

November 18, 2011 Land Bank Commission Retreat Notes

Attendees:

Facilitator – John Howell; Land Bank Commissioners – Tom Cowan, Amanda Azous, Nancy Greene, Lance Evans, Lisa Wolford, Jim Skoog, Doug Strandberg; Staff – Lincoln Bormann, Tim Clark, Judy Cumming, Ruthie Dougherty, Eliza Habegger, Diane Kinnaman, Doug McCutchen; Public – Charlie Anderson, Eileen Drath, Louise Dustrude, Pam Gross, Tom Reeve, Ed Sutton, Dave Zoeller, Dave Zeretzke.

9:10 a.m. Retreat Convened

Introductions

Discussion of ‘Renew Our Land Bank’ Campaign and Feedback from the Public

Tom Reeve – Several themes: 1) Many comments prefaced with “we love the Land Bank, but...” 2) No clear consequence for voting ‘no’; 3) People want to be heard, but existing outreach by the Land Bank isn’t working; 4) The Land Bank should strive to be “more a part of the community.”

Pam Gross – Lack of feeling of connection to the community as a persistent theme. Open meetings not adequate. Brickworks project [Erickson Historic Preservation and Conservation Easement] highly divisive on San Juan Island.

Dave Zeretzke – ‘Spontaneous’ support lacking. Public support for conservation needs to be rebuilt. Lack of clarity and understanding on the economic benefits of conservation to the community. Need for different type of outreach.

Charlie Anderson – Definitely a sense that people want to focus economic resources on building community assets. Many long term Land Bank supporters voted no, the question is ‘why?’ Land Bank needs to better integrate itself into the ‘fabric’ of the community especially by maintaining and building upon partnerships with other organizations (Economic Development Council, Community Foundation, etc.).

Louise Dustrude – Lopez was much more supportive. Why?

Tom Reeve – Tim Clark (Lopez Preserve Steward) is well connected within the fabric of the community.

Tom Cowan – Support on Orcas was definitely higher in 1999.

Lisa Wolford – Stronger sense among realtors and other groups on Orcas that the Land Bank real estate excise tax (REET) is negatively affecting sales. People feeling that the local economy is out of their control.

Dave Zeretzke – Change voter’s logic and feelings through greater community interaction by Land Bank staff, commissioners and supporters.

Jim Skoog – Hard to overstate the difficulty of current economic climate. People very susceptible to misinformation and not trusting of government. A lot of outreach done (over 80 events in past year), survey on Parks, Trails and Natural Areas. Maybe people have lost sight of the need for conservation at present.

Tom Reeve – People not rejecting conservation, “the Land Bank does important work, but...” Outreach in general is relatively new for the Land Bank. Need to make sure people are heard both through actions and words. Land Bank should ask the community to ‘help us understand where you’re coming from.’

Lance Evans – Need to think about how the program might change knowing that we can only do so much or add so much. Voters checking ‘no’ box much more quickly today.

John Howell – Process of going back to the public is an important piece.

Lisa Wolford – Only comments ever received from the public were about Brickworks and the water system on Lopez [Upright Head Preserve].

Doug Strandberg – Community lacks awareness about what the Land Bank does making it easy to vote ‘no’ in current economic climate. Need to partner with other organizations to build awareness and good will.

Charlie Anderson – Actively make the argument the Land Bank contributes to economic development.

Lincoln Bormann – Clear need in 1990 and 1999 to ‘preserve the character of place.’ Many new residents since then. No compelling sense of need given the current lack of development and real estate sales.

Nancy Greene – Turnover in population definitely has an effect. Also, Turtleback loomed in previous campaigns. No obvious immediate threat to a widely recognized property. Land Bank has tried to adapt to public input – more outright acquisitions for public access, historic preservation, preserving agriculture, but these efforts have attracted criticism.

Eliza Habegger – Community wanting more outreach, but providing more details can simply be confusing. How do we describe ‘what’ we do?

Tim Clark – Land Bank has become an ‘institution’ rather than a movement. Easy for people to criticize institutions.

Eileen Drath – Land Bank mission has remained unchanged, but people attacked it. A lot of people are misinformed.

Amanda Azous – People opposed because they are saying ‘no’ to taxes period. Also believe REET deters real estate sales. People didn’t understand what a ‘no’ vote would mean for the Land Bank. Perception that voting either way held little consequence.

Ruthie Dougherty – Many more organizations competing for support today than in 1999. Other groups may see Land Bank as a competitor for limited funds. If/when REET expires Land Bank needs to be well positioned to steward properties into the future.

Dave Zeretzke – Partnerships should be with broader range of groups, e.g. Bed and Breakfast Association, Tourist Bureau. Land Bank should contact each new buyer personally.

Lisa Wolford – Land Bank should reach out more to owners of property adjacent to Land Bank Preserves.

Jim Skoog – Land Bank has taken on new initiatives within its mandate to cope with current scarcity of funding and satisfy community needs. Need to better explain these changes.

Tom Reeve – New initiatives should help the Land Bank better integrated into the fabric of the community (trails, relationship with County Parks). Land Bank works for the public good without taking sides. Need for ‘active listening’ on new projects.

