

Discovering Your Neighbor's Dreams

How You Can Help to Make a New Idea Come True

BY LIZ SOSA



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I have the privilege (or curse) of dreaming every night and remembering nearly all of these dreams the next morning. I wonder if my brain uses dreams to sort through the chaos of my life, or maybe it's teasing me by bringing my inner ideas to the surface, nudging me to bring them to fruition.

We all dream. Some dream at night, others daydream, and still others dream more publicly (thank you Dr. King!).

In Public Square Communities, we are continually discovering just how powerful it can be to invite people to share their dreams for the community they love.

During the first phase of the Public Square process, our staff interviews each individual on the local steering committee. In turn, each steering member interviews three residents. But there's a catch: these must be people they do not know well. We call this phase "mobilizing" because these dream-sharing conversations energize people in surprising ways.

What if you and I were sitting together at this very moment and I asked:

- ▶ When do you feel most connected to your community?
- ▶ When is this community at its best in helping youth?
- ▶ Give me an example of citizens working together to do something wonderful for your community.
- ▶ Who are your bridge-builders: people who cross boundaries to get things done?
- ▶ What do you hope can happen in the next 10 years in your community?

And what if you, in turn, spent an hour with a neighbor (not a close one, but one you are curious about) asking these same ques-

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tions? Guaranteed, this would not be a boring conversation!

We take a healthy risk by opening up this particular stream of communication. In hearing and sharing another's dream, will some of the weight of that dream transfer to my shoulders? Can I consider joining my neighbor and making this dream come true?

In Liberal, the steering committee is just now at this Mobilizing stage. Each has interviewed individuals from different sectors, with different lifestyles, and from various cultural and religious backgrounds.

The outcome has been remarkable and profound.

The interviews energized and motivated the committee members. To truly listen to the dreams of their civic neighbors was a first for many. One member returned exclaiming, "I just didn't know... I had never really listened!" Former mayor Jack Cooley reflected how "Interviewing is a way of showing others that their opinion has a value. It is a positive conversation with a focus on the assets that make the community OUR community."

As a group, the steering committee learned that, across the boundaries of race and language and politics and religion, most people have very similar dreams for the future of their community.

Not just in Liberal, but in your and my town, too. By listening to our neighbors' dreams, we re-affirm our own. And with that action, we take a bigger step than we may realize toward mobilizing ourselves to achieve them. **KCL**

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