

**From:** [Ken Eklund](#)  
**To:** [Benton County Talks Trash](#)  
**Subject:** Testimony: Imagining futures with a futurethinking workshop  
**Date:** Thursday, September 8, 2022 7:32:03 PM  
**Attachments:** [TTWG-futuresworkshop.pdf](#)  
[writerguy-cube2.png](#)

---

**CAUTION:** This email originated from outside of the organization. Do not click links or open attachments unless you recognize the sender and know the content is safe.

Dear Workgroup:

I'm attaching here a PDF document relevant to the discussions about the future of solid waste management in Benton County. It should be distributed to the Workgroup members for their consideration and included in the next meeting packet. Thank you!

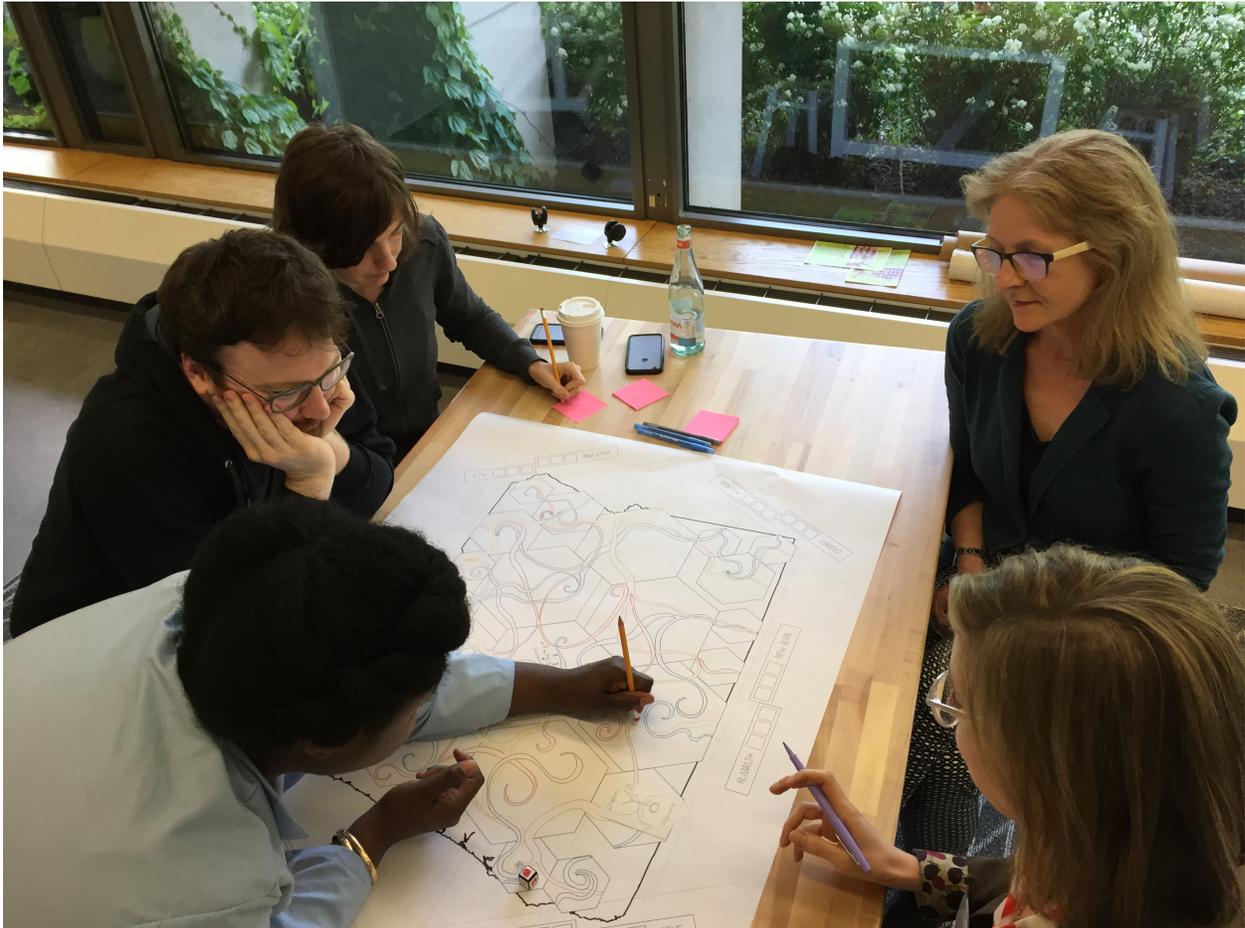


Ken Eklund, writerguy

Creator of  
*World Without Oil*  
*Ed Zed Omega*  
*FutureCoast*  
and other storymaking games

Dear Members of the Sustainable Materials Management Workgroup:

As you refine and prioritize the goals and agendas of the Workgroup, I'm recommending you include a futures workshop in your timeline. By "futures workshop" I mean a session or sessions in which a specialist in collaborative futurethinking helps the Workgroup visualize the alternate futures ahead for the county.



Workshop on Oregon Futures, University of Chicago

It's hard for people to think about the future: it seems so unknown, so vague. It's no wonder that, without guidance, people stick to the shallows close to the present and avoid the deeper waters of 5, 10, 20 years out. Futures workshops tackle this problem head-on: they use synthesis, sensemaking, creativity, and visualization techniques to create plausible stories about possible futures, grounded in present-day facts. Their goal is to evoke narratives that resonate with the present-day situation and inspire collaboration that builds toward a future aligned with shared values.

I'm familiar with futures workshops – they are adjacent to / overlap my own future work – and it's apparent to me that they are an excellent fit with what the Workgroup has been asked to accomplish. Establishing a platform of shared understandings about the sustainability of the region's solid waste future, and voicing the values that citizens hold about their communities – these goals require us to step up to the next level in how we think about the common path forward.

Many groups offer futures workshops – here are two that I know best:

ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY is noted worldwide for its focus on futures studies. I was Resident Artist at the School for the Future of Innovation in Society in 2017-8. Contact: professor Lauren Keeler at SFIS, who specializes in foresight methods for complex governance challenges in sustainability: [lauren.withycombe@asu.edu](mailto:lauren.withycombe@asu.edu)

INSTITUTE FOR THE FUTURE, a non-profit headquartered in Palo Alto, CA, “the world’s leading foresight education and futures organization.” They offer custom futures workshops and already have wide-ranging research on national and global issues including solid waste. Contact: start with John Clamme, [jclamme@iftf.org](mailto:jclamme@iftf.org)

There are other providers as well. I’ve already emailed the facilitator, Darren Nichols and the County Commissioners about this idea.

If I had to pick a word to sum up what a futures workshop can contribute to the process, that word would be *imagination*. We know there are better ideas / better plans / better worlds out there – we just haven’t imagined how to get there. To ever get beyond the false binary of big vs. bigger landfill, imagination is the first step.

I’m happy to answer any questions or provide more information or, just chat.

Best wishes for the future,

Ken Eklund

Member, Solid Waste Advisory Council  
Member, Disposal Site Advisory Committee  
Benton County resident