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CLINTON FUTURE SEARCH CONFERENCE

January 27 – 29, 2012

Our Conference Question:

Given the inevitability of change, how do we take the reins and create a future for Clinton's central core that will enable our community to thrive?



About the Clinton Future Search Conference

Overview

The Clinton Future Search Conference brought together 70 people in the Clinton Community Hall for a lively and intense 3- day process to explore and answer the conference question (above). The conference culminated in a shared vision for desired future, specific plans for how to make that vision a reality, and commitments to move those plans into action.

Participants

Participants were selected to represent a range of different stakeholders groups, to ensure that the conference outcomes would reflect diverse perspectives and interests. The eight represented stakeholder groups included:

1. Owners of Businesses in the Clinton Core
2. Owners of other Clinton Businesses
3. Residents of the Clinton Core
4. Rural Residents
5. Public Agencies
6. Non-Profits
7. Youth
8. Neighbors

Why a Future Search?

The conference was planned by a Steering Committee (committee members are named on the following page) who selected the Future Search methodology for several reasons. First, the methodology has been proven over time and around the world; the Future Search Conference approach was pioneered in the early 1960's by Marvin Weisbord and Merrelyn & Frank Emery and has since been used successfully all over the world to engage the collective learning and creativity of large groups. Second, the Future Search methodology begins from the premise that effective planning occurs when the 'whole system' is in the room because

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STEERING COMMITTEE

Jill Engstrom
Sherryl Christie-Bierschenk
Carol Flax
Jack Lynch
Maury Hood
Barbara Taylor
Don Rowan
Tom Fisher
Helen Price Johnson
Debby Colfer
Curt Gordon
Mary Posz
George Henny

FACILITATORS

Ursula Roosen-Runge
Dorothy Baumgartner
Sara Saltee

participants - not the facilitator or a small “expert” group – collectively hold the expertise needed to create a vision for the desired future and identify the actions and approaches needed to make that vision a reality. This emphasis on using the wisdom of local people as the foundation for the future seemed a good fit with the ethos of the Clinton community.

The Future Search Process

The Future Search process is structured around five core tasks which each take about three hours to complete. Participants explore - in turn - the past, the present and the future through a series of semi-structured dialogues. Techniques such as timelines and mind-mapping are used to quickly identify major trends and issues. Dialogue takes place both in stakeholder and mixed groups of 6-8 people, followed by small groups reporting their conclusions to the whole group. Everything is posted, visible, and discussed by the whole group.

About the Facilitators

The Clinton Future Search Conference was facilitated by consultants from Strategic Learning Resources, a South Whidbey based consulting firm with experience planning and facilitating Future Search conferences in diverse communities and organizations.

FRIDAY EVENING



Warming Up: Sharing Symbols of the Future

Participants were invited to bring with them to the Conference a symbol of their hopes for Clinton’s future, and – after a quick round of introductions - participants kicked off Friday evening with an opportunity to share those symbols, first in small groups and then with the whole group. Some of the symbols included:

- A more-than half-full cup of water, representing an optimistic outlook and a thriving community
- A magnet, representing both the notion of Clinton in general as a place that draws people to it, and the idea of creating a specific place in Clinton that could serve as a commons; an inviting center for people of all ages to come and spend time
- A vintage coin purse from Simmons Garage (printed with a 4-digit phone number), and a tax token from the same era to remind us to have reverence for our history, and to represent the desire for a continuation of true community, meaning a group of people who are interdependent and know their neighbors
- An amaryllis plant, surrounded by an (imaginary) triangle, representing a form that is both stable and a symbol of change, and the amaryllis inside represents an ecosystem, color, life, air, light.
- A wooden gate with the word Clinton on it – representing the perspective that “Gateway” is a limiting concept, meaning something you go through. “Landing” was suggested as a more powerful image, meaning a place you stop and explore and where you feel a sense of home, in addition to being a place you travel through.



Focus on the Past: Where We Have Been

Purpose: To build community through a shared history and explore what the past means for our work here.

