

Integrated Vision of Prescott's Future

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Description

Prescott as a center for creativity. Creativity in arts, knowledge industries, entrepreneurship, and culture. Continuing on Prescott's national image of having history, culture, and a strong base of artists and the creative, using that base to further attract the innovators, the think-tanks, the technology researchers, the conferences of creative and intellectual industries, the entrepreneurs and the industry and culture they bring with them. It is a way to have a more solid economic base than tourism or growth-for-growth-sake, yet preserve our culture and desirable way of life.

Preserving Prescott

It is not a radical change of Prescott, rather it is the best way to preserve our past yet thrive into the future in ways that we, ourselves, will like. Ranching, for instance, is no longer practical, but the history, culture, and art of the ranching past are a gem to preserve. They can be part of strong way to approach the future.

Specifics

Specifically what it involves overlaps into arts, culture, and industry.

In arts, we already have a sizable base of widely recognized artists, some nationally recognized in art, pottery, writing, and music. These people in turn know that there are plenty of artists around the country who enjoy coming to Prescott. When local arts groups have tried to reach out nationally they have had no problem getting national artists to come here and not only share their art, but teach and connect with others in their fields.

With the right support we have attracted Itzhak Perlman, and the Moscow symphony whose featured violinist gave an advanced class before the performance. We have our own Tsunami on the Square which attracts the best physical performers from around the country, and the Hassayampa writers' institute which gathers notable writers nationwide. With more emphasis on making these connections we can easily make this a steady stream, create small institutes in various arts that host these events and have regular classes and presentations, and have some artists make this their base. When we attract big names in art or performance we can go for the creators. Not the singer of songs but the song writers. Not the actor but the playwright doing a reading. Not the artistic agent selling paintings but the painter. And when we arrange their visit we try to arrange not just performing or

selling, but staying to teach and participate. Many of them love this. It can become known that you don't come to Prescott just to perform, you come to share, to participate, and to add to the creativity.

The cultural sphere overlaps with arts and industry. Our history -- the South West, ranching, and Native American culture -- are embedded in our cultural expressions such as the Phippen and Smoki museums, Whiskey row, the cowboy poets, and the rodeo. We should play on that strength, not in a cheap touristy way, but in ways that make our area attract those same kind of independent souls who made the past. We have some national awareness of Prescott, the desirable location, the history and artistic base of culture. Enough that with a little effort we could become one of the national hubs for conferences and get-togethers of those on the leading edge of various arts, social, political and technological fields.

There are a handful of locations that become regular meeting places for these groups. Such as Wolftrap in Virginia for exceptional performances and workshops of performers, like Asilomar in California for meetings of all sorts of leading edge groups, and like Reykjavik Iceland for diplomats and politicians. The groups that go to these conferences are everything from the think-tanks in social, political, and economic fields from all points on the political spectrum, to the scientific and technical research groups, to the artist workshops. These are not "industry conferences" where they show off their wares and need buildings the size of football fields for booths. These are the intellectual industry players getting together to stay up-to-date and cross-pollinate ideas. They look for someplace that is desirable and has some culture they want to partake of during their stay. Like Prescott. Prescott with its culture, beauty, character, colleges, the beginnings of a national awareness, is primed to take its place nationally.

The ideal situation that would serve this purpose is something similar to some of the church camps we have around town. A sort of campus in the woods. Imagine a location within Prescott, in the woods or some pleasant natural setting, where there would be a large meeting hall, communal dining and socializing areas, and cabins on the grounds. They go to the meeting hall to hear presentations. They go to the communal dining hall to eat, meet, network, hang out and talk. They stay in cabins right on the grounds so they can continue to meet and talk and wander the grounds as late into the evening as they want, and be ready the next day to continue the presentations. This is exactly the kind of setting that becomes popular for conferences of associations of scientists, economists, educators, management consultants, doctors, researchers, technologists and others. And of course while they're there a pitch is made for them to take a dinner at restaurants in town, to stay over the weekend and visit the galleries, the events, hang out on Whiskey Row, and get to know Prescott.

Prescott is also primed for all the offshoots of being such a cultural and intellectual hub. Those who visit and find enough culture and creativity going on here and want to stay will set roots here. These are not people who come hoping to find a job and that the area will support them. These are independent people bringing something with them, bringing their businesses or creating new ones, mostly with clients and connections outside the area, bringing the money in. With these people doesn't just come "jobs" but clean, innovative businesses with futures. With them comes good jobs in technological industry and other intellectual property businesses, production of multi-media content, artists' foundries, distribution of artistic media, support of various institutes and think-tanks, etc.

