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Hot Button Issues in Local Government: From Homelessness to the Environment



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Class Description

In an era that is increasingly distinguished by polarization and distrust, we face complex challenges that require us to move past our tribal tendencies. Housing, homelessness, climate change, budgets, and representation are just some of the issues that local governments are currently facing.

While cities are on the frontlines of addressing these various problems, the larger picture necessarily includes collaboration between counties, regions, and states. In this session, participants will learn the characteristics of “hot button” issues, the sources of distrust, the biggest issues facing our communities, how we can overcome partisanship and find solutions.



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Course Objectives

- Understand the context of hot button issues in the larger framework of local government
- Recognize that despite the risk of polarization and distrust, there is often common ground to be found if people listen and understand each other
- Understand that cities do not exist or behave in a vacuum—they are situated within counties, regions, and states that also shape our communities



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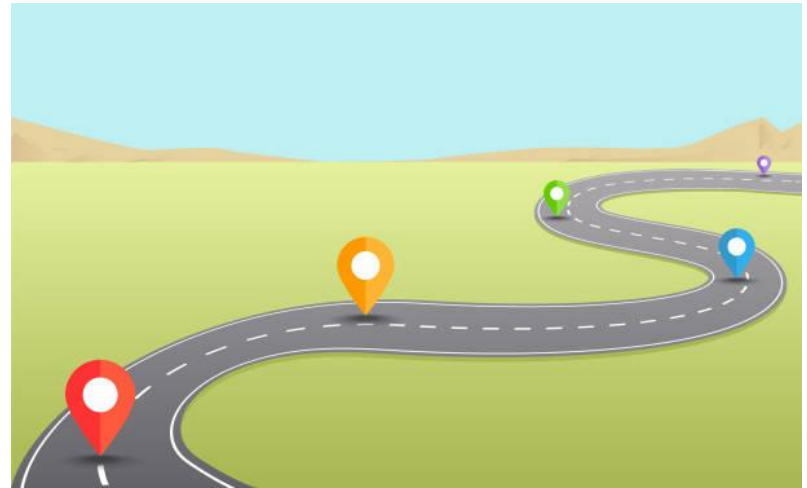


Road Map

1. Introduction
2. Polarized Politics: What's In It for Me
3. Local Finances and Budgets
4. Q & A

Break

5. Housing, Homelessness and Land Use
6. Water, Drought and Climate Change
7. Race and Representation
8. Finding Common Ground
9. Q&A



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**In the chat, type what you
think makes something a
“hot button” issue**



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Introduction



Lots of heat, little light



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**90% of local
government is “below
the waterline” of public
awareness**



Polarized Politics: What's In It for Me?



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What's Different?

Global: Digital revolution; rise of authoritarianism; and disruption of traditional industries

National: Partisan polarization; erosion of trust in government; and fiscal stress of inflation and public debt

State: Changing demographics; affordability crisis; and fears of rising crime

Local: Erosion of local media; aging civic leadership; and anti-government sentiment
Everywhere: rising expectations and frustrations – “me” “now” “my way”



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Toxi(City)

Social Media Echo Chambers: Algorithms amplify divisiveness, rumors, conspiracies, alternate facts and tribal politics

Polarized extremes: Loudest and most passionate increasingly dominate the political discourse online, at public meetings, etc.

Winner Take-All Politics: Negative campaigning fuels cynicism

Perverse Incentives: These forces push electeds toward governance by soundbites and slogans and exploiting hot button issues



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Local Finances and Budget



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Budget Crisis

Four Horsemen of the Fiscal Apocalypse

Revenues; Neglected Infrastructure; Pension Debt; & Changing Community Needs

Short-term is short-sighted

Hiring freeze, furloughs, pay-cuts, service reductions, postponing or downsizing capital investment, tax and fee hikes

Inflation, Recession or Both?

State is awash in cash but the tide is already going out

Never let a good crisis go to waste

Opportunity to prioritize services and expenditures; right-size the organization; and invest in recovery and the future



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Questions?



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10 Minute Break!