Next, participants were introduced to some of the principles and expectations of the Future Search conference, then set to work on their first major task: exploring their shared history from 1970 to the present. The group worked together to create three timelines. One captured milestones in participants' personal histories, another focused on events in world

history, and the third looked at Clinton's history.

Small groups then went to work looking at the themes and meanings held by the timelines individually and in relationship to each other. Some of their insights included:

The Personal timeline tells a story of:

- Priority on family
- Multigenerational families
- Diverse group of people
- Lots of mobility
- Drawn to Island
- More travel in 90's – less now
- Marriage, jobs, graduation, death, - life events
- High percentage came here as adults
- Deliberate choice about quality of life

Some of the implications of the Personal timeline include:

- Many are new, don't have history
- Hard to get alignment – don't have the deep roots
- Need to get long term families here
- Look at maintaining a quality life
- Many came from different places – but have a common goal of improving/keeping life here.

The Global timeline tells a story of:

- Everything is speeded up: war, communication, transportation, technology
- Social Media changes
- Impact of wars and our responses
- Counter culture movement
- I-5 corridor, navy base, growth
- Technology economy
- Consumerism/housing bubble

- National spotlight on Seattle – spilling over to the Island
- Internet – allows more independence
- Economic crisis
- Back to the land, Act 2
- General nervousness

Some of the implications of the Global timeline include:

- Don't need to work overseas – can work here
- That can lead to isolationism
We could develop a communication system where we could be more inviting and a voice through the technology

The Clinton timeline tells a story of:

- Building in the 70s
- Stagnant in the 80-90s
- Increased ferry traffic and increased vacation homes
- Economic decline and less development
- Fewer families and more retirees
- More commuters who don't really participate in community
- Landslides – topography works against us
- Lack of voice to deal with that
- People first came to harvest resources – timber, fish
- Ferry is an integral piece to Clinton's story
- Resorts came – recreation

- Moved for better quality of life – and people could earn living wage and cost of living was lower
- Jobs have gone away, families can't afford to live here, and demographics are changing

Some of the implications of the Clinton timeline include:

- Lost what we used to have – dances, basketball etc in Clinton
- Used to have events (Clinton days) – dissolved probably due to changing/aging demographics
- We are still resource rich in people and environment
- Tremendous quality of people who live here – and they are untapped
- How do we harness the talents and enthusiasm of newcomers?

Taken together, the timelines tell a story of:

- The constant is the change that is happening
- Deep and abiding history
- Baby boomers came and raised their families
- Increased traffic in Clinton
- Aging of Clinton now
- Can't just think about where we've been but what is the trajectory?
- Diversity
- People have come from many different places – soup of ideas and thought processes
- In terms of how things change – we are isolated and we have a delayed response to some big changes
- What we are striving to do is to create more connectedness between people

The implications of the timelines, taken together, include:

- How might we use our human capital in a more efficient way? For example, centralize

the 250 non-profits. Harnessing human energy is a key—need to figure out what the common goal is between the youth, business, non-profits, other people that are here.

- A necessary shift from the “pipeline” or “gateway”—change the energy so it disperses better than people just shooting through—so it becomes more than Clinton Landing rather than the “gateway”
- Heard a lot of ideal-ism about living here on Whidbey Island - the sense of being blessed. People are here because they think this is a great place to be. That's what brought us here—the opportunity to be here—we are appreciative about being here.
- A common goal is “quality of life” which is a real amorphous, subjective idea. For some people it's escaping the mainland, for others its building community. But we don't have a system or a container for those decisions to be made.
- One of the things that hasn't come up is Climate Change—there is going to be pressure to come here because of the climate as other places that are desire-able dry up—we are fairly “watered” here.
- If we could connect all these ideas, we could “rein in” and actually help control the future of Clinton.
- Three things that jumped out at me—change, trends, and job were mentioned in every report out. Also mentioned was age, and technology—are the older folks keeping up with technology—why couldn't we have the kids teach us old folks and that would help with the jobs.
- A youth participant shared surprise that people expressed NOT feeling community here – “Everything I've wanted to do in my 9 years on the Island has been supported, so I'm surprised that people don't feel a sense of community.”

