

Regional Open Space Strategy (ROSS)

Executive Committee Meeting SUMMARY



Date: Wednesday February 17, 2016
Time: 2:00-4:00 PM

Location: Puget Sound Regional Council
Suite 500 (Board Room)
1011 Western Ave.
Seattle, WA 98104

Executive Committee Meeting Summary

Participants 22 people in attendance, with 2 attending over the phone (See Attachment A)

Welcome Ron Sims welcomed the group, and introduced the agenda of the meeting moving forward and everyone introduced themselves.

Return on Investment – Earth Economics Zach Christin from Earth Economics began his presentation with a question? How can we best use economic information concerning open spaces to make decisions? What is our call to action and our message? One way that Earth Economics has chosen to make a persuasive argument is through the use of benefit cost analysis showing the return on investment (ROI) to investing in open spaces. Zac presented 4 case studies:

1. **Setback Levee** in the Upper Puyallup – 40 homes and a levee were damaged by repeated flooding. Instead of trying to further channelize the river, created a setback levee that had an ROI of over \$1 meaning that the return on the investment was more than the initial investment.
2. **Riparian Restoration** in North Lands Weir – Removed a Boeing parking lot covered with impervious surfaces, and restored it to a more natural riparian habitat. The ROI was just over \$1 because of the very high upfront costs, and the inability to value all services.
3. **Aquifer Recharge** in California – This type of work will become even more important moving forward, especially for agricultural areas with wells. Ultimately a very small recharge area was created, although the ROI was \$4.67 for every dollar invested.
4. **Open Space Conservation** in Santa Clara, California – a very large open space was conserved and the ROI was \$20 for each dollar invested.

Discussion

Steve Starlund asked if we can quantify the qualitative experience of these places?

Zac replied that we could, there are several good tools and TPL does a good job of this. Surveys are very expensive, but there other tools, such as mental health benefits. The recent HUD competition is a good example of how qualitative benefits can be considered.

Ikuno Masterson added that we are focusing on the financial aspects because this hasn't been used very often. It is becoming mainstream to talk about how to monetize natural capital (see Washington Post article from Ron that was handed out at the meeting: https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/energy-environment/wp/2016/02/08/scientists-have-come-up-with-a-way-to-put-a-price-on-nature/?postshare=1741455639852758&tid=ss_tw) and bring it into the normal cost-benefit calculations.

Ron Sims noted that one of the reasons he likes the HUD grants is their ability to look beyond the upfront environmental costs, and see the co-benefits. Benefits like crime reduction and higher educational achievements when parks are created in neighborhoods.

Growth in the Central Puget Sound - PSRC

Paul Ingraham then gave a presentation about the growth the Central Puget Sound Region has experienced in recent years. Since 2010, the region grew by more than 63,000 people, that's the equivalent of seven people coming to the region every hour, or the entire population of Tacoma.

The population is expected to reach 4 million by 2017, and IT/Tech is seen as the primary driver of job growth, with aerospace helping us stabilize. Even with the massive growth taking place in the region, if you look at building permits over the past 13 years, the urban growth boundaries are standing out very clearly. 95% of housing has been built within the UGA as opposed to 72% in 1992. In Kitsap, historically, we've seen a lot of rural growth, but this past year, we've seen greater urban growth. Snohomish is experiencing 2.2% population growth (fastest in region), and this is located primarily in urban. King County has almost all growth in urban area and an overall rate of 1.8% growth. Pierce County has half the rate of Snohomish. The demographics of the region are also changing. Minority populations have risen to 34%, and foreign born populations are now 33%.

The major challenges of growth are: congestion, housing prices, and environmental pressures. (You can find the presentation on the PSRC Growth Management Policy Board website at: <http://www.psrc.org/assets/13108/GrowthPresentation.pdf?processed=true>)

Discussion

Gene Duvernoy asked if there has been any analysis on climate refugees?

Paul said that this subject has been discussed, although we still do not know the where, when, or how.

Erica Harris added that PSRC gets their forecast data from the Federal government, so there should be some consideration of this subject by them.

Ron brought up that the President has asked agencies to plan for this, and he will try and track down if they have modeling software that we could look at.

Christie True mentioned that it would great to do sensitivity analysis on this subject ourselves and not wait for federal government.

Nancy Rottle stated that it was great to see that there is less pressure on the rural lands, and further noted that if we don't make great cities, than this pressure

could be restarted. A high quality of life is important. Is PSRC doing any modeling or looking at patterns of how open space factors into this?

Paul replied that this was a presentation focused just on growth. Looking at Vision 2040, at the policy level, we want livable neighborhood centers that incorporate all those amenities. Our role here is to help provide some guidance to housing, design, and open space.

Steve asked if there was data related to the need for more growth management professionals?

Paul will look into it how public services are accounted for in the tally of jobs. There are a lot of cities that are much larger than us, that have managed their growth. Nobody is doing it all right though, so there is no model that we can just copy.

Charlotte Garrido asked if we perhaps are not drilling down far enough on the jobs issue, so we just cannot tell if people are in this industry.

Gene noted that even though most of the growth is concentrated in urban areas, we cannot get complacent because 33,000 acres of rural lands are consumed every year, and this is not sustainable.

Kaleen Cottingham brought up that she is asked everyday down in Olympia when they will stop buying land, and that most of our legislators think there is adequate land reserved now. We need more tools to help convince them and others that this is important, that conservation is a good investment.

