September 11, 2022

TrashTalk Workgroup: Future Deleted

[This was a public comment at the first Trash Talk Workgroup* meeting]
*aka "Benton County Talks Trash"

Gee, I'm old enough to remember back when this workgroup was going to explore *the future* of solid waste management in Benton County. *"The future of solid waste disposal, including the landfill"* is what the initial charter said. But looking at what tasks have been set before the Workgroup and how the facilitator proposes to schedule its time, boy those days seem to be long gone.

Seems to me that any discussion of the county's options for the *future* of solid waste management have been surgically removed from the agenda. You can see this yourself by taking the Common Understandings document prepared by the county and doing a simple search on it: *search for the word "future."* Nothing comes up, beyond terms like "future expansion" and "future litigation." Nothing forward-looking at all. Nothing to even suggest that landfilling has its problems and that alternatives are available.

Landfilling is *not* the future of solid waste management. Landfilling is a way to *avoid* the future of solid waste management. It's a way to kick the trash can down the road, to avoid thinking about it in a new way. And it's a dead end. It's obsolete technology. We don't heat our homes with coal anymore and neither should we be landfilling our garbage.

Workgroup members: look at the agenda, look at the Common Understandings document. They're all about the past. Nothing about the future. No vision, no values, no sensemaking, nothing. *Don't accept this.*

I imagine you've also seen that this Common Understandings document has very few "commonly understood" things in it. It's so *uncommon* as to be pretty much impenetrable. It's full of legal minutiae.

In particular it has nothing helpful in it when the Workgroup gets to Task C, the Sustainable Materials Management Plan. And to the Plan's purpose, which is "to protect the health, safety and welfare of the people of Benton County" – which is a *very different charge* than navigating the legalities of land uses such as landfills. Something can be legal but still very unhealthy.

So, back to the main point: what has happened to the original goal of this endeavor, which was to explore *the future of* solid waste management in Benton County? Why have *possible futures beside landfilling* and *beyond landfilling* been left out of this Workgroup's purview? As Mark Yeager pointed out in his testimony, these visions are absolutely vital if we are to move in the right direction.

I heard many Workgroup members say they're here precisely to explore these hopeful futures. I hope that you *speak up*, and insist that "future" and "common understandings about our solid waste future" be reinstated as a top-line goal of this Workgroup. You have that power.

I'm here to answer questions live or in the chat. Thanks ~

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