FRIDAY EVENING - SATURDAY MORNING



Focus on the Present: Current Trends

Purpose: To get everyone talking about the same world

As a final activity on Friday evening, the whole group gathered to create a mind-map reflecting the trends they see having an impact on Clinton today. After brainstorming trends, participants used dots (coded for stakeholder groups) to note the trends they thought were of particular relevance, then went home for a well-deserved rest.

The next morning, participants re-gathered around the mind-map to identify the top trends they felt would impact their planning work.

Top Trends

1. Rise in empty commercial buildings
2. Ferry service/Tourism issues
3. Pressures on the environment
4. Declining public funding/decreased interest in the common good/rise in civic engagement
5. Aging population
6. Rapid changes in technology
7. Rising interest in non-motorized transportation and public transportation (walkability/bikeability/flex cars)
8. Youth needs and issues (including declining population in schools, rise in drug use and obesity, need for recreational opportunities)

Next, stakeholder groups met to identify what they are already doing now to respond to these trends, and what they hope to do in the future. Then, these groups reflected on things they are proud of and sorry about related to what they are doing now with respect to Clinton.

SATURDAY AFTERNOON



Focus on the Future

Purpose: To imagine a future for Clinton's central core we are willing to work toward

Following this grounding in the past and acknowledgement of the present, participants next turned their attention to envisioning Clinton as they would like it to be 10 years from today. They worked in small groups to consider their answers to two questions:

What will Clinton look like in the year 2022?

What happened that enabled us to accomplish these things?

Each group then chose a creative way to present their ideas to the whole group. Some performed skits, others created collages and one group wrote and performed a song.

IMAGES OF CLINTON, 2022

- Pedestrian overpass
- Useful shops (butcher, baker)
- Electric zip cars – rental system
- More events/book signings
- 7 day bus service
- Higher density business core
- Incorporation as a city
- Sewer
- Community Center/Central Hub ('The Barn')
- Stop light at crosswalk
- Visitor center building
- Central farmer's market
- Cooperative commercial building
- Sidewalks, bike paths, walking paths
- Clinton is defined
- Welcome to "Clinton Landing"
- Flowers, trees, native plants
- People out and about
- Public social events and activities
- Hotels, restaurants
- Tourists know they can get food and supplies here
- Less dependent on fossil fuels
- Electric car charging stations
- Easy access to businesses
- Shuttle service from ferry to businesses
- Recreation building
- Bike rental/loan
- Park enhancement
- Marketplace for local goods and services
- Attractive, walkable shopping centers
- Frontage roads/roundabouts
- Business and technology park
- Progressive Hall has second story, includes a café offering senior meals, dance hall, daycare
- Higher density housing including apartments and condos, with services nearby
- Trolley or horse-drawn carriages bring people up the hill from the ferry
- Street lights with hanging baskets
- Grass
- Murals
- Dog area
- Park benches
- Coffee
- Kiosk
- Announcements about Clinton happenings on ferry
- Flea markets
- Art shows
- Tours
- Monthly "Whidbey 101" class
- Welcome wagon
- Larger grocery store
- A formal body, recognized by the county, representing Clinton ("community council")
- Improvements to 525 create traffic calming and pedestrian-friendliness
- Unifying visual markers/elements
- Schools purchase food from local farmers
- More businesses within walking distance from ferries
- Comprehensive plan for downtown Clinton
- Culinary institute
- Community volunteer and engagement center
- Historical identity
- Alternative waste management practices (not the traditional sewer)
- Emergency preparedness
- Lots of community/citizen involvement
- Median
- Parking
- Serve both locals and tourists
- Stay for a day, a week, or a lifetime



What happened that enabled us to accomplish these things?