Gene Duvernoy of Forterra then presented on the results of a recent survey Forterra conducted to get a feel of how the public in the Central Puget Sound feels about growth. More specifically they wanted to know the right language to use when speaking with the public on this subject, and how we could ultimately stop urban sprawl through rural areas.

They worked with consultants experienced with surveys and ended up reaching 638 residents from representative demographics and geographies. There were five key findings from the survey.

1. The Central Puget Sound Region has a very **positive** public. The respondents rated themselves at a 7.2 out of 10 in terms of quality of life, when the national average is 6.1, and 50% of them think life will get even better. The survey results also display that we need to learn to talk with the public, not at them as 73% of respondents are interested in the region and 62% say they are informed.
2. Further, 80% of the respondents **recognized that growth is coming** and that we must plan and prepare for this growth.
3. There are four central personal priorities of respondents, two positive and two negative. The two positive traits are that people live here because they **love being outdoors** and they **love their communities**. The two things they are most **worried about are traffic and the affordability** of the region.
4. There is a high level of support for the **creation of a regional vision** that focuses on natural land preservation and affordable housing. Respondents want a vision for growth in the region, to make sure we grow responsible, and do not believe that we have one yet,

Forterra Survey

5. **Words matter**, and if we can find strategic hinges that link attributes on the ground to benefits in our personal lives people are more likely to get on board.

This survey shows that there is a conditional social license to grow if we get serious about creating a cohesive vision for that growth.

What is the call to action, how do we start making this change? Forterra is working primarily on farm preservation and creating corridors between urban and rural areas to reduce that divide between rural and urban areas, and pivot away from isolated acts of conservation. Forterra is also spending time in the community. (You can find a link to the survey on their website at: <http://forterra.org/subpage/values-research>.)

Discussion

Zac asked how growth was presented to the respondents in the survey?

Gene will send Zac the questions that were used, although the consulting firm was very careful to talk about growth in terms of development and not just job growth.

Jared Jonson noted that this presentation has been given a few times, and asked how rural areas have responded to the results?

Gene said that rural groups often feel disenfranchised from the economies and culture of the urban areas, especially residents in eastern Washington. If we are going to be sustainable, we need to reknit the rural and urban halves.

Charlotte noted that we often talk about open spaces and urban centers and we do not consider the social link, the network that makes community.

Ikuno mentioned that the presentation brought up a couple of themes that link with the earlier presentations. We need a common vision that links aspects of sustainability and we need to link the columns of funding - government, philanthropy, and private sector capital to implement that vision. It seems to be in PSRC's purview to help spearhead these actions as part of the next VISION 2040/50 update.

Nancy brought up the tension between creating great cities, growth management, and affordability.

Gene added that if we are going to be a sustainable region, we can't shirk that question.

Ron suggested that we cannot have a priority list that says affordability is more important than open spaces. We have to be able to do it all.

Gene countered that the ROSS is not an affordable housing group. While we do need to make sure that our investments go to where the affordable housing is located, the primary concern should be the open space system.

John Owen mentioned that the key to accommodating growth that is still affordable is through greater land use intensity. And to do that in a way that creates the livable environment that Ron talks about will require greater investment in transportation, housing, open space and human infrastructure/resources. That should be our message: Investment in open space is an integral part of comprehensive regionally-based strategy to grow gracefully - and it is a good return on investment.

Steve noted that the last remaining large open spaces are located in rural areas, with political climates least likely to conserve these spaces.

Zac asked how the public has been engaged, especially rural areas to try and gauge public sentiment?

Kaleen said that the rural tax base is the real issue. When lands are conserved they often are removed from the local tax base (or prevented from becoming developed uses that could contribute to the base) and the local legislature neglects to make up for this loss. Residents in rural areas also want to use open spaces for hunting etc. A lot of the opposition would probably disappear if we could find a way to make up with the local tax base gap and provide for more diverse uses of open space.

Final Say

Ron closed the meeting by reminding us that we need to flip our thinking on parks and cities. Parks are not in cities, cities are located in parks and we should plan accordingly. (You will find access to Tim Beatley's writings in the resources section of this webpage: [http://biophiliccities.org/.](http://biophiliccities.org/))



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Attachment A – Attendance (Alphabetical order by last name)

In Person:

- Sue Abbott – National Parks Service
- Josh Baldi – Washington Department of Ecology
- Laurie Benson – Washington Department of Natural Resources
- Amy Brockhaus – Mountains to Sound Greenway
- Zach Christin – Earth Economics
- Kaleen Cottingham – WA Recreation and Conservation Office
- Gene Duvernoy – Forterra
- Charlotte Garrido – Kitsap County
- Erika Harris – Puget Sound Regional Council
- Paul Ingraham – Puget Sound Regional Council
- Jared Jonson – Urban Land Institute
- Paul Kundtz – Trust for Public Lands
- Janet Lee – ROSS Staff
- Ikuno Masterson – ROSS Staff
- John Owen – Makers / ROSS Staff
- Nancy Rottle – Green Futures Research & Design Lab
- Ron Sims (Chair) – Civic Volunteer
- Steve Starlund – Kitsap County
- Sarah Titcomb – ROSS Staff
- Christie True – King County

Over the Phone:

- Ryan Dicks – Pierce County
- Elaine Somers – Environmental Protection Agency