

Behind the Scenes in Municipal Government

Public Policymaking Keys to Success

Step One: Start the Conversation

- * Never assume local policymakers are aware of the true extent of the issue in their area.
- * Many public officials in WI have a basic knowledge that issues exist surrounding alcohol use and misuse, but they often do not know where to begin to make an impact.
- * Most policymakers do not consider policy changes unless there is a call to action or a trigger event that creates public awareness of the problem.

What Causes Change?

- * Call to action issued by research groups, coalitions, schools, or law enforcement based on State, County or Local trends. Fact based. Uses statistics that illustrate the issue and measure progress.
- * Trigger events that generate emotion in the community. People begin to wonder what can be done to fix or prevent.

The Public Policy Process

- * Begin a discussion with local leaders who either lead or sit on committees or boards that can create change. Ask to be placed on a meeting agenda as a presenter.
- * Show them how to make an impact to improve. Use examples from other communities that have created successful policy changes.
- * Share sample legislation or ordinance language to use as a starting point. Get leaders talking and thinking.

Taking Shape: The Nuts and Bolts of Change

- * Once policymakers understand there is room for improvement, they can begin open discussion of the issue and possible options to address it.
- * Committee discussion can create public interest or often media attention. Community members on both sides may offer feedback. Draft or sample policy changes can be prepared by attorneys to be considered and voted upon.
- * Once the committee approves a policy, they forward it to their Common Council or Board for final vote.

What Do Policymakers Need Most?

- * SUPPORT FOR CHANGE!!
- * Provide factual information. Attend meetings to speak in favor of the change.
- * Gather community support for the change by writing opinion letters to local papers, social media
- * Positive reinforcement from law enforcement, coalitions, health departments, schools and neighborhoods.

Prepare for Pushback

- Anticipate pushback from affected stakeholders. Tavern League, bar owners and patrons, service clubs if they sell alcohol at events for fundraising, bartenders and more!
- Rise above the noise! Be sure there are also supporters of policy change in the audience at these meetings and that they are also speaking. There needs to be loud voices in support of the change also.
- Stay strong. Stay positive and on message. Use evidence based talking points to keep policymakers focused.

Overcoming Opposition

- Emphasize that changing the alcohol culture serves the public good.
- Change is about safe, healthy communities, responsible beverage service and consumption.
- It is NOT about "big government", placing hardships on small business owners or squashing people's fun.

Win Some...Lose Some

- If a particular policy change does not pass, don't give up.
- Stay in touch with policymakers
- Identify opportunities for alternatives. Pilot programs, get community leaders to propose a one or two year trial and evaluate results.
- Search for other positive changes the community can make to address issues.
- There are likely multiple issues to solve. Be persistent.

Public Opinion: What Do People Really Think?

- We know experience has shown that there is wide public support for positive policy changes surrounding the culture of alcohol abuse and misuse in WI.
- Pushback is loud sometimes. Don't let a loud group at a meeting scare off policymakers. The reality is they are a small but vocal group. Emphasize that the larger population is looking for improvement in these things.
- Be present at meetings where votes happen. Be respectful, vocal supporters. Encourage policymakers to stand strong.

What Works to Win?

- Policymakers do not like to be perceived as ineffective or weak. Emphasize that change that creates the best impact may be difficult, but a brave, bold gesture will bring positive results.
- Provide facts and statistics to decision makers that make typical opponent arguments difficult to gain traction.
- Outline success stories from other communities who have fought these battles and succeeded.

Steady Progress is Possible

- Once a community passes a positive change in alcohol policy, offer praise, support and thanks to those who supported the vote and the effort.
- If additional changes are needed, ask leaders to consider additional changes steadily, but not all at once.
- Start with easier changes first. Positive feedback will help policymakers gain confidence that they are doing the right thing. Future decisions may be less difficult.

What Does Success in a Community Look Like?

Wausau in 2010

- * Marathon County/United Way LIFE Report conducted a widespread survey and revealed results showing that Central Wisconsin was leading the pack in many areas that were not things to be proud of such as:
- * Underage drinking, binge drinking, alcohol density, OWI, alcohol related illness or injury, public intoxication and others.
- * Problem taverns were creating safety issues for patrons and neighbors.
- * Available Class B licenses were issued first come, first serve

Wausau Since 2010...

- * Liquor license policy has changed. No longer issue Class B licenses on a first come, first serve basis. All licenses are now vetted by a subcommittee that reviews management plan & experience, reviews expectations and ordinances and selects the best plan.
- * Demerit points ordinance has been revamped and is more strict.
- * Closed three problem taverns and suspended another for 90 days based on management issues.

Wausau Since 2010... (continued)

- * Social Host Ordinance enacted to address underage drinking and house parties
- * Public Intoxication Ordinance enacted
- * Sober Server enacted in 2014 after a battle that drew statewide media attention. Council voted 8-2 in favor. Ordinance was vetoed by Wausau's Mayor two days later. Wausau's Council overturned the veto and re approved the ordinance. In the first 14 mos, there has been one citation. Ordinance includes temporary servers at events, regular servers and owners/managers when they are in control of the premises.

Take Aways

- * Municipal leaders want to make a difference. They want to solve problems to make their communities better
- * They often do not know what options exist and need ideas
- * Sometimes they are conflicted when opposition surfaces
- * Alcohol culture varies by community, tailor your approach to the audience you are approaching
- * Always build up, encourage, praise and congratulate community leaders who have stood up to make brave changes
- * Never give up. Steady effort brings success....

Keys to Wausau's Success

- * Strong support from law enforcement
- * Strong support from Marathon County AOD Partnership
- * Strong support from our Marathon County Health Dept
- * Strong support from schools and parents
- * Vocal support from media outlets and residents who want to see the culture shift