Ed Sutton – Voted ‘no’ because the 12-year time horizon was too long. Things are changing too fast to lock the REET in for that long. Also seems like there are a lot of great Land Bank properties on Orcas already. What are the other priorities? Do we need more?

Ideas on Changes in Land Bank Programs and Outreach Efforts

Nancy Greene – First step; place a big ad in the papers thanking the community. Put the mandate out there so people can see what we do.

Tom Cowan – Land Bank unsuccessful at getting people to come to public meetings. Possibly establish advisory committees on each island to help solicit input.

Eliza Habegger – Land Bank needs better listening and a greater sense of involvement.

Jim Skoog – Capacity to do more is limited. Land Bank needs to reach out more effectively. Create a ‘Friends of the Land Bank’ organization?

Lance Evans – Need an ‘elevator speech’ to articulate what we do concisely and clearly.

Charlie Anderson – Stop pitching the Land Bank to people. Need to go back to look at the fabric of the community. Have conversations about community needs. Piggyback on existing mechanisms; participate and let it grow.

Pam Gross – Create personal connections to individuals and organizations, e.g., teachers, schools, homeowner’s associations.

Nancy Greene – Commissioners unsure about how much more they can do. Commissioners should be able to speak with authority when projects are presented that may dove-tail with Land Bank mandate.

Lisa Wolford – Land Bank needs to update its communication mechanisms.

John Howell – What do you want to ask people?

Tom Reeve – Write an open letter to the community. “We heard you, but we want to understand.” Invite people to join advisory board.

Dave Zeretzke – Identify 30-50 people in community who others trust and work with them on new ideas.

Lincoln Bormann – Immediate priority to contact these folks and address any lack of understanding or misinformation.

Jim Skoog – Any period of soliciting comments should also communicate what the Land Bank does.

Lisa Wolford – May be wise to wait a few months before re-engaging people.

Charlie Anderson – Need for immediate action. Thank community for renewal. Tell them the Land Bank is going to operate differently based on what was learned in the campaign.

Tom Reeve – 2,000 voters don’t feel heard. How can you reach at least 500?

Charlie Anderson – Identify key people and work with them to redefine or change the Land Bank. Word will spread through them. Participate in the Community Foundation’s Critical Needs Task Forces. Make the Land Bank part of the solution.

Tom Cowan – Possible creation of a neighborhood grant program. Let groups submit proposals for various projects to the Land Bank Commission (need to fit within Land Bank mandate).

Lance Evans – Neighborhood Associations as a potential starting point.

Specific Outreach Methods/Objectives

Lincoln Bormann – Need to establish an endpoint. ‘We’ve heard you and this is what we’re going to do.’

Lance Evans – Identify ways to get a place at the table with other groups where there wasn’t a seat before. Need to engage lessees of Land Bank properties.

Tom Reeve – Listen to dissatisfied people and find a way to resolve their issues to pre-empt a backlash.

Jim Skoog – Neighborhood grants an excellent idea.

Doug McCutchen – Funds will be extremely limited.

John Howell – Develop the kernel of an idea on a grant program and test to see if it has traction in the community.

Ruthie Dougherty – Identify 3 most important things to address and how.

Lisa Wolford – State percentage of REET to be committed to stewardship from 2012 forward.

Amanda Azous – Assign Land Bank liaisons to different groups, e.g., OPAL, Critical Needs Taskforces.

Charlie Anderson – Message should be ‘this is the new Land Bank. Tell us how we can help you where we can!’ Aiming for constructive feedback leading to action.

Amanda Azous – Focus on ‘how the Land Bank may better serve you.’

Proposed Action Plan – Group, led by John Howell: **Short Term**

Overall need for a plan identifying: 1) the audience; 2) how to reach them; 3) what's the message; 4) tailor to each island.

Initial actions:

- Take out 'thank you' ad in December. "Thanks for voting yes, let's continue the conversation."
- Each district to come back with their plan for community outreach prior to next Commission meeting
- Write an open letter to community – 'we want to know what your priorities are.'
- Place second ad stating what the Land Bank is doing in response to public comments.

Longer Term Ideas

Ruthie Dougherty – Need to have a conversation about priorities within the mandate.

Doug McCutchen – Need to make proactive decisions about leasing/agriculture part of the program.

John Howell – Determine appropriate stewardship funding mechanism and amount.

Tom Reeve – 1) Create a 'Build Out' model. People need to know there's still a problem and the program is one way to address it; 2) Make the economic argument. For every \$1 spent on conservation \$5 are realized by the community (tourism, increased property values, fewer infrastructure/services costs); 3) Create a feeling that the Land Bank isn't done. Public desire/need for trails, public access, especially as population grows in the future; 4) Need an on-ongoing media presence/relationship; 5) Demonstrate how good stewardship is done. Separate issue of taxes from stewardship.

Charlie Anderson – Stress the return on people's 'personalized investment,' how having the Land Bank has and will continue to enhance quality of life. Keep focusing on other sources of revenue. REET isn't the only funding source.

Doug Strandberg – Note that other conservation organizations have explicitly calculated the dollar value of conservation, e.g., trout fishing streams near Sun Valley, Idaho.

Wrap up. Tom Cowan

2:40 pm. Meeting Adjourned