ensure your real estate interests cross the political finish line.

### WHAT WE DO:

- Corporate Consultation
- Strategic Development
- Organizational S.W.O.T. Assessments
- Community Screenings (Social & Political Due Diligence)
- Project Management
- Crisis Management
- Coalition Building
- Public Affairs
- Issues Advocacy
- Ballot Box Initiatives
- Political Communications
- Corporate Training/Seminars
- Consensus Building
- Public Hearing Support
- Media Relations
- CSR Augmentation

## THE ART OF WAR



*SUN-TZU*

*Know Your Enemy and  
Know Yourself, and  
In 100 Battles  
You Will Not Be in Peril*

### KNOW THY NIMBY

Sun-Tzu was a famous Chinese general and strategist who authored the world renowned manuscript, *The Art of War*. Sun Tzu's teachings have been studied by leaders from around the world representing generals, corporate CEOs, politicians, professional sports coaches and a plethora of other special interests. Every student of Sun Tzu has learned that in order to win a war (military, political or business) you must be better informed about your opponent (Know Your Enemy) than they're about you. To know your enemy is to have the upper hand in exploiting their weaknesses in any campaign.

Vocal special interests opposing real estate development have become adept at exploiting their enemies (i.e. developers). Countless corporations are defeated every year by NIMBY agents who seemingly operate with no budget, no office, no experts, and no training. What makes NIMBY campaigns so effective against multi-billion dollar corporations is the lack of knowledge that corporate leaders have about anti-development activism.

*Secrets of the NIMBY: Part I: Seven Secrets They Don't Want You to Know* reveals knowledge on how NIMBY agents successfully defeat land use applications. The knowledge you gain from this report will forever change how you view and engage NIMBYism. This special report will give you the knowledge you need to gain the upper hand to neutralize future NIMBY opposition.

### SECRET 1: NOTICE & HEARING PROCESS

In most states, a site plan, permit or rezoning application must go through a public review that is governed by a notice and hearing process. This process is *legal, logical, and conventional*. Generally, a bureaucratic notice is posted, followed by one or more public hearings. Corporate developers retain land use lawyers, planners and engineers to leverage their expertise, ensuring the "critical path" of the project is achieved.

**Here is the secret:** The notice and hearing process actually works in the favor of anti-development activists who have become adept in exploiting this antiquated system. The weaknesses of the notice and hearing process are several: The notice is too bureaucratic and vague helping to fuel community gossip. The process does little to nothing to facilitate effective public participation between the applicant and community stakeholders. Furthermore, it begins way too late into the application process.

The system telegraphs the applicant's actions and sets the project up for NIMBY ambushes. For example, the initial public hearing is when the vocal minority will fully reveal itself, ambushing the applicant and the elected body, resulting in application delays, expensive concessions, lost political capital and negative press coverage. Anti-development activists know that corporations are reluctant or incapable of engaging third-party stakeholders. Therefore, NIMBY activists gain the strategic high ground to employ crushing *political*, *emotional* and *unconventional* strategies and tactics.

Need proof? How many times has an elected official told you privately they supported your project, but then turned around and torpedoed your project at the public hearing, encouraging his colleagues to vote against you?

## **SECRET 2: CORPORATE BLINDSPOTS**

Developers are risk takers, putting up big dollars to get a big payoff. Success is sweet, and over time, it can breed poor operational attitudes a.k.a. arrogance. **Here is the Secret:** Poor operational attitudes ignore, overlook and underestimate vocal special interests. Arrogance creates operational blind spots that telegraph weaknesses to seasoned NIMBY activists who are adept in exploiting them.

The results enable political ambushes that often cripple projects.

## **SECRET 3: COMMUNITY OUTREACH**

More and more corporate leaders are accepting the reality that they must initiate community outreach to protect their bottom lines from NIMBY related losses. Over 90 percent of developers who initiate community outreach begin by setting up a town hall meeting that is endorsed by city hall, promoted in the newspaper, flyers, and even direct mail. The elected officials love it, because they believe it gives them cover. The media loves it, because they get to report on the project sooner. The anti-development activists love it, because it gives them a public stage to attack the project.

