



Is it time to ditch ‘NIMBYism’?

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Because companies don't operate in a vacuum, chances are most have experienced NIMBYism while operating within their communities.

NIMBYism is a term commonly used to describe stakeholders opposing a change or development within their local area, often fuelled by selfish or self-serving motives. The 'Not-in-my-Back-Yard' syndrome is, if you like, the xenophobia of community engagement – the public articulation of a fear of significant, long-lasting change.

Part of the difficulty lies with the use of the acronym: NIMBY is a pejorative term often used condescendingly as a catch all for anyone who doesn't agree with a proposed development. Nobody identifies as a NIMBY; most don't describe others as NIMBYs, at least not to their face.

What these terms ignore is the 'reasonableness test'. As a proponent or other harbinger of change, the first role of a company is to assess whether its proposed development or plan

passes the reasonableness test? Is what the company planning to do in this community reasonable?

So what motivates the NIMBY?

While the reasons are many and varied, there is some commonality within objections to development or planned change that fall broadly into the following areas of concern:

- **Quality of life changes**

Reasons may include subjective amenity concerns such as detrimental impact on views or changes to light and shade as well as actual impacts on property access, increased commute times, congestion arising from increased dwelling density and the sharing of finite amenities or resources.

In the case of the NOOMBY ('Not-out-of-my-backyard'), quality of life changes can have far reaching economic and social impacts. This



includes the loss of vital services following the banking sectors' branch closures in regional communities, or the loss of relied upon medical and allied health services following the establishment of specialist centres of excellence within the healthcare sector. Is it reasonable to categorise customers as NOOMBYs when a company's decisions and actions result in not inconsiderable personal inconvenience in locating alternative services or travelling further to access services?

• Environmental, health and social impacts

Major projects regularly fail to get off the ground due to perceived or actual environmental or health impacts associated with new or changed developments. The threat posed by the prospect of increased noise pollution, impacted air quality, changes to waterways or impacted natural habitats are just some of the concerns that can spur communities into action by [harnessing the power of social media](#).

Impacts brought about through changed zoning or the location of social housing, public service amenities, public transport or other social infrastructure can meet organised community resistance, and lead to [community outrage and activism](#).



• Impacted property prices

For the majority of residential and commercial property owners, their asset is their single largest investment and consequently companies could consider that NIMBYism is a rational response to the uninsured risks of homeownership¹. So while you can insure your home against fire and other catastrophic events, there is no way, currently, of claiming for devaluation by nearby changes in land use. The continued rise of 150-metre high wind turbines across the Irish landscape angered agricultural property owners adjacent to wind farms with claims that their properties were devalued without recourse for compensation.

• Suspicion of big business

So called NIMBYism may also arise in response to a distrust of impending development and change, a distrust of large organisations and a general lack of confidence in the public sector.

Ideology or personal impact?

Long-held ideological beliefs are often challenged when it comes to matters of personal interests.

Most reasonable people understand the requirement for faster and more frequent commuter bus services, but few want bus depots beside their homes, buses driving down their streets or bus stops outside their garden fences. Most environmentally aware Australians have enlisted in the ideological 'War on Waste'; however how many of these mum and dad eco-warriors want a glass bottle sorting and recycling centre clinking away at all hours behind their garden battlements?

Does this a NIMBY make? Or is it a normal human response to a change within a person's immediate environment or community?

Consider for a moment that these fears are simply a natural part of the human condition, perhaps it directs companies towards a greater understanding of that little bit of NIMBY or NOOMBY in everyone. Once there is understanding and appreciation of the situation, it is easier for companies to find a solution on how to work with NIMBYs or even better still, how to prevent NIMBYism in the first place.



How to prevent NIMBYism?

The imperative for companies to gain a social licence to operate cannot rely on purely quantitative research and poorly considered tactics that may only pay lip service to consultation. An early community change management approach is the ideal solution.

While traditional community consultation and engagement tools can help gain an understanding about an impacted community, the [tech revolution](#) presents a range of opportunities to broaden the scope, increase the effectiveness and enhance the value of community engagement.

A qualitative approach can harness the breadth and depth of local knowledge and sentiment to assist in developing a strategic, effective and timely engagement strategy that can bring communities on board, facilitate partnership approaches and share problem solving.

Considering stakeholder engagement as an afterthought when designs and plans are locked in and fully resourced is a step closer to failure, often with costly and politically undesirable consequences.

“Companies who come to the table early, with the confidence to be flexible and the capacity to be reasonable, have the greatest success in securing their social licence to operate.”

Ditch the acronyms

And ultimately, let’s call time on the use of acronyms such as NIMBY, NOOMBYs and other pejorative terms that prevent companies from developing truly effective engagement strategies that help secure a social licence to operate.

Glossary

For those struggling to keep up with the many acronyms, here’s a handy guide:

<i>NIMBY</i>	Not In My Back Yard
<i>NUMBY</i>	Not Under My Back Yard (for tunnels)
<i>NOOMBY</i>	Not Out Of My Back Yard
<i>YIMBY</i>	Yes In My Back Yard
<i>NOPE</i>	Not On Planet Earth
<i>NOTEs</i>	Not Over There Either
<i>CAVEs</i>	Citizens Against Virtually Everything
<i>NIMEY</i>	Not In My Election Year
<i>BANANA</i>	Build Absolutely Nothing Anywhere Near Anyone

Reference

¹ Fischel, Professor William A. 2001. Why Are There NIMBYs? Land Economics



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