And with a strong base of innovators, technologists, and culture it will be much easier to attract the other clean energy and technology industries that a thousand other towns are competing to get.

Regional & Local Roles

There are both regional and local aspects. Many aspects of planning require regional thinking, like resource planning. However each local area has its own role to play that compliment one another. Chino Valley, Paulden, and Dewey-Humboldt will likely want to keep their rural flavor. Prescott

Valley is doing a great job of becoming a lively, modern feeling city, which is an important role for the area. Prescott has the history and cultural tradition. This vision is about Prescott. Prescott Valley has done a lot to define itself and move that direction. Other communities need their own integrated vision. If each achieves that the area is enhanced.

Integrate all aspects: economy, culture, transportation, planning, etc.

The 2050 Envisioning project tried to imagine what would be desirable for Prescott in a variety of areas, economy, resource usage, arts, transportation, etc. Trying to pursue desirable goals individually would be very difficult. If there is an integrated vision that connects all the pieces together, that requires all those pieces, and acts as the engine to move them forward, then a range of desirable goals are much more likely to be met.

The idea of Prescott as a creative center requires all those pieces, and requires for them to be planned together. The economic planning thrust would need to focus on promoting this creative center. The retail area around downtown would need to be encouraged to expand in ways compatible with that goal. The arts are naturally an integral part. Transportation plans would be needed to keep downtown from being a traffic jam and to make getting around town convenient for both citizens and visitors. New neighborhoods would need to be just that, desirable neighborhoods, rather than some developments that look like parking lots for houses. All of these pieces are needed to make it happen, and as it begins to happen it pulls all these pieces along.

With a strong local economy and strong local community other non-profits and community support organizations will find it easier to gain support. Social services will face less demand than they would otherwise.

Culturally inclusive

This vision is inclusive of all types of people of Prescott. Cowboy poets and bohemian poets; jazz, blues, genuine folk & country, and symphony. The poetry, songs and art of ranching life; the poetry, songs and art of the diverse independent spirits that the South West, and Prescott in particular, have attracted. Progressive groups would be at home in a town of a lot of independent souls and such forward thinking organizations as ECOSA and Prescott College, and conservative think tanks would be at home in a city with a cowboy past and where Barry Goldwater and John McCain started their campaigns.

Local involvement and connectedness of the community

Part of the danger of unplanned growth is that all the new-comers have little connection with the culture of the existing citizens. Part of the appeal of Prescott is the strength of its community, that there is a great deal of connection between people and many participate civically. Part of the advantage of this integrated vision is that it involves citizens. Part of the idea of visiting artists giving classes, of events like the Hassayampa writers' institute where national writers and local writers can mingle, of having extensive opportunities for locals to join on-going workshops and classes, to both volunteer and get jobs as docents, support staff for events and the like. It's part of the idea of promoting a culturally desirable town, from the farmer's market to the square to the local clubs and venues, so the very places the visitors want to come to are the places the residents want to be. It strengthens the local community and draws in the new comers. Which brings us to who we are attracting.

Who we attract

Who we attract is important. It is important but almost never considered. If Prescott were to somehow just create a lot of jobs, that would certainly be good, and the people it would attract would

be welcome, but they would be the same people who would otherwise have gone to Phoenix for work. People who come hoping the area can support them. Being as Prescott *has* character it has to mean that the *people* of Prescott tend to have character, and we want to continue to attract those people, even while all are welcome. It is the people who are the independent, make-their-own-way types, who value a little culture and character over the safety of the Phoenix job market who will be the anchors of the culture and the economy. If we become a creative center we will attract more people who come *because* of the culture, because they want to be a part of it. They will integrate into the existing community more, and bring more to it, and eventually, along with our children if we can give them reason to stay here, become the next standard bearers for the culture.

Not exclusive of other business

The emphasis on creative and technological industry does not exclude anything else. Anyone can do any kind of venture or business they want. The creative-center focus gives us a base on which other things can happen.

Minimizing government restrictions

Little of this requires government restriction or specific planning. There would be some, but it can be minimized. We would not want a business to tear down a downtown building and put up golden arches. And if, hypothetically, Mile High school decided to move and the city ended up with that property the city might put in a street with ample sidewalks and old fashioned street lamps and zone it for offices and retail, to encourage the “square effect” to expand there. Some planning would make sense. But for the most part government would do best to endorse the creative center idea as the desirable goal, and create conditions conducive to it, and let it grow. Rather than nailing down a detailed plan and dictating from the top, it would be better to create fertile soil and let individual groups and businesses grow it from the ground up.

