



Facilitator's Report from the Countywide Community Forums Steering Committee 9/4/08

The topic recommended for the next Countywide Community Forums is ... County Budget Priorities

Given the growth that's coming, what do we want the county to do? Our current fiscal situation is bad and citizen expectations are high. We don't yet have a robust process to engage citizens around the priorities and budget. We have no comprehensive plan to go from here to there.

The style of the meeting ... Dynamic Facilitation

In this meeting we sought a natural conversation where people express themselves freely seeking an emergent consensus, rather than to brainstorm and vote for instance. In this case, because the meeting was so short, we held out the possibility of a vote if time ran short.

The story of the meeting:

The meeting began with energy and concerns around the coming population explosion and the budget crisis arising from that. Other issues were mentioned but the group circled around this topic, especially how this issue should best be considered. One direction was to use an allocation of resources exercise. Another was to base the budget conversation around a specific agency or department. From this conversation it became clear that there are different ideas about the primary purpose:

- a) To provide specific information to public officials so they can make better decisions.
- b) To provide a forum where the public becomes educated about issues and their complexity.
- c) For people to just get together and start talking about these issues.
- d) To start an educational dialogue between elected officials and citizens.

The group reached unanimity on the the budget crisis but ran out of time in deciding whether or not to focus on a narrow sub-topic. The Sheriff's office was mentioned but that decision will be left to the King County Auditor. In the last minutes we retreated from the "choice-creating" conversation to vote on that question. The vote was fairly balanced.

The Charts from the meeting

Dynamic Facilitation uses four charts to reflect and track group progress, usually taking the form of "Solutions," "Data," "Problem-statements," and "Concerns."

SOLUTIONS

- 1) This county is being driven by growth. It affects everything. One million more people in the next 20 years.
 - Where to put the growth?
 - What about infrastructure ... before you get revenue?
- 2) The question is really housing. It creates the reality of the community. Availability? Affordability? It affects education and drives taxes.
- 3) Given the growth that's coming ... what do we want the county to do? Our current fiscal situation is bad and citizen expectations are high.
 - a. We don't have a robust process to engage citizens around the priorities and budget.
 - b. We have no plan to go from here to there
 - c. We miss the comprehensive thinking needed between agencies and districts.
- 4) Specific idea to help people wrestle with this topic is ... Here are the existing community services. Here is \$100 ... How would you like that \$100 spread around? Develop citizen priorities. Then factor in the required expenditures. Ask, "are these requirements helpful?" Ask, "how would you do it more effectively?"
- 5) Use this forum as an educational device without expectation that participants will come to a solution.
- 6) Also the forum is for hearing the opinions of others and learning about their values. People may become activists from this.
- 7) Rural area government and service delivery (possible topic)
 - a. The percent of people who get direct service from the county is declining.
 - b. 90% of the area of the County gets only 7% of the services
 - c. What happens to the folk that don't get direct service?
- 8) How does a community define safety? Streetlights burned out? No muggings?
- 9) Put out a list of what individuals might be able to do to improve their neighborhoods
- 10) The budget crisis is coming. What can government and citizens do? ... to be educated? ... to work in partnership? ... to meet the real needs in a comprehensive way?
- 11) Present clearly defined issues that people can respond to.
- 12) Get specific: How to best deal with budget cutbacks in the Sheriff's office? What are your suggestions?
- 13) Be general: Just ask people what is important in their lives?
- 14) Just ask how to fully engage the citizens in a way that people really care and that has real impact on their lives?
- 15) How to fully engage citizens in the issue of the budget shortfall?

DATA

- 1) Animal shelters ... people aren't willing to pay so they don't really value them.
- 2) CCF can support the exploration of values.
- 3) Most government agencies are in trouble now.
- 4) The public process currently divides complex issues into sub-issues ... and creates militant one-issue groups
- 5) The state says, " You have to prevent food borne diseases." ... The agency says "this means four checks per year." ... It becomes an entrenched requirement, whether really needed or not.
- 6) The county has adopted a mandate to be more strategic in their thinking. ... but they are not sure how. They adopted an ordinance for a county wide strategic plan with input of citizens among different agencies.
- 7) The county already did a beautiful comprehensive plan but there is no correlation to budget priorities.
- 8) What can a citizen do?
- 9) There are multiple layers of government. King County is not alone.
- 10) People are into political grandstanding vs. thinking.
- 11) The Fast Forum tool has limits:
 - a. It can ask yes/no questions
 - b. It can ask multiple-choice questions
 - c. It can ask Likert value scale questions
 - d. It can make a ranking within limits
- 12) The county has 2 million people ... only 540 people participate. Aiming for 3-4 times a year
- 13) People are so overwhelmed in their lives and are fearing that this won't make a difference.
- 14) Cities some times pay counties for patrol work
- 15) In a budget crisis services compete for tax dollars. There is a missing prioritization process.
- 16) People don't know what King County does. For instance, they don't do education.
- 17) Budget deficits are here now.

CONCERNS

- 1) To not have people just list their preferences ... but to really think comprehensively
- 2) We are not an inter-governmental study group. ... Or a public policy group. So we can't be expected to do this rich thinking.

PROBLEM STATEMENTS

- 1) How to generate comprehensive thinking?
- 2) How to engage citizens in strategic thinking?
- 3) How to translate the CCF process into real budgets?
- 4) How to include the impact of other districts and levels of government?
- 5) How to assure the people of King County that this citizen involvement process really is a way to make a difference?
- 6) How to help people get involved?
- 7) How to create a conversation between government and the people ... so that people understand why they can't fill their own potholes or independently

address traffic safety? So there is partnership, mutual education and response?

- 8)** How to pick a topic that gives information to elected officials?
- 9)** How to pick a topic that will bring people to the community forum?