



**“Are Conservation Commissions Still Necessary? – The Current Economy, the Nature of Good Growth, and the Future of Municipal Commissions”  
Land, Water and Conservation Summit  
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In this high-involvement workshop, we will consider: a brief overview of the environmental movement, from the turbulent 60s culminating in the iconic earthrise photo to the legislation in the 1970s establishing federal, state, and municipal regulatory and review agencies, to waves of 80s-90s activism, to early 2000's self-critique -- having to do with the very meaning of environmentalism -- to more recent developments in our thinking, e.g. forms of clean energy, eco-design, green building, smart growth, conservation development, social justice and human rights issues, and the design of truly healthy communities.

We will note some patterns of economic development and how they intersect with global concerns. We will consider what concrete steps and new ways of doing business local conservation commissions might take to be ahead of the usual development curve and its pressure in their communities. The idea is to become integral partners in sync with models of optimal growth culminating in a vision that inspires us all.

## **AGENDA**

**Gather, welcome, hand-outs** -- procedure and explanations (10 mins.)

**MAGICAL HISTORY TOUR** and first go-round (23 mins.)

**GLOBAL FUTURE SCENARIOS** and second go-round (23 mins.)

**LOCAL SETTINGS / TRANSFORMATIVE STEPS** and third go-round (23 mins.)

**Inspirations, reflections and feedback...** (10 mins.)

### **“Cliff Notes”**

**The space of the “center,”** focusing on the fertile space of the “in-between,” honoring the creative energy field in our midst, the collaborative process of insight and compassion

**Circle format/methodology:** each person speaks honestly from the heart, or from the mind, one at a time as others listen intently, and when one’s own turn, one can add, contribute, or pass in each separate go-round... this has a powerful and cumulative effect

**Asking “Generative” Questions\*!** – highly dense or nucleus questions – that is, questions that have no right or wrong answer but admit of a plurality of divergent answers, have a diversity of interpretations, and as such depend intimately on our personal perception, involvement, life stories, metaphysical and/or religious beliefs

**Giving the gift of going slowly and mindfully:** beyond brainstorming, usual discussion, and still less argument – the exercise of just opening sensitively and reflectively to each other, listening to one’s deeper intuitive self, which turns out to be not too different from our emerging collective wisdom

**Setting the stage for more creative conversations** for learning and applying this approach generally, with almost all groups in very different settings

**My sense of an objective, my own question is...**given the overall history of the environmental movement, what is the next phase of our specific CC roles/task/mission in the coming imperative of a clean energy world? That is, what does it mean to be ahead of the usual development curve? How do we create and encourage optimal growth? What does this feel like, inwardly and outwardly?

## **MAGICAL HISTORY TOUR OF THE 20<sup>th</sup> / 21<sup>st</sup> CENTURY – WITH HIGHLIGHTS OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENT**

Early 1900s – the preservation of national treasures (J. Muir & T Roosevelt)

1914-1918 – “The Great War” (WW I) and subsequent influenza epidemic

1920s – party time, governmental corruption and wildly inflated financial speculation

1930s – The Great Depression, FDR, public works projects of the CCC

1940s – WW II... wartime production massively revs up American industry

1950s – Cold War and scientific expertise, scientific management of natural “resources”

1960s -- *Silent Spring* and the turbulent “Sixties:” radical social-political-consciousness movements... critique of scientific rationality and industrial civilization... new visions of the planet... iconic Earthrise photo, first Earth Day celebrated, the Whole Earth Catalog

1970s -- the attempt to mitigate widespread industrial pollution -- federal legislation passed, The Clean Air and Water Act, EPA founded; state DEM agencies of regulation, and enforcement; local/municipal conservation commissions mandated and/or established

1980s – governmental “deregulation” of industries side by side with national environmental advocacy organizations like Audubon Society, the Sierra Club, UCS, and The Nature Conservancy – spearheaded by activist/protest groups like Greenpeace

1990s – “innovation” becomes a business mantra; the internet and PC technology; the search for a defining vision for America manifested in the liberal/conservative struggle

Early 2000s -- new “eco-design” ideas converge with the social justice imperative; global climate change acceleration generating population, energy, and global resource concerns

**ROUND ONE: \*CIRCLE QUESTIONS\*! – 2012 -- WHERE ARE WE NOW?.....  
WHAT SHOULD WE BE CONCERNED ABOUT TODAY? HOW WOULD YOU  
DESCRIBE THE KEY PROBLEM OR TENSION WE FACE TODAY?**

## SIX GLOBAL FUTURE SCENARIOS

.....??? What is the world you are preparing for? What will it be like???.....

Keep in mind larger patterns of food, shelter, transport, entertainment, commerce, work, meaning, power, governance, learning/education, technological breakthroughs, the sense of community, religion/spirituality, and global climate conditions...