Looking back from 2022, groups offered many ideas for what they would have done and how they would have worked together in order to create the 2022 they had envisioned. Some of their ideas included:

- We got on relevant long range plans (eg. Washington Ferry Plan, Island County Master Plan)
- We built infrastructure to support development (planning)
- We set up a community council
- For a stop light, we lobbied WSDOT (led by the Chamber), organized surveys and petitions
- An active Chamber
- Positive momentum created sustained community support
- We set up a trail/path organization to write a “trail plan”
- To get 7 day bus service, we held a “transit day” on which thousands of people rode the busses
- Everyone got involved: Property owners, schools and youth, local families, the Chamber, commissioners, and a Village or community council
- Our stakeholders worked together with respect and cooperation



Discovering Common Ground

Purpose: To discover what all present want for Clinton's central core

Following the engaging presentations, small groups went back to work to identify what they thought all the scenarios had in common. Following a core principle of the Future Search Conference method – “seek common ground” - they worked to answer the question: “What do you think everyone in the room agrees with?” After combining their lists with a second small group, the combined groups brought forward lists representing the eight (or fewer) areas

they felt reflected agreed-upon desires of everyone in the room. After some discussion of how best to group the items on the lists and identification of areas that seemed to have less than complete agreement, participants retired for the evening.

SUNDAY MORNING



Confirming our Common Future

Purpose: To confirm and articulate clearly what all present want for Clinton's future

In the morning, participants looked with fresh eyes at the eight cluster areas representing the common vision for Clinton's future, and we had a lively discussion about them, ensuring that all present understood the intentions and meanings behind the clusters and that things were grouped in a way that all felt good about supporting. With the clusters refined in this way, individuals selected an area they felt passion about

and worked together with others who shared that focus to draft a statement of intent for that area.

Below are the eight areas for action that emerged, each with the draft statement of intent that was created to describe it. (Note: Most of the statements are written in the “future as present” tense, conveying the perspective of a future moment in which today's aspirations have already been achieved.)

AREAS FOR ACTION

ONE VOICE/COMMUNITY COUNCIL

Statement: “We are the Clinton Community Council, representing the community to all government agencies regarding issues related to the common welfare of the community. The council shall have influence on all decisions that affect the Clinton community.”

BEAUTIFICATION

Statement: “We have identified our environmental assets, thereby showcasing our natural beauty, and enhancing our public areas. We have implemented a comprehensive beautification plan, beginning at the ferry dock and through the central core with the collaboration with local businesses and residents.”

TRAILS AND PATHS

Statement: “We are continuing to extend our non-motorized, weed-free trail system to our expanding community. We will continue to expand our trails to other community trails, eventually connecting the island.”

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Statement: “We will develop a plan to support existing business, and encourage new business in meeting the needs of residents and visitors through the integration of our community assets.”

TRAFFIC MANAGEMENT

Statement: “We have implemented traffic-calming measures to reduce speed, promote local access, and provide a safe and inviting pedestrian environment.”

TRANSPORTATION OPTIONS

Statement: “Dependable, user-friendly transport options, 7 days a week.”

COMMUNITY CENTER/CENTER OF THE COMMUNITY

Statement: “We are planning to create an indoor/outdoor community gathering place/space that serves all ages.”

INFRASTRUCTURE/UTILITIES

Statement: “We have in place those infrastructure components and policies necessary to support the economic growth and health of our community in an affordable and equitable manner.”

SUNDAY AFTERNOON



Action Planning

Purpose: To develop near and short term action plans

After presenting their statements, the action-area groups took another step forward by identifying the next steps they would take to move that area forward. Below are the action steps developed for each action area.

NEXT STEPS

ONE VOICE/COMMUNITY COUNCIL

Short-term Action Steps:

- 8 people who worked to develop the statement for this area will form an initial steering committee, and will meet next week
- One person will talk to people from each of the other 7 groups
- Exploring options for representative formation – how can we organize and be heard as a group?
- Recruited Bob Peterson to put together ideas on what is possible.

