

## **Perfection vs. Good**

*By Dave Earling*

Most of us have encountered the phrase "perfection is the enemy of good". As I later found out, the phrase "perfect is the enemy of good" is attributed to Voltaire. None-the-less I first encountered the phrase years ago in a meeting with Senator Slade Gorton.

Senator Gorton is one of the wisest and most perceptive people I have ever known. He used the phrase in a discussion regarding prioritizing projects leading to a regional vote for Sound Transit. At the time many leaders, while wanting to move toward a regional vote to continue and grow the project, were arguing for their favorite piece of the puzzle as though it were the most important piece for the project's success. They all knew their viewpoint was the only right answer and there was little backing down! Period!

All of us in the room understood there was no way to fund all of the pieces and yet the point, counterpoint went on far too long. Finally, the wise man sitting at the table made some brief comments, and ended by challenging us with "perfection is the enemy of good".

There! The answer was given to us in very few words.....you need to compromise. The message was clear, to the point and needed. While over the coming weeks negotiations went on, there was compromise, a package was assembled, a vote was taken and approved and Sound Transit moved forward.

Too often we go into important decision making processes with our minds already made up. We see this in business when we negotiate contracts, in our personal, family changing, decisions such as moving to a new city or changing jobs, and of course in politics, whether Federal, state or local.

Negotiation has unfortunately become a fading, or in some cases lost, art form. At the Federal level we log jam on the budget, immigration reform, who's right or who's wrong, we finger point and, all too often, simply position our parties or individuals for the next election. What about us folks back home?

We have been locked in this kind of stand-off at the local level also. Sunset Walk-Way, yes or no? Harbor Square, yes or no? What should we do at Westgate? Change it or just leave it the same? We need to aspire to solving problems, to work together, to find agreement.

Another more recent reflection comes from Carol Sanford and a presentation she gave at the Edmonds Chamber of Commerce Luncheon. Ms. Sanford if you don't know is an internationally known consultant and writer who happens to live in Edmonds. She and the group she works with come into communities to assist them in developing a culture of finding common ground, working together and agreement.

She is also a dynamic and persuasive speaker. Her particular presentation was focused on four different levels of communities working and attempting to function together. The four categories she generally finds communities in are identified as; Fragmented, Degenerative, Generative and Regenerative. Fragmented and Degenerative were riddled with descriptors unbecoming to a community and not where I believe Edmonds citizens see themselves.

Generative and Regenerative are laced with descriptors and phrases such as: Deliberative dialog for development of full understanding and respect, e.g. talking slow so we can hear one another, knowing everyone has something that will help; Building the next era on successes of previous and learning from shortfalls, e.g. knowing that it all happens in phases on the way to something else – that is why Slade's comments were able to change the Sound Transit discussion; Capability building is key, e.g. we need to agree on a shared framework to talk and then talk, not start first; and the biggest one, have a shared idea of what is unique about a place and use it to guide changes and growth. It not only makes a community stronger but builds a better set of neighbors. The greatest cities have a unique identity and people come to that city because of it. Using it as a guide is inspiring and unifying.

Her message: build relationships, find common ground, articulate needs clearly and think to the future on behalf of current and future generations. It is a message that resonates with me and which I believe resonates with the citizens of Edmonds,

Coupling her thoughts and those of Slade Gorton from so many years ago with the phrase "perfection is the enemy of good" sends a simple message to rally around and build our future. Thanks to Carol and Slade.