SCENARIO I -- **catastrophe**, dire events, civic disorder and/or regression to savagery; or the slow, painful decline into environmental degradation ('the long emergency')

potential or appropriate mode of response: disaster/emergency preparedness

SCENARIO II -- political/corporate **monoculture**: absorption/forgetfulness of the masses in ubiquitous commercial spectacles, entertainment and consumption; privileged but gated communities surrounded by a permanent underclass... loss of a wider horizon

mode of response: breakout, guerrilla activity or insurgency, rebellion, turn-away, walk-away

SCENARIO III -- **techno-singularities**: technological transformation(s) leading to literally unimaginable evolutionary effects... differently evolving futures for humanity, e.g. genetic conquest of aging and disease and even bio-death, development of trans-human cyber ("machine") intelligence, development of new virtually unlimited forms of energy and power, expeditions leaving the home planet for other galactic homes ("human cosmic diaspora")

mode of response: devotion to innovation and continuing advanced research

SCENARIO IV -- "**the end of history**:" global equilibrium, the end of periods of wars, disruptions and turbulence (historical/economic suffering) in the world-wide triumph of sure and steady democratic progress (the final success of science, technology, capitalism, and liberal democracy), the attainment of a global plateau of stability with an all but universal level of adequacy, sufficiency, and material comfort

mode of response: faith in the democratic process, of long range and incremental parental patience, fortitude, guidance

SCENARIO V -- **planetary enlightenment**: the earth as a garden or a luminous artwork in the making -- green/clean energy alternatives become mainstream and blossom in a context of wisdom and caring...material infrastructures develop in tandem with ecological/spiritual awareness... a new consciousness upholds the dignity, solidarity and rights of all species and beings in a planetary matrix of continuing evolutionary growth... ‘inner’ development blends, balances and harmonizes ‘outer’ development’... “growth” becomes deeply consonant with respect for (outer) conditions and consistent with the ‘mission’ or sacred calling of the planet as a whole, the re-enchantment of things in an ever-widening compassionate sensitivity, concern, service and stewardship

mode of response: the thoroughgoing, daring and optimistic exercise of the liberating power of our imagination, faith in our ability to create constructively

SCENARIO VI -- **the dramatic universe**, the alternative cosmology of unpredictable pendulum swings, radical uncertainty, existential tension and the continual need for resolution in judgment and decision... we create and complete the cosmos by our choices and by what we cultivate... the world is a “rorschach test” – what you see is what you eventually get... all conditions subject to radically different interpretations (confirming very different worldviews and worldpaths)... the fundamentally creative circumstance and freedom of world-determination... the capacity to cultivate radically distinct and possibly overlapping paths that connect us with our ultimate nature ... we bring into existence and dwell in the worlds we seek or forge unconsciously or with awareness – in this sense our actions are totally/intimately determinative, our presence integral and vital, our input essential...

mode of response: “the courage to be” – the capacity to be in touch with and strongly act in accord with our true nature or spiritual source

SECOND GO-ROUND / CIRCLE QUESTIONS\*!: WHICH SCENARIO DO YOU BELIEVE WILL HAPPEN? WHY? WHICH IS YOUR GUT-FAVORITE, THAT IS, WHICH DO YOU WANT TO SEE HAPPEN? WHAT MIGHT INTERVENE TO MAKE IT A REALITY? WHAT BRIDGES NEED TO BE MADE? WHAT WILD CARDS DO YOU SEE IN THE MIX?

**LOCAL SETTINGS AND FOCAL PRACTICE: SOME GROWTH FRONTS, POTENTIAL AFFILIATIONS AND INTEGRAL PRACTICE** – a variety of concrete steps, specific initiatives, and transformative strategies that roughly correspond to the different levels of citizen participation and personal involvement

**Keep to business as usual** – e.g. maintain municipal conservation commission advisory reviews and occasional local initiatives and projects; continue to use specific CC criteria, guiding documents and best practices, such as site assessments in accord with town comprehensive plan for growth, the notion of a town environmental inventory, green building guidelines, low impact development (“LID”), conservation development and eco-intensive design ideas generally

**Consider the Smithfield Conservation Commission model of review** having a multi-department committee, which includes one member of the Smithfield CC that as a team evaluates the viability of building/development proposals in an informal conference/conversation at an early rough conceptual stage that emphasizes town goals and values

**Amalgamate or absorb the conservation function into the planning function** of the town (the town planner and/or planning board) that will promote conservation development type standards and will routinely incorporate, expedite and promote clean energy development as a matter of course

**Begin to see that local governance must function holistically**, that is that administrators, boards, councils, committees and agencies ( including all services like police, fire/emergency, roads and schools) must not operate in bureaucratic isolation, departments acting like stand alone silos, but realizing municipalities can only get a handle on right growth/optimal development by operating holistically, i.e. in close communication with each other for the benefit of the whole community... i.e., taking the town’s comprehensive plan for growth seriously in every proposal, large or small, with special respect for long range investments of a multi-generational nature

