

**Can you define land-use politics?**

**Saint:** Land-use politics is a discipline in land-use permitting that employs sophisticated political campaign strategies and tactics to help ordinary citizens influence public officials' decision-making process in reaching land-use decisions. Land-use politics practitioners facilitate grassroots activism by organizing and assisting citizens in the effective use of their political rights.

**Why is it important that companies and developers understand the ramifications of land-use politics?**

**Saint:** They need to understand that the city council doesn't care if they create 300 new jobs because they may also be creating 600 new vehicle trips a day down the street and people are going to object to this. Those people will show up and pressure the city council into saying, "No." If you assume that the city council is going to make a decision on the reasonableness of the project, as opposed to the objections of the opponents, you're wrong. If you don't understand that it's political, and not logical, then you will lose.

**It seems that many industrial projects would offer a lot of advantages to communities today, in terms of attracting jobs and tax revenue. Why are they often hard to sell to residents?**

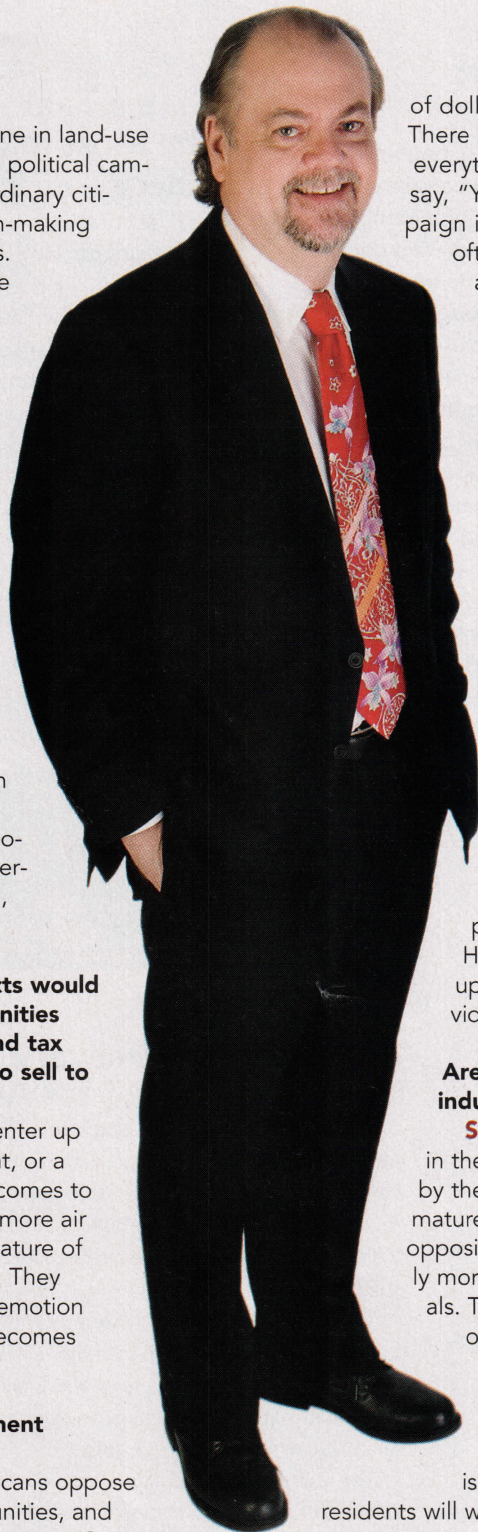
**Saint:** Whether it's a distribution center up the street, a rock quarry, a power plant, or a supermarket, residents think that if it comes to their area, they will have more traffic, more air pollution, higher crime, or the rustic nature of their neighborhood will be destroyed. They react emotionally to the project; that emotion becomes passion, and that passion becomes political action.

**Is opposition to industrial development getting better or worse?**

**Saint:** Fully 74 percent of all Americans oppose any new development in their communities, and three out of four Americans are now saying, "Stop building in my community." Each year, more people say that they have actively opposed something in the past 12 months in their community.

**Why use a land-use politics approach?**

**Saint:** Because it works. It takes more work, but millions



of dollars are at stake in these big projects. There is too much money at risk to not do everything in your power to get City Hall to say, "Yes." Managing a land-use political campaign is no job for amateurs; developers are often their own worst enemy because they are constitutionally unable to act in a disinterested and diplomatic manner when the project under attack is their "baby." The reasons people are unwise to represent themselves in court are the same reasons developers should not attempt to represent themselves in securing project approvals.

**What are some best practices in influencing favorable decisions?**

**Saint:** You need to create a political campaign that convinces, identifies, and delivers supporters into the process. We advise clients to get out there before opponents have formed into organized groups and talk to people who live closest to the project because they are most likely to form the nucleus of the group to stop it. You need to find people who think the project is a good idea and get them to come and participate in the political process by calling City Hall, showing up at public hearings, putting up signs and posters, and appearing in videos.

**Are certain areas more receptive to industrial development projects?**

**Saint:** The toughest region in which to build in the United States is the Northeast, followed by the West and the Mid-Atlantic. The more mature and dense the market, the more intense opposition is likely to be. The Midwest is generally more supportive of new development proposals. The Southern states tend to be less opposed to new development than the East and West coastal states. Communities that haven't had much growth are more likely to be receptive to development. The more densely packed the community is, the more traffic congestion, the less likely residents will want anything else built.

**What role does the Internet play in this process?**

**Saint:** The way to get information out is not to get a story on the front page of the paper, but to get a Facebook page with 5,000 friends, communicating to all those people that care about your issue. Opponents now



have information available on how to wage a successful campaign, using websites and e-mails, to convince City Hall to not approve the project. You can also get all of the tools, advice, and strategies you need on the Internet for free to stop a project. You can put anything you want on Twitter and you don't have to spend any money doing it. So you need a social media weapon in your arsenal to counteract opponents.

**What is at stake if land use strategies are not carefully thought out?**

**Saint:** We believe that the process of getting things built will become more controversial and difficult in the years to come. We have seen perfectly logical, economically good projects go down to defeat because the developer didn't want to recognize that he had to actively recruit support and get that support to go down to City Hall and express their opinion. Sophisticated strategies will be required in order to overcome intractable opposition, and it is through the effective use of land-use political techniques that success will be

achieved. A proponent who does not understand that the process is inherently political, and who does not act accordingly, will spend thousands — or even millions — of dollars and still lose.

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## **THE ASSIGNMENT**

The Saint Consulting Group is an international business with operations in the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom. From a single office, the company has expanded to more than a dozen, now employing 100 people across 10 divisions. Saint Consulting operates throughout the U.S. and has 250 projects in process at any one time.

P. Michael Saint, CEO of the Saint Consulting Group and co-author of *NIMBY Wars*, recently talked with *Area Development* about the politics of land use.

A site to see.

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