Maximizing government support for the dollar

Government would not need to be the primary source of funding. To a large extent this does not require funds beyond what would naturally happen anyway. Much of this is just growth and change that would otherwise occur randomly, but instead we grow and change with a clear goal in mind. What funding is needed would come largely from the normal process of businesses taking part in a growing segment of the economy, from non-profits pursuing related projects and seeking development funds from around the country, and from the people we attract who bring their ventures or start them here.

For city government, endorsing and promoting the city image would be primary. Acting as the official connection for some projects even when it isn't the city footing the bill. If we invite a few select groups to try our city for their conference for little or no cost, the city might act as the contact even if the cost is largely offset by a consortium of business and others that would benefit in the long run. The city can also try to bring in federal money.

There are considerable amounts of grant money for arts, culture, and community development available nationwide to those organizations that can show the substantialness to make good use of the money. A lot of funding can be generated in this way if groups in the city become proficient at grant seeking. The city can support sound organizations in their grant seeking by, offering advice from their own grant writers, providing letters praising the grant project and what it can do for the city, endorsing the history of whichever organization is seeking the grant, and showing support for the project in less expensive ways such as providing meeting space for organizational meetings, offering free publicity on city web sites and publications, etc.

The city can facilitate the creative people of the community in working on ways to promote the

goals in creative and less expensive ways. Put together brain-storming sessions, support small trial efforts at novel promotional ideas, etc.

The need for economic substance

Prescott is a desirable place but doesn't have any other core economic stake. It is not in or next to a big city, not on a major waterway, not at a major geographic or transportation hub, not a major producer of crops, and mining is not as significant as it used to be. While physically desirable, it does not have one spectacular feature like towns that are on a gorgeous piece of coastline or high in the most beautiful Rockies or by a major recreational body of water or a big ski resort. With no major economic stake, less than 50 years ago, with ranching and farming dwindling, Prescott's growth was almost stagnant. This partly explains the mindset of some long-timers to want to do everything to promote growth. At one time that approach was needed, and, much to their credit, they succeeded.

Now, though, what was appropriate becomes a problem of unstable, circular growth. The area is desirable so people come, need to make a living, a great deal of the economy is (or was) real-estate and growth, but all that growth tends to wash out the character that made the area desirable. Our economy naturally steered many people into those fields, but then they are dependent on the boom continuing. That's a fragile, self-fulfilling cycle, especially susceptible to the inevitable bust. If growth stops, suddenly a large chunk of the people are without a way to make a living. What's needed is a substantive stake for us to hang our economy on so growth is just a side industry. Some core industry that sticks to the adage to "do what you're best at" so we're not dependent on our own growth, which is a precarious way to survive.

We could become a tourist area but that is really an unpleasant model. If a town is on a tropical island or by a ski resort it can hardly help being a tourist town. If it has some lesser claim to draw tourists and kind of forces itself to be a tourist town it has an undesirable result. A downtown full of shops and stores geared to tourists that don't hold much interest for locals. If it's successful, a downtown that is overrun with tourists. The locals avoid it. The town's heritage is reduced to t-shirts and tacky mementos, the jobs are generally low wage, and the whole economy is especially susceptible to economic downturns. It may end up attracting tourist but discourage people to actually move in.

We could just view ourselves as similar to other cities our size and try to draw miscellaneous manufacturing jobs and such. But that doesn't give us much grounds for competing with a thousand other cities, except maybe a little edge over some on desirability. We would basically be in a bidding war to attract those industries. And it gives us no hold on those industries, no reason why a decade later they shouldn't decide some other place has a cheaper workforce or is closer to resources.

On the other hand if we focus on what we have that is truly unusual, what is ours, what few others can compete with us on, then we can have something of real substance to base our economy on. Then we don't have to sell our cultural soul to tourists, or be dependent on feeding on our own growth.

Are there other plans?

Are there other viable visions? Having tourism as a primary focus is, as noted, not a good plan. Going forward with no particular plan does not give as desirable a result, and does little to ensure that what growth does happen, happens in a way that best preserves what we like about Prescott. We could focus on attracting high tech industry, but, again, just going after that does nothing toward preserving the character of Prescott we want. And having a desirable culture and a pool of talented people is part of how we would get the industry here in the first place. So we want to move forward in a way that more than just helps what is unique about Prescott to survive, but to thrive in desirable ways, and go on to it's own next chapter of interesting history. No other picture of a future Prescott seems to do that.

Is it viable?