BEAUTIFICATION

Short-term Action Steps:

- Identify what the public and private areas are in Clinton core
- Sine Hough is familiar with all garden clubs and will be liaison with them
- Barbara Taylor will be liaison to business and building owners
- Start working on some public areas, so that property owners can see positive results and come on board
- Will meet 4 times a year, subgroups might work on individual projects
- Miriam Cotes is looking into models in other communities – will provide photographs and examples to show people before/after images and help speak to the benefits in other communities
- Approach garden tour re: funds for plants, also have line on Langley garden where plants are available
- Approach local growers/nurseries
- Also want to meet with benches, walkability group (Trails and Paths)

CLINTON TRAILS AND PATHS

Short-term Action Steps:

- First meeting early Feb to identify other committee members
- Identify existing paths
- Look into how Coupeville set up their trails
- Contact walking groups for cooperation and coordination

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Short-term Action Steps:

- Start exploring conversations with land and building owners
- Solicit more community involvement

Area for Action: TRAFFIC MANAGEMENT

Short-term Action Steps:

- Deferred to One Voice committee – that has to come first

TRANSPORTATION OPTIONS

Short-term Action Steps:

- Identify methods – Island Transit focused
- Explore rentals, zip cars, flex cars
- Helen Price-Johnson will go to Transit board, look at inter-agency agreements

COMMUNITY CENTER/CENTER OF THE COMMUNITY

Short-term Action Steps:

- Develop shared understanding and vision for s/place
- Asset mapping survey
- Host gatherings/focus groups before April 30, to develop written statement of goal for process

INFRASTRUCTURE/UTILITIES

Short-term Action Steps:

- Get the county to approve another alternative treatment process that property owners could use
 - A couple members of group will approach Clinton water district, ask them to invite Port Orchard model to make presentation
 - Create core support group to assist local water district and approach regulatory committees.
-



Organizing for Action

Purpose: To determine what needs to be in place, and our role, to support the action plans

Before concluding the conference, the group took on a final task – identifying the processes and structures they wanted to have in place to support and sustain their work going forward. That discussion resulted in the following agreements and commitments:

1. A **“Coordinating Committee”** was formed, including 4 members of the Conference Steering Committee and new members who volunteered at the conference.

Coordinating Committee Continuing members:

- Jack Lynch
- Sherryl Christie-Biershenk
- Carol Flax
- Tom Fisher

Coordinating Committee New members:

- BikerBob Akers
- Terri Arnold
- Glo Sherman
- Sine Hough
- Hal Schloman

2. Each of the working committees will have a **point person** who will be the point of contact for the Coordinating Committee for their committee. (Ex. Mary Donaty will be the point person for the Economic Development work group.)
3. The Coordinating **Committee Role and Charge** includes:
 - Show up
 - Communicate with the larger community
 - Serve as communication hub for work group participants
 - Set up structure for electronic communication
 - Serve as a clearinghouse of information including:
 - Participant database – who is on what committee
 - What committees are doing/accomplishing
 - Resources and supports
 - Hold committee members accountable/monitor the process
 - Establish a financial structure
 - Help identify funding sources when funds are needed to support projects
 - Coordinate budgets for committees
 - Explore establishment of non-profit
 - Convene a check-in meeting in three months
4. **A three-month check-in meeting is planned.** Original Future Search participants will re-convene for a one-day session in three months (April/May 2012) to share/discuss progress on short-term action plans. The meeting will be convened and organized by the coordinating committee, with support from sub-committee members.



Closing Circle: Personal Commitments

Purpose: To share the actions we commit to taking as we work toward our common vision for Clinton's central core

To close our time together after so many hours of hard and rewarding work, participants gathered in a circle to share impressions of the conference and describe the commitments they personally were making to move the action areas forward and achieve the common ground vision identified through the conference. Participants voiced a sense of renewed energy for moving forward, shared gratitude for the experience overall, appreciation for the talented people in the room, expressed particular admiration for the youth who participated, and reminded each other to persevere when they encounter the inevitable obstacles and difficulties on the road ahead.