Stretch & Hydrate



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Land Use, Housing, and Homelessness



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You Get What You Plan For



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Land Use

Local Control vs. State Intervention

State is increasingly stepping in to promote housing

NIMBYs vs YIMBYs

Older homeowners concerned about erosion of property values and quality of life confront emerging force of younger housing advocates

Walkable Urbanism vs. Conventional Suburbia

Crisis of affordability crisis put the California Dream at risk

Missing Middle

Not only are we missing intermediate housing types, we're also missing win-win outcomes

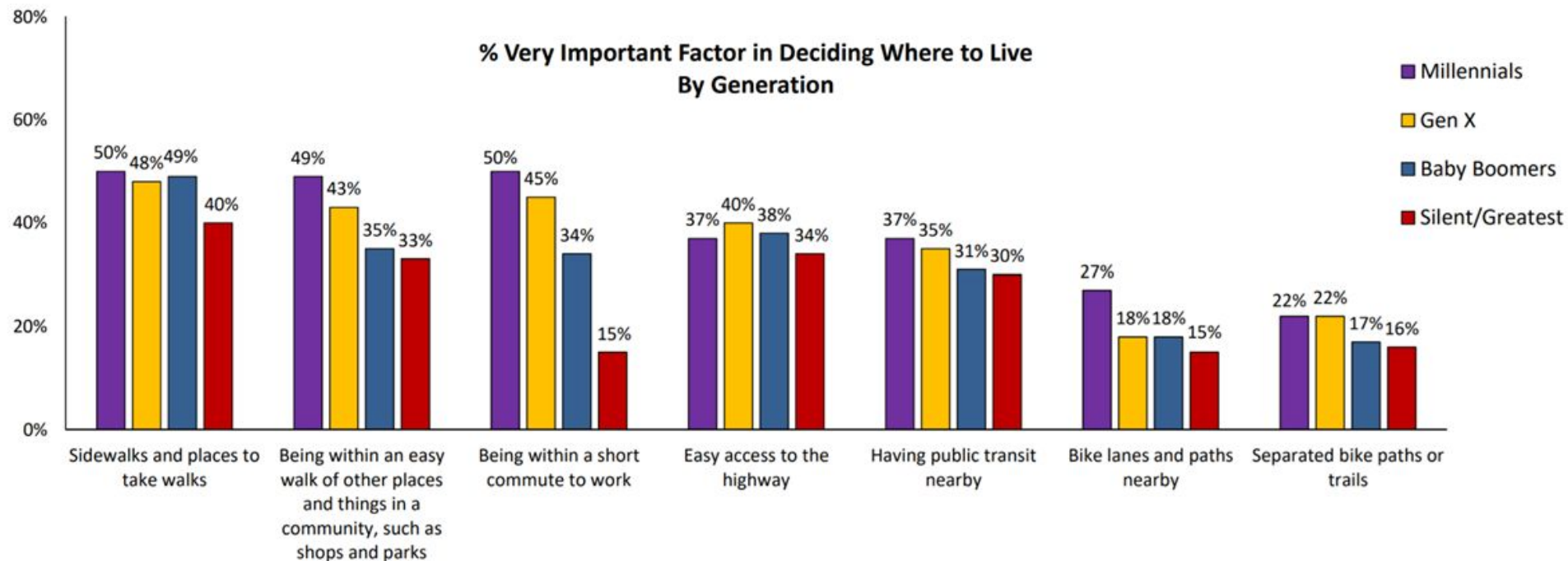


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Millennials & Gen Xers Prioritize Walkability and a Short Commute More than Previous Generations

Millennials see having public transit nearby as equally important to highway access





