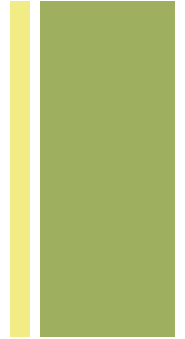


Engaging Communities

Lessons from the Field

Elva Yanez
Active Living Research Conference
San Diego, CA
February 10, 2010

+ Overview



- Case example demonstrating how the involvement of outside experts, including researchers, in a broad-based coalition changed the course of a land use advocacy campaign
- Other examples of advocates working with researchers to further policy goals
- Lessons learned from these experiences
- Recommendations

+ Elephant Hill Campaign

- Grassroots land use campaign to secure additional environmental review on a proposed residential development of 24 luxury homes in El Sereno, a low-income, park poor community
- Community Concerns:
 - Gentrification: El Sereno historically provided working families with affordable housing
 - Public safety: Unstable geology & history of landslides
 - Environmental degradation: Loss of one of the last and largest remaining hillside open spaces in Los Angeles

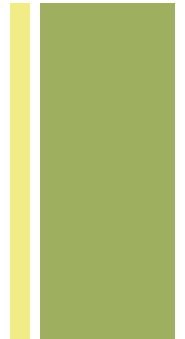


+ Elephant Hill



+ Timeline

- 1984 – Work begins on Environmental Impact Report for tract 35022
- 1993 – City approves tentative tract map despite wide-spread opposition and community concerns about unstable geology and other environmental impacts (*Advocates lose Round 1*)
- 1994 – Developer postpones project due to real estate downturn
- 2003 – Project sold to new developer when market heats up
- 2004 – As project starts to move forward, residents engage in door to door organizing to build grassroots base; outside environmental groups and experts do not get involved
- 2004 – Unable to meet his administrative deadline, developer sues City to secure final approval of tract map (*Advocates lose Round 2*)
- 2005 – Residents continue to monitor project as developer acquires more properties adjacent to site



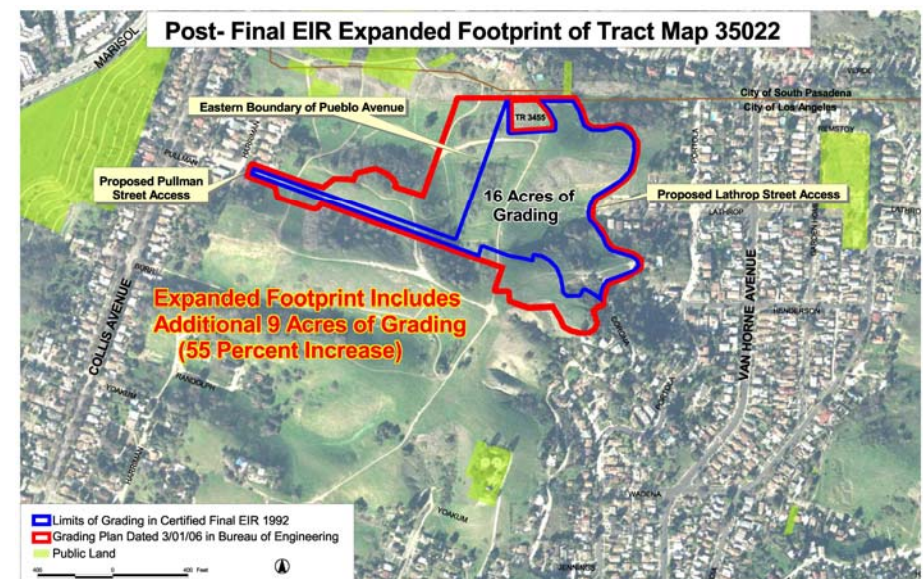
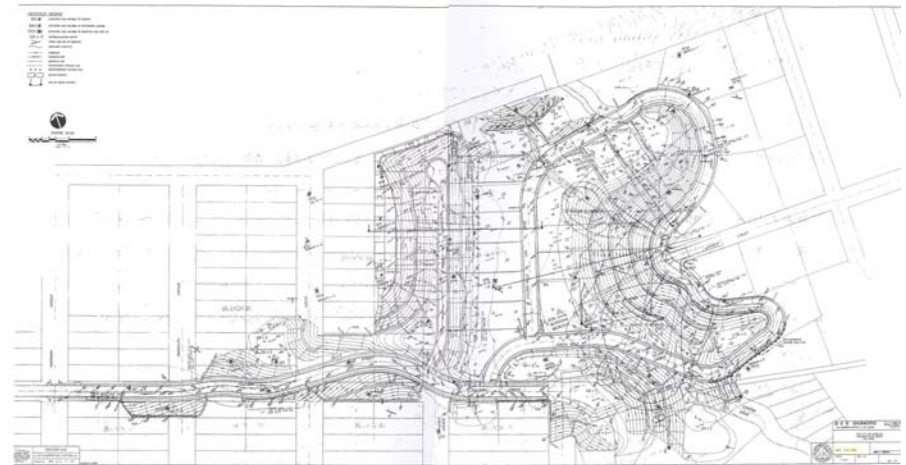
+ 2006-2007 Timeline

