

GREATER PHILADELPHIA FUTURES GROUP

DIALOGUE. COLLABORATION. KNOWLEDGE-SHARING.



Scenario Planning to Inform Long-Range Plans

June 16, 2020, 10:00am – 12:00pm

MEETING SUMMARY

Welcome and Introductions

Brett Fusco, Manager of Long-Range Planning at DVRPC, welcomed attendees to the first virtual Futures Group meeting and introduced the guest keynote speaker and other DVRPC staff. There were 76 participants on the webinar.

Keynote Speaker

Robert Goodspeed, PhD, AICP—Assistant Professor of Urban Planning, University of Michigan—recently released his latest book, *Scenario Planning for Cities and Regions: Managing and Envisioning Uncertain Futures*. Dr. Goodspeed offered his perspective on scenario planning as a tool to address the complexity of cities as part of the collaborative and long-range planning processes. Four major types of complexity include: artefactual (things produced by humans), systems, biological, and ecological. The consequences of the complexity are imperfect knowledge of what the city is, imperfect knowledge of what will happen if we intervene, and imperfect knowledge of an aspirational vision for the future. Cities (and regions) are complex systems, which means it is difficult to address problems in isolation, there are no 'solutions' only goals we may pursue and which may or may not align, and anything is possible.

Limitations of Traditional Planning Tools

	Internal Focus (Mutual Understanding)	External Focus (Trends & Systems)
Single Vision	Visioning <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Can only have one vision, but whose?● Data?● Plausible?	Forecasting <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Quantitative trends are difficult to predict; so are technological and economic trends.
Incorporates Multiple Perspectives	Consensus Building <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Focus is in the present.● Whose job is it to think about the future?	Strategic Planning <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Focus on strategic issues; understanding how strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats may evolve over time; strategies.

Connecting People, Places & Prosperity in Greater Philadelphia

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Traditional planning tools have limitations in their ability to deal with complexity. Collaborative planning theory provides ideas for planning within this complex system. One of which is the use of scenario planning, which can replicate the benefits of traditional planning tools, while overcoming some of the concerns about their use:

- Visioning—aspirational visions, charrettes.
- Forecasting—plausibility, trend analysis.
- Strategic Planning—focus on strategic issues; understanding how strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats may evolve over time; strategies.
- Consensus Building—stakeholder engagement, participation.

Scenarios can be used for visioning, informing decisions, and exploring trends, forces, and uncertainties. Models can be a useful tool for exploring alternative futures, but they have limitations. They are complex and can add to uncertainty; and many have too much historical data to be useful for really exploring how the future could be really different from the present

Dr. Goodspeed further offered some tools for evaluating scenarios and long-range plans, noted some of the other areas his book covers (collaborative planning, qualities of good scenarios, evidence for scenario planning effectiveness, and use of scenarios to imagine more transformative futures) and encouraged attendees to participate in the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy's Consortium for Scenario Planning.

Questions & Answers

Q: Has the practice of scenario planning changed how you think about the future?

A: I wouldn't say it has changed my mental model significantly. However, the study of scenario planning has changed my perspective and understanding of how others view the future. For example, Afrofuturist work has presented some really challenging and intriguing notions to what the future can and should be.

Q: How can we assure that planning acknowledges and incorporates the many past inequities—such as redlining, past decisions on placement of disamenities—that constrain planning decisions?

A: Although in general I don't think practitioners have done this nearly enough, one thing that has moved in this direction I mention in the book is the practice of "opportunity mapping" pioneered by the Kirwan Institute at OSU which can be used to open up discussions about current and past inequity.

Q: What if issues of inequity clash with current thinking in public health? For example, current public health pushes for fewer cars on the street while older Blacks suffer disproportionately from disabilities and need automobiles to avoid becoming isolated.

A: I think there are often trade-offs in policy making like this, which underscores the importance of consulting with different communities. I don't have any special insight into this issue. However, more broadly, scenario planning can help address this by highlighting these sort of trade-offs during the scenario-building process.

Q: What's the real, practical impact of Scenario Planning? How can this actual[ly] inform things like the selection of projects on a regional TIP or LRP? Is there a danger that less of a 'vision' focus simply reinforces the status quo as a default?

A: The Indianapolis MPO case is in this working paper: <https://www.lincolinst.edu/publications/working-papers/scenario-planning-smaller-places>.

Q: What happens when things are upended quickly as in the pandemic? Thinking about public transportation and people potentially reverting to single passenger auto travel because of contagion concerns.

A: I think this one is still unfolding, as there is newer evidence that with certain measures transit may be safer than some fear. I do think the pandemic has also helped re-frame the value of transit as providing critical rides, such as for essential workers or for some individuals to reach healthcare and social services, so in a way there has been a shift away from a narrow focus on ridership. For longer term investments, the conversation should be about what infrastructure is needed for the long term for multiple goals, not only public health but also sustainability, equity, etc.

Q: I am concerned about the effects and influence of the pandemic on future plans and infrastructure investments. We spent the 90s and early 2000s talking about "bending the trends" to develop a more center-based planning concept to counter the negative impacts of sprawl. This pattern and its benefits have been more widely accepted in the last decade. Now with the recent pandemic the media and surveys of local residents have called for decentralization, using transit less and a return to single occupant auto travel.

A: I think a scenario logic can be useful by acknowledging impulses like this as a starting point for a discussion. Then you could point out that it seems likely a treatment may be developed or the pandemic will ease in the next year or so -- after which we need to decide what type of transportation we need. Even if you want to focus on public health, arguably greater biking and walking may be healthier than driving, so perhaps those modes should be emphasized. Scenarios may highlight the need for multi-modal networks, but allow for exploring different options.

Connections 2050 Long-Range Plan Visioning Workshop

Brett Fusco, DVRPC, facilitated a visioning exercise as part of the next step in updating the Connections 2050 Long-Range Plan for Greater Philadelphia. The 30-minute conversation asked attendees a series of visioning questions to ask about participants values, concerns, and goals for the region. This exercise is one of many happening throughout the spring and summer of 2020 with a diverse set of stakeholders and general public and will help to craft the Vision included in the 2050 Plan.

While DVRPC's other long-range plan visioning outreach has focused solely on the future forces behind the forthcoming Dispatches from Alternate Futures scenarios to inform thinking about the aspirational vision for the future, this presentation detailed each of the four scenarios that the Futures Working Group, a subset of the Futures Group, helped to develop.

Dispatches from Alternate Futures: Exploratory Scenarios for Greater Philadelphia

Jackie Davis, DVRPC, presented a designed draft of the Dispatches from Alternate Futures scenario planning report; a result of DVRPC's second exploratory scenario planning exercise with the Futures Working Group in the spring of 2019. The draft report is in internal review and will be available in digital form before the next Futures Group meeting