**Here is the secret:** Anti-development activists know the best way to intimidate elected officials is by creating media spectacles in public forums. That is why you see so many public hearings turn into *Jerry Springer* episodes. They love it when an applicant sets up a town hall meeting. Town hall meetings typically end with activists sabotaging the meeting, generating negative media, and recruiting new activists to their cause. The applicant is put into a defensive posture and never gets to communicate the merits of the project. Political cover begins to evaporate for not only those elected officials who want to support the project, but allies as well.

## **SECRET 4: DAVID vs. GOLIATH GENRE**

“Greedy developers”... “Elected officials have sold out to corporate interests”... “The voice of the people must be heard” ... “We’re not NIMBYs, we support responsible growth.” These are just a few examples of what reporters are hearing from NIMBY activists every day. Activists know that the person who contacts the press first will frame the issue to their advantage. They also know that the media loves to sell conflict and nothing sells better than the David vs. Goliath genre. **Here is the secret:** Activists are adept in manipulating the media into believing their group (some as small as a NIMBY of one) represents the sentiments of the silent majority. Every negative news report, showcasing the big developer debating the underdog activist, slowly raises political anxieties at city hall.

## **SECRET 5: CORPORATE MERCENARIES**

Not every community conflict is caused by homeowners’ fear of change or special interests’ defending the environment. A small, but prevalent number of NIMBY conflicts conceal a deeper secret: Corporations fighting for market share. Big box retailers, shopping centers, mining companies, landfill operators, hoteliers and other industries have been NIMBY’d by their competitors.

Local citizens either don’t know or don’t care about the secret alliance they make with a competitor intent on stirring up community opposition to prevent the applicant from growing in a market.

**Here is the secret:** There are consulting firms that will represent your company to defeat NIMBYism, but will then turnaround and represent your competitor to instigate NIMBYism against you. It’s a shadowy endeavor that may initially serve the interests of a company, but the political residuals and fallout adversely affect future quality developments seeking community approval.

These consultants turned NIMBY mercenaries are very good, but they are too good and leave fingerprints. For example, door knocking in key precincts, crisp marketing materials, petition drives, and direct mail are some clues that a professional hand is guiding a NIMBY campaign. Be careful who you retain, because they may be helping your competition to fight you in the future.

*(The Slevin Group works with corporate clients to win community and government support for their real estate interests. The Slevin Group believes that exploiting local citizens to defeat a competitor is unethical and ultimately harms the economic interests of the real estate industry.)*

## **SECRET 6: THE BIG BOX EFFECT**

Wal-Mart is the world’s largest retailer and the largest employer in the United States. Wal-Mart is also the poster child for NIMBY activism in America. The Big Box Effect is the fallout from over a decade of NIMBY battles between big box retailers and labor unions, community groups, environmentalists, small businesses, and other special interests.

About five years ago, two national labor unions launched grassroots campaigns attacking new Wal-Mart Supercenter applications across the nation. These union groups included *Wake Up Wal-Mart* (United Food and Commercial Workers) and *Wal-Mart Watch* (Service Employees International Union). In short, these and other special interest groups successfully recruited, trained, and directed hundreds of citizen activists to set up local front groups to carry out their union agenda under the flag of NIMBY. The result was not only the defeat of big box applications (Wal-Mart, Target, Home Depot, Lowes) in hundreds of communities across the nation, but the establishment of a grassroots political model that created a nationwide network.

The grassroots political model became so effective that it essentially took on a life of its own. Even after the mission was completed and the initial Wal-Mart site plan was defeated, local citizen activists began to freelance, venturing out to attack other real estate projects (retail, residential, commercial, industrial, etc.). The impact of the anti-Wal-Mart campaign has successfully launched a cottage industry of anti-development operatives who are organized, primed, and capable of attacking numerous project applications.