- Equipment used to install fencing around project causes sinkhole & flooding
- City departments do not respond to residents requests for supplemental environmental review (SEIR)
- Residents request help from NRDC, Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy, state elected officials & Councilmember Jose Huizar for City action on SEIR

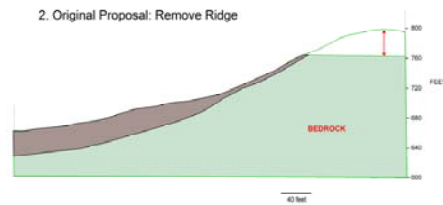
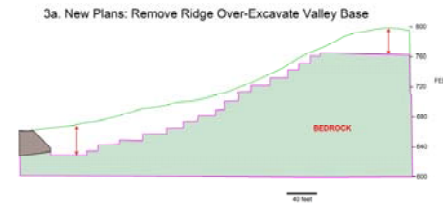
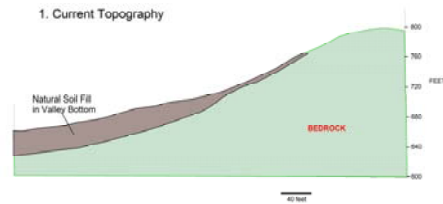


+ 2006-2007 Timeline

- May '06 – Residents obtain evidence of expanded project using public record request
- Nov '06 – Broad-based coalition forms & gains political traction using maps enhanced by SMMC showing expanded project; CM Huizar introduces motion to examine need for SEIR
- Jan '07 – Coalition wages legislative campaign for SEIR that involves 10 public hearings over a 10 month period
- Oct '07 – Council's final vote for SEIR rests on independent analysis of expanded grading plans & testimony by a fluvial geomorphologist (*Advocates win Round 3*)



+ Independent Research Analysis of Expanded Project Plans



Source: Data adapted and redrawn for illustrative purposes from The U. S. Dept. of Army, W85-3000-2, dated March 9, 2008.



+ Epilogue

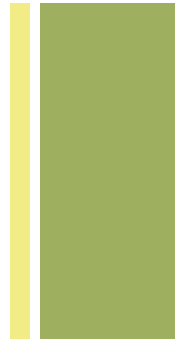
- Developer sues the City again, after losing Round 3
- Advocates secure pro-bono legal help & intervene in lawsuit in Dec '07
- City loses in lower court in Jan '09



- Intervenors appeal lower court decision in July '09
- City settles lawsuit with developer in Nov '09
- City acquires 20 acres of Elephant Hill for park space as part of settlement