**“Public hearings are that place
in American society where no
one listens.”**

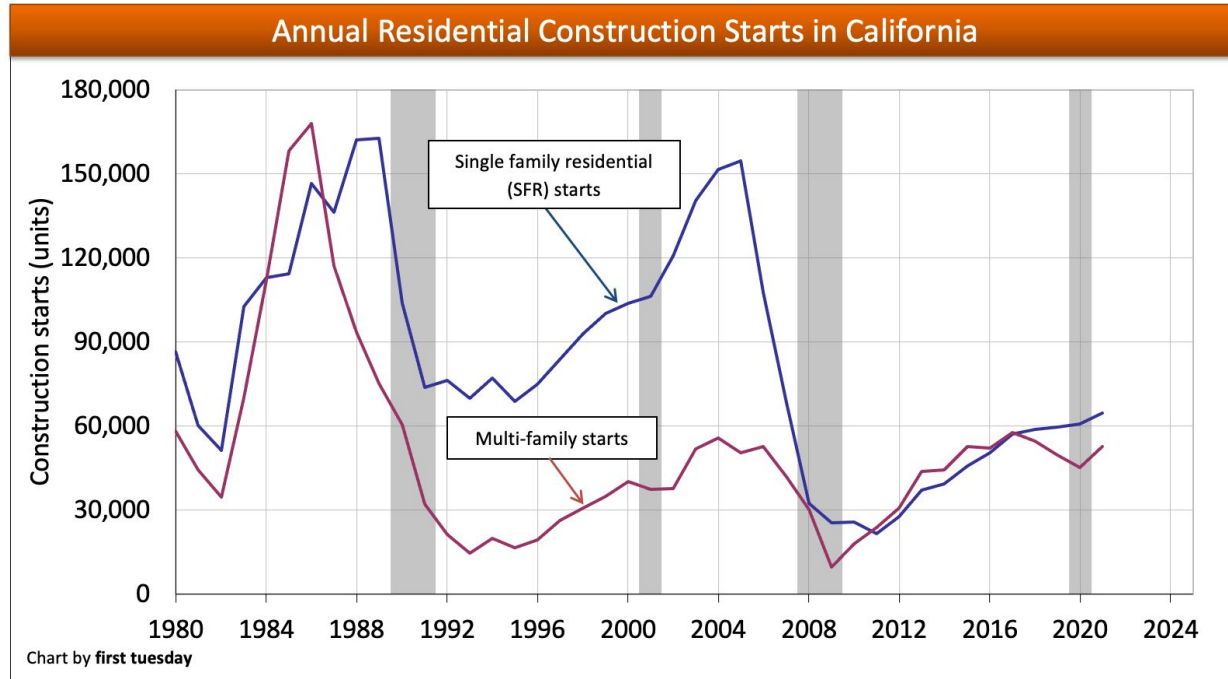
-Former Mayor Dan Kemmis



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Housing



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“For every complex social problem there is a solution that is easy, quick, cheap and wrong.

- Journalist H.L. Mencken



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Homelessness

It's Not One Problem: Homelessness is the product of multiple systemic failures

Community, not a government problem: Cities have a key role, but so does private, non-profit, faith and civic sectors

Jurisdictional dysfunction: Homelessness doesn't fit neatly into bureaucratic boxes
The Search for Panaceas: One size won't fit all

Built for Zero: We know what works



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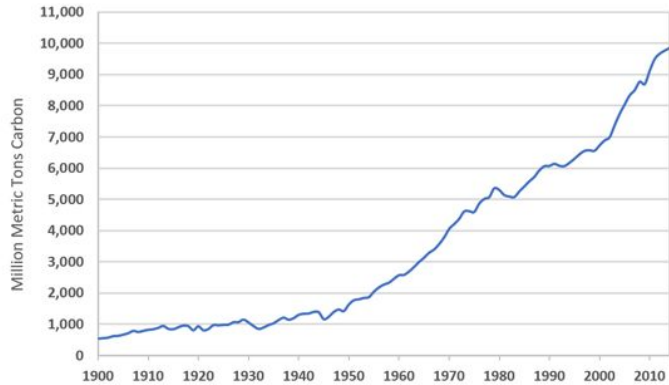
Water, Drought, and Climate Change



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Global Carbon Emissions from Fossil Fuels, 1900-2014



“Things that can’t go on forever, dont.”

-Economist Herb Stein



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Denial: Maybe if we ignore it, it will go away

Climate Change is here: Droughts, wildfires and sea level rise are clear and present dangers

Plan is a verb as well as a noun: We must adapt in real time at the local level

Whiskey is for drinking, water is for fighting: “One Water” is the key to collaboration

Think Globally, Act Locally: Communities have an opportunity and responsibility to adapt



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Race and Representation



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Power, Politics, Policy

Bay Area Cities: A recent study showed while about 40 percent of the region's population is white, 71 percent of elected officials are white and one-third of cities in the region have all-white city councils

California Voting Rights Act: The law has spawned a shift in local elections to district elections that coincide with state and national voting

New Constituencies: Not just more voters, different voters

All Politics is Local: Yet all communities will increasingly face shifts in who votes and who gets elected



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Identity Politics

Polarizing Language

Words become lightning rods: Critical Race Theory; Diversity, Equity & Inclusion; BIPOC; LGBTQ+; Neighborhood Character

Issues Are Nationalized

Bitter partisan disputes are played out locally

Conformity and Backlash

Whose side are you on?



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Finding Common Ground



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“The public realm is a commons; the nature of the city is a shared environment.”

-Sociologist Dr. David Brain



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Building Community



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Thank You!



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