

The Future of Air Quality Management in 2006:
Our Future Search for Common Ground

Review of the Puget Sound Air Pollution Control Agency
Future Search Conference
January 24 -- 26, 1996

It Ended with 13 Points of Common Ground...

On January 24-26, 1996, 62 participants met for three intensive days of discussions about ourselves, the world we live in, and the future of air quality management. The results were 13 points of common ground concerning the future of air quality management in the Puget Sound region, and a host of ideas centered on the 'hows' of achieving our common air quality management goals for the future.

The Future Search conference is a different approach to envisioning a common future. The Future Search approach focuses on finding common ground on which future actions can be planned. Some found the process frustrating, some found it stimulating. Some conference participants later reported that they would have liked a focus on areas of disagreement and problem-solving rather than identifying shared perspectives.

The results of the conference are now the framework for the agency's strategic planning. While a couple of the conference discussion groups are continuing to meet and forge ahead with projects, other group members will become a network resource for the agency as staff pursues the issues of these groups

The shareholder groups represented at the conference were: the PSAPCA Board of Directors; business - large and small; environmental activists; government, health and education; PSAPCA staff and a few who crossed these boundaries. In this document, we will review the results of these three days spent finding the vision for the future of air quality management in the year 2006. For additional information on how we arrived at these results, please see attachment 1 to this report, which summarizes the Future Search process.

The Future Search conference is built upon a unique process leading to final points of consensus about the future. The beginning of the first half-day of the conference focused on our common past. Important milestones in our personal lives intertwined with happenings of historical impact that shaped our visions and beliefs. The focus then shifted to the present as the stakeholders in consensus perceived it. The goal of discussing the present was to understand the current forces that have an impact on the management of air quality right now. These discussions progressed into an afternoon of envisioning an ideal future for management of air quality. The three days led to a final Friday morning session devoted to discovering our common future.

Our Common Ground -- Focus on the Future

Many participants will remember the Friday morning activity focused at ‘the wall’ as the conference began to draw to a close. ‘The wall’ became the place where bits and pieces of ‘whats’, ‘hows’ and ‘whos’ were forged into a concrete agenda and action groups. While certainly not every idea made it all the way to the wall, the ones with the greatest amount of consensus did.

The following 13 points were agreed upon as a part of our common vision for the future of air quality management in the Puget Sound region:

- Improved public awareness, including personal accountability
- Less bureaucracy/less government
- Fewer, simpler, sensible regulations
- Multimedia focus
- Single, integrated environmental regulations
- Growth and land-use management
- Stakeholder involvement and cooperation
- Support for research
- Healthy, aesthetic air
- More transportation alternatives
- Information accessibility
- Air quality/transportation linkages
- Self-regulation of business

The final process of arriving at these points of common ground was not an easy one. The best witness of this is the number of topics that came to reside on a second list entitled ‘Potential Futures/Unresolved Differences.’ These topics are outlined in Attachment 2.

Some of these topics were areas that some could agree to as a desirable future, but not everyone. Other areas were close enough to agreement to be defined as an issue, but it was difficult to agree to a definition of the issue’s parameters. One particularly engaging example was ‘quality of life.’ Participants agreed that ‘quality of life’ is a desirable goal, but there was much discussion about how to define the term.

The definition of ‘growth management’ was another topic that met with considerable discussion. Some felt that effective growth management was limiting growth, others felt it meant more densely populated urban centers, while still others agreed with neither of

these ideas. Most also seemed to agree to disagree about who is to pay to manage our air quality for future generations. The words “dollars, dollars, dollars” on the ‘unresolved differences’ list seemed to sum up the thoughts of many participants.

Some of the areas classified as unresolved differences were topics that surfaced repeatedly during the three-day conference. Given more time for discussion, or perhaps during the process of working toward futures that we could agree upon, some could later be areas of potential agreement. The group also defined a list of possible projects for the future (see attachment 3).

Action Planning: The Next Steps

Once we determined our 13 points of Common Ground for the year 2006 A.D., we spent the remaining two hours of the conference in action planning groups based on our interests. Our task was to generate action plans which could help us achieve the vision. These plans ranged from ways in which government, environmental activists and businesses could learn more about one another’s daily workings to developing Websites.