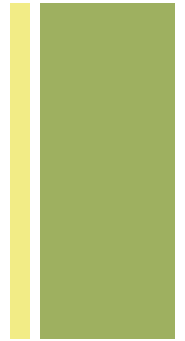
+ Smokefree Workplace Campaigns

- Rigorous economic research studies of sales tax revenues (pre and post policy implementation) discredit flawed “surveys” sponsored by tobacco industry-front groups claiming that smokefree policies hurt businesses and the local economy
- Academic researchers and advocacy groups collect and analyze tobacco industry documents to expose front-groups and discredit tactics used to stop local smokefree campaigns
- Advocacy group’s collection and analysis of smokefree policies in the U.S. demonstrate that strong policies are common place and later serve as a data set for academic and government researchers
- Health groups invest in telephone surveys to demonstrate widespread voter support for strong local smokefree policies (and the elected officials who vote for them)



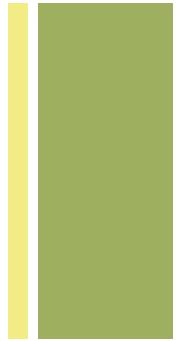
+ Other Examples

- A grassroots community coalition works with academic researchers who utilize GIS to map the relationship between crime and alcohol outlets in support of land use policies to regulate the placement and concentration of these outlets
- A land conservation organization partners with public health researchers to create a childhood obesity data layer for a park equity mapping system to demonstrate the relationship between physical inactivity and lack of park space
- Environmental justice groups form a collaborative with academic researchers who develop a GIS screening methodology to identify communities that are disproportionately impacted by cumulative environmental impacts in Los Angeles to support policy development

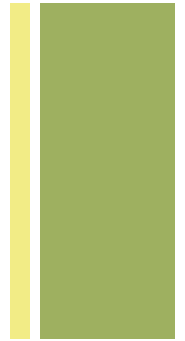


+ Lessons Learned

- Advocacy groups that ask for and receive help from outside experts, including researchers, lawyers, intermediary groups and other government agencies, often have greater policy advocacy success than those that don't
- Researchers and advocates who work well together often have similar values and are committed to the same policy goals
- For the relationship to be mutually beneficial, both advocates and researchers must understand and respect each others' expertise, needs and processes to reach those goals
- Researchers who come from the communities that are the subject of public health studies bring important community knowledge to the research process due to their lived experience and cultural competency



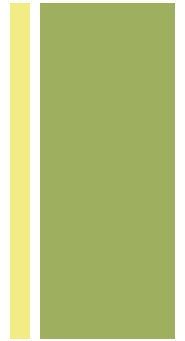
+ Lessons Learned



- An advocacy group's campaigns and front-line experiences will often influence the work of its research partners
- Advocates at the cutting edge of an issue often end up doing applied research out of necessity, creating important data sets and influencing the direction of scholarly research
- Researchers can play an important role in building the research capacity of advocates given their partnerships and working relationships

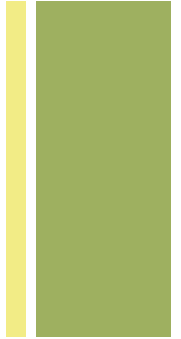
+ Recommendations

- Advocates should actively seek out researchers who are interested in developing data and conducting analysis to support their specific policy goals
- Researchers should be pro-active in indentifying strong, effective advocates to partner with and finding ways to incorporate advocates into participatory action research processes
- Advocates should consider doing research on their own if they can't find outside researchers to help them
- Foundations and research institutions should find ways to meet the short-term, applied research needs of advocates working on policy issues
- Foundations and research institutions should continue their efforts to nurture young researchers who come from underserved communities and diverse racial/ethnic backgrounds





Final Lesson: Its Never Over



- The Elephant Hill victory was dependent upon the California Environmental Quality Act
- In January, the Governor put forth a proposal that would exempt 125 projects from CEQA legal requirements
- This week business interests submitted paperwork for 4 ballot initiatives:
 - 2 would preclude anyone but the Attorney General from filing a suit under CEQA to challenge an EIR
 - 2 would two additionally limit the AG's ability to bring CEQA cases based on failure to analyze greenhouse gas emissions.
- These proposals are being referred to as Job Creation measures
- CEQA provides for public participation, accountability and public health and safety