**Here is the secret:** What may appear to be just a few homeowners voicing concerns about your development may in fact be a “Trojan Horse” hiding a much more sophisticated operation. Your real estate project has a greater chance of being attacked by a seasoned big box NIMBY operative, then it does by first-time angry homeowners who do not have a political axe to grind. More than likely, they will see you coming well before you see them, and by the time you realize you have a political threat, the media will be calling you for a token quote in a pre-written negative story (see Secret 4).

## **SECRET 7: THE PLAYBOOK**

The intelligence community has a saying, “the best place to conceal a secret is to hide it in plain sight.” To find a NIMBY playbook loaded with political models, strategies, tactics and tips, you must venture into the most public location in the world – the internet. The internet is loaded with countless resources that are published to help both first-time activists or seasoned professionals get the information they need to defeat corporations at city hall and elsewhere.

**Here is the secret:** Locating these playbooks requires you to think like an angry homeowner who is not sure where to turn for help to defeat development. If you Google search “Wal-Mart” you will find a playbook on [WakeUpWalMart.com](http://WakeUpWalMart.com) and you will also find Al Norman, who Forbes Magazine dubbed “Wal-Mart’s #1 Enemy.” Norman is the founder of [Sprawl-Busters.com](http://Sprawl-Busters.com) “An International Clearinghouse on Big Box Anti-Sprawl Information.” If you Google search “anti-development groups” you will find [sprawlcity.org](http://sprawlcity.org), an academic driven site offering some of the best anti-development literature on the net.

These playbooks are easy to find and they encourage citizen activists to organize early, even *before* a site is acquired. Also, activists are instructed on how to lobby elected officials, to form coalitions, to generate press coverage, to exploit the notice/hearing system, and how to recruit spies in city hall. There are even seminars on how to NIMBY as evidenced by [www.sitefighters.org](http://www.sitefighters.org).

## PARADIGM SHIFT

These seven secrets reveal the greatest secret of them all: America is transitioning from a NIMBY nation into a BANANA (Build-Absolutely-Nothing-Anywhere-Near-Anyone) republic. Not too long ago, a homeowner screaming NIMBY feared change based on a lack of information, which often could be mitigated. However, in a BANANA republic, citizens have political agendas and often align themselves with anti-development operatives who want to stop all growth. Therefore, mediations, concessions, and compromises often fail and in many cases such attempts only serve to embolden the opposition to work harder to defeat your project.

## SUN TZU & YOU

In his excellent book *Sun Tzu for Execution: How to Use the Art of War to Get Results*, researcher Steven W. Michaelson quotes Sun Tzu, “He who lacks foresight and underestimates his enemy will surely be captured by him.” Corporate leaders, developers and land use professionals now possess the proper foresight, but will they take action with the knowledge they have just gained?

For those who want to protect their investment capital, market share, and shareholder values from NIMBYism, the *Secrets of the NIMBY: Part II* will help them translate knowledge into civic action that “avoids capture” of their projects.

## SECRETS OF THE NIMBY: PART II

Part II of *Secrets of the NIMBY* will take the knowledge you have learned from Part I and provide key civic practices, strategies, and tactics that will help you protect your real estate priorities from anti-development activism. The report will be published in the June edition of *NIMBY America Newsletter*. *NIMBY America Newsletter* is a free monthly electronic newsletter produced and authored by Patrick Slevin of the Slevin Group.

To ensure you receive Part II of *Secrets of the NIMBY* go to [www.SlevinGroup.com](http://www.SlevinGroup.com) and sign up for the free *NIMBY America Newsletter: Civic Strategies for Corporate Leaders*.

## PROTECT YOUR INTERESTS TODAY

If you have a project currently in the crosshairs of NIMBY activism or you want to take proactive measures to protect future investments, contact Patrick Slevin for an initial consultation. You can contact Patrick Slevin at 850.906.9888 or email him at [pslevin@slevingroup.com](mailto:pslevin@slevingroup.com).

Be sure to check out [www.SlevinGroup.com](http://www.SlevinGroup.com) to learn why the Slevin Group is the most trusted firm in the nation at helping clients win community and political support for their real estate interests.