Ask the people who can give valuable input if they agree. Ask the architects, the college leaders, etc. if they think Prescott could attract, on a national scale, the creative people, those in the knowledge industries, the think tanks, the independent innovators, the related entrepreneurs, to live and operate out of Prescott, and to use it for their conferences and seminars. Ask the established cultural and artistic workers. Eventually all of Prescott should be asked, but to initially evaluate whether this vision is viable, get the input of everyone able to offer informed input. Ask the person who retired here from a think tank, the grammy nominated musician, the nationally recognized author, the people who retired here out of related, national and international-scale careers.

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Miscellaneous Additional Input

Supports local businesses

Attracting people who come for the culture will support local businesses. These people create markets for goods and services. They will encourage a market for everything from more good quality restaurants to various specialty shops. They will be more likely to want to frequent the small local shops than the big chains, keeping more of the profits local, creating more opportunities for local entrepreneurs. Since they come *because* of the culture they will want to participate economically in the culture. In addition to frequenting the small local stores they will want to start their own.

People who just have a "get by" job and want to shop at the lowest cost buy in national chains and the money goes to corporate headquarters in Poughkeepsie or wherever, and to the shareholders around the globe. When people want to be part of the local culture they will be willing to pay a little more for their goods in stores where the owners are here, the investors are local investors, the money goes into local banks, gets spent locally, builds things locally, goes to support local non-profits. These people want to stop by the Worm or Old Sage bookstores to talk to the long time owners or personnel about that book they're interested in, they want to go to the local restaurant or pub, they want to get their hunting rifles from the local shop owner who knows them. Even their cell phone, they could order online but there's that local shop where the guy has been there for years and knows what's a good deal. These people want to participate in the local retail culture and that keeps money here.

Ways we are ready

Prescott is already known as one of the best places in the country to move to.

It attracts a lot of very wealthy people. We want it to be affordable but having that money in town doesn't hurt. A creative identity will encourage that attraction to continue while at the same time providing a way for some not-so-high-income people to make a living.

The skills of the people who retire here are impressive, and some of them would like to put their skills to use.

We already have pieces of national reputation in knowledge work. Prescott College is nationally and even inter-nationally recognized as a leading light in environmental studies and some of the very "green" skills that will be needed in the developing economy. Embry-Riddle is a national top-class engineering school. Smaller outfits include ECOSA which was the first school of sustainable design.

The Yavapai College performance hall has exceptional sound. It also has great comfort and simple class. If it's good enough for Itzhak Perlman and the Moscow Symphony then let's bring the rest of the world here.

Downtown Prescott is not yet spoiled, not overrun with national chains, no MacDonald's on the square, yet. Prescott, in terms of physical settings, culture, history, ground work already laid for it's reputation, the creative and independent people already here, the colleges, in all these ways it is so primed for this role that with a modest amount of effort it could grow right into it. But its potential seems to be little appreciated, probably because it is too much right under our own nose.

Not seeing our own potential

Prescott is rather like a high school graduate with some amazing potential. A graduate who simply has no

sense of himself and has no idea he is exceptional and is therefore contemplating getting an ordinary business degree and looking for a middle-management job. It would be a waste. Like the student who could be a next great physicist but only thinks he's a little good at numbers and should maybe go into accounting. If we see our own potential, and sell others on it, they will come and find there is substance to it and some will want to be part of it. Many artists and performers will be glad to have it as part of their circuit.

Integration

The integrated vision requires all aspects of planning to be coordinated. If economic development is not integrated it could go after what might seem easiest, promoting a lot of tourism. If allowances aren't made for substantial transportation planning then downtown might become unpleasant to get around in, or other commercial/retail centers might not thrive. If planning is not focused then when someone wants to build a private parking garage on prime retail space it might happen. If the arts and culture are not considered then maybe the Elks Theater is not made reasonable for local groups to use and an important asset fails to thrive. If there is an integrated vision then all the pieces have something to focus on. And that vision in turn requires us to be smart about planning all those pieces.

Quality of Life

Makes for a place very rich in the things money can't buy, in ambiance, in culturally rich things to do, in the number of interesting people living here, in the things that they will bring with them. It is one of the qualities of Prescott which would be washed out by generic growth.

Involvement of locals

Opportunities for locals to be involved in the arts and culture could be expanded by the continued growth of groups, institutes and venues for local plays, art classes, writing workshops, and the like so the downtown culture is not a tourist zone the locals avoid but a place WE enjoy for OUR culture that visitors like to come and participate in.

Yavapai College has limits on many art and continuing education classes on how many times people can retake them because of state funding guidelines. Art and performance workshops, classes, institutes, etc. through other venues give people a way to keep retaking them as much as they want.

In the same ways we give local creators the chance to share their talents or begin to explore them, to read their works, to show their art side-by-side with more advanced artists. It's a way to mentor the local creