Reaching a Wider Audience with Social Media:
The Benefits and Drawbacks

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Case Study:
Development Proposed in Huntington, Long Island
Problem:
Town created (under the radar) a TOD zone around the train station, increasing density, with no planning or input from residents.
Development proposed (18 units to acre), 10 buildings with 490 units, only partially in the TOD zone
OUTRAGE by the community
already marginalized by urban renewal,
racial issues and a closed school
In Response:

Resident Activist created a page: Say No to Avalon Bay Huntington Station

Made a video of the walk to the station to show that the walk is not optimal for safety and comfort

Posted the video on the FB page and the opposition movement grew
Proponents and Opponents began to use

(a community-specific news & information platform)

A small group of people online turned the process into a circus

“calling each other names of the worst sort”
Finally: Voted Down

School board was the tipping point...

learned the whole ½ mile circle was given increased density

& feared more children
Post Mortem:
Vision Long Island Smart Growth Summit
November 19, 2010
Resident Activist

What was being said by the town and the developer was just not true... Huntington Station has been marginalized ever since the commercial area was torn down to create parking lots.
Huntington School Board

We were neutral ... the number of school children created would be the same as SFH’s... BUT, nobody told us that the whole TOD sector was down zoned... when were they going to tell us?
Huntington Township Housing Coalition

No one paid attention when the TOD resolution was passed... The project collapsed under the weight of public anger about shootings, gang violence and a school closing.
Leadership Huntington

This was about the need to attract private investment ... but it was also about the failure of leadership at the town level and a dysfunctional town council.
Senior Regional Editor
Patch.com

It took no time at all for the debate to “fall off the cliff” and become name calling. ...we finally had to lock down comments.
...social media was a major component, which in this case led to “uncivil” discourse and took dominance over the facts.
Conclusion

Social media can be a powerful force to reach and engage the public ...

But, beware – comments are not filtered on most sites and it is easy for misinformation to be out there.
Recommendations

--Websites like PATCH and other local public blogs need closer monitoring when debates about land use arise.

--Towns also need to use interactive sites to post information about projects.

--Increase the use of public webinars for presentations by developers so that more people can participate directly.
Postscript -- the tragedy:

TOD is now a “dirty” phrase in the Huntington Station Community.

This fight was never about TOD –

It was used as a ruse by the town council to avoid “spot zoning”.

Sadly, the opportunity for real improvement in the built environment in this area has probably been lost.
Permanent Citizens Advisory Committee to the MTA
www.pcac.com

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www. visionlongisland.org