Following are just some of the action plans generated:

- Internships at businesses for PSAPCA staff members to experience the issues businesses confront, and internships at PSAPCA for business people to understand better the work agency staff is doing;
- Joint training between large business, government, and environmental activists to learn ISO-14000 principles together;
- Meetings with foundations which fund environmental projects to determine ways in which the environmental community can participate more fully in air quality projects with government and business;
- A pilot project involving PSAPCA, state and federal air agencies in simplifying reporting requirements for businesses;
- The formation of a scientific advisory group to assure that policy makers have excellent scientific information on which to base choices leading to the maintenance of healthy, aesthetic air for all citizens of the Puget Sound Region;
- The development of a Master Smogbusters program, promoting alternative means of transportation (other than single occupancy vehicles);
- The idea of air quality messages being incorporated into high school drivers’ education programs;

- Stakeholder participation in developing data on current auto use to publicize the beneficial effects of individuals using alternative modes of transportation and policy makers making smart transportation investments;
- Development of an Internet WWW home page and/or Electronic Bulletin Board;
- Establishing a community resource list to provide citizens with greater access to information and assistance on air quality issues;
- A mobile source measurement van (smog-o-meter) that could measure air quality at populated junctures (such as freeway on-ramps);
- A speakers' bureau and direct mail to community/neighborhood groups to increase community access to air quality information and promote greater interaction between PSAPCA staff and communities and neighborhoods.

Action areas are transformed into agency agenda

The common ground vision and action areas generated at Future Search have become the groundwork for targeting the future of the agency. The impact of Future Search on the agency was the focus of discussion at a management team retreat on February 13-14, 1996. The retreat gave the management team the opportunity to dissect and interpret the points of common ground and the principles for achieving them. The meeting also led to the formation of a staff team led by Jim Nolan, Director of Compliance, to interpret and integrate the Future Search common ground agenda into the agency's strategic planning. This work will focus on the process of integrating the Future Search vision in the everyday fabric of the organization. Another task for this team will be to integrate and lead the efforts of some groups working on action plans developed at the conference.

Let us touch on how the management team worked to further define the common ground from Future Search. Following the first interpretation and refinement at the management retreat, a team of management staff further clarified the material. The agency Board of Directors and the Advisory Council were presented with these conclusions, and their feedback was incorporated.

The matrix that follows shows how we tried to cluster concepts, interpret them and refine them into six principles that will guide our agency's planning for the future.

Future Search Vision Points

Concept 1

- Less bureaucracy/government
- Fewer, simpler rules & regulations

What It Means To Us

Concept Title:

Sensible Government

- Quality, not quantity
- Examine why we have rules

- Leave anchors in place for rules which are removed
- External forces may limit our options

Concept 2:

- Self-regulation
- Improved public awareness including personal accountability

Concept Title:

Self-regulation

- Organizations and individuals are accountable and responsible for their actions
 - Awareness
 - Environmentally sound decisions based on incentives and market-based ethics

Concept 3:

- Multi-media focus
- Single, integrated environmental regulation

Concept Title:

Integration

- Holistic approach
 - One-stop shopping
 - Cross-coordination w/other agencies
 - Integration

Concept 4:

- Stakeholder involvement & cooperation
- Information accessibility

Concept Title:

Accessibility

- Organizational accessibility
 - Involve the involved
 - External forces on stakeholders
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Concept 5:

- Support for research
- Healthy, aesthetic air (defined)

Concept Title:

Research

- Better characterization of air quality (tied to research)
- Healthy, aesthetically pleasing air is the overall vision
- Fundamental to better choices

Concept 6:

- Growth & land use management
- More transportation alternatives
- Air quality and transportation linkages

Concept Title

Growth Management

- Systems understanding
- Better choices
 - in control strategies
 - in technologies
 - in lifestyle decisions
 - in planning and zoning

Based on these interpretations, we have written the following six principles to boil down many of the Future Search visions and the agency's role in achieving them into concise concepts.

Sensible Government:

We examine why we have rules and we make sure they are clear, understandable, reasonable and effective. When we remove rules, we make sure our gains are sustainable.

Self-Regulation:

We find ways to help individuals and organizations integrate environmental principles into their personal and corporate lives so that governmental regulations become less necessary.

Integration:

We have a holistic approach to our work, carefully coordinating with other organizations to assure that our efforts integrate rather than interfere.

Accessibility:

We are committed to being open and accessible, involving our stakeholders in all decisions that affect them.

Research:

The decisions we make are based on an understanding of what healthy, aesthetic air is, leading to decisions that are grounded in good science and founded on solid research and the best information that is available to us.

Growth Management:

We are partners who actively influence the systems (decision-makers) that drive growth management, land-use and transportation planning that affect clean air lifestyle choices.

As work with the Future Search vision continues, a team of PSAPCA staff will lead work to find 'homes' at the agency for all of the Future Search principles. The agency sees work with the integration of Future Search results as continuing throughout 1996, eventually becoming an integral part of all agency work. The Future Search conference is a process that will impact total agency strategy to the year 2006. We will provide another brief report to Future Search participants in late 1996 or early 1997 to identify where we have successfully integrated Future Search results into agency actions.

