

Location: Calabasas

Issue: OWTS Ordinance (Septic Ordinance)

Methodology: Workshop/ Keypad Polling

Davenport Institute Role: Consultation/Workshop Facilitation

The City of Calabasas, California lies at the foot of the Santa Monica Mountains. Most of the City is relatively modern suburban development, but the city limits also stretch up into the canyons into neighborhoods that are far more rural and want to stay that way. For this reason, when the City introduced a septic ordinance that required (among other things) on-site septic inspections it quickly became controversial – to say the least.

After several years of deadlock and frustration between the residents of the city's rural Old Topanga neighborhood and the City Council, the city reached out to the Davenport Institute to conduct a meeting that would go beyond the city's typical three-minutes at a microphone format. In October 2011, the Institute facilitated a workshop which drew about 35 city residents to discuss the City's Onsite Wastewater Treatment Systems (OWTS).

The workshop consisted of three stages:

- 1) Residents gathered in small groups to discuss their top three priorities for the content of a City OWTS ordinance and reported out their top three priorities.
- 2) In the same small groups, residents discussed perceived issues/ suggested improvements for the *implementation* process as residents understand it and again reported out their top three priorities.
- 3) With the help of volunteers, Davenport staff developed 8 major themes from the ordinance discussion and 8 major themes from the implementation discussion. The remainder of the evening consisted in voting on the top three priorities (from each list of 8) using Turning Point Technologies anonymous voting.

Following the workshop, the Davenport Institute drafted a memo on both the process and the findings of the October meeting, which Executive Director Pete Peterson presented at a City Council Meeting in January.

Following the presentation and further deliberations by Council, the City Council decided to revise its OWTS policies based, in part, on public feedback from the workshop.