**Develop a Town Comprehensive Green Plan**, as Barrington did – the objective of all municipal buildings and functions as installing clean and renewable energy efficiency systems, and amplifying this initiative to encourage and promote a variety of backyard/basement/studio small experiments of scale to looking at all local/regional patterns, e.g. food and community supported agriculture, viable local transport alternatives, local currencies, new kinds of jobs – ranging from retrofitting and low tech to hosting advanced education and research facilities (like the Oceans Aquarium idea in West Greenwich!), new building, industrial and commercial patterns with greater

synergies, e.g. waste streams become resource/materials streams, etc. Expanding these and kindred ideas in such a way as to show better paths to optimal development that benefits the health, capacities and working/service welfare of whole communities... The word “economy,” *oikonomia* in Greek, originally meant “management of the household.” The only way to get ahead of the usual pattern of invasive and haphazard development is to begin to think about the profound renewal of your town as a community and your community as a whole enterprise in which we all have a stake.

**Start an ongoing series of vision-based and future-oriented local resident “citizen conversations”** in your town (like Narragansett and West Greenwich did) or gather together an ongoing group of concerned citizens (as the Charlestown Citizens Alliance did) that focuses on your distinctive local issues and questions, your distinctive vulnerabilities and assets

**Initiate a visionary journey, a series of statewide campaigns** -- a collaboration with kindred groups and organizations, that commits to a serious sequence of statewide reforms, tackling one pivotal or key issue after another, with the objective of making Rhode Island an exemplary state, from farming and education to culture and entertainment, to an economy that sees work, learning, leisure and service as all integrally blending together in a determined and heightened appreciation for our beautiful environment, insisting on quality of life for every single one of us, and steadily raising our collective level of human potential... an economic and cultural transformation that will make Rhode Island a jewel of a state and place

**Start a “Revolution in Place!”** – that is, by your personal, mindful and compassionate interactions in each of your organizations and groups, your chosen “families” of concern, make HOW we relate to each other, our forms of communication, a form spiritual, political and community renewal, a way of lifting up us all... You can start a revolution where you are breathing, standing, in your own shoes, the shelter of your home and heart that spreads ever outward by your simple actions...a revolution in how we communicate with each other...

THIRD GO-ROUND: CIRCLE QUESTION\*! WHICH CONCRETE STEPS – ARE THEY MUTUALLY EXCLUSIVE?!? – WHICH BROAD APPROACH, WHICH OVERALL STRATEGY IN CONSERVATION WORK APPEALS TO YOU, WHICH DEEPLY CHALLENGES YOUR OWN MINDSET AND HABITS? WHICH ONE ENCOURAGES YOU, WHICH INSPIRES?

## SOME REFERENCES, RESOURCES AND RALLYING POINTS

### Articles (all available online)

Wendell Berry, "Conservation is Good Work" 1992  
Paul Hawken, "Dreams of a Livable Future" 2003  
McDonough and Braungart, "The Extravagant Gesture: Nature, Design, and the Transformation of Human Industry" 2001  
Kareiva, Lalsz Marvier, "A New Conservation Ethic for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century" 2012  
Jon Gertner, "True Innovation" 2012  
Dan Novak, "Beyond Sustainability: The Spectrum of Ecological Design" 2008

### Spring Spadework (Ecology, Culture, Politics, Economics, Spiritual Practice, People)

Ray and Anderson, *The Cultural Creatives*, 2000  
McDonough and Braungart, *Cradle to Cradle*, 2002  
Nordhaus and Shellenberger, *Breakthrough*, 2007  
Paul Hawken, *Blessed Unrest*, 2008  
Peter Russell, *Waking Up in Time*, 1998, 2008  
Guy Dauncey, *After the Crash*, 1988, 1996  
Victoria Castle, *The Trance of Scarcity*, 2007  
ShaktiGawain, *Creating True Prosperity*, 1997  
Riane Eisler, *The Real Wealth of Nations*, 2008  
Natrass and Altomare, *The Natural Step for Business*, 1999  
Thich Nhat Hanh, *Peace Is Every Step*, 1992  
Henepola Guanaratana, *Eight Mindful Steps to Happiness*, 2001  
Ganga White, *Yoga Beyond Belief: Insights to Awaken and Deepen Your Practice*, 2007  
Charlene Spretak, *Relational Reality*, 2011  
Edgar Cahn, *No More Throw-Away People*, 2004  
Peter Block, *Community: The Structure of Belonging*, 2009

### Organizations and Websites

The Providential Gardener ([www.providentialgardener.com](http://www.providentialgardener.com))  
Grow Smart Rhode Island ([www.growsmartri.com](http://www.growsmartri.com))  
Environmental Council of Rhode Island ([www.environmentalcouncilri.org](http://www.environmentalcouncilri.org))  
Rhode Island Association of Conservation Commissions ([www.riacc-online.org](http://www.riacc-online.org))

### Campaigns and Connecting Initiatives (where, with whom, when, why...?)

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**What is missing here, that perhaps only you can find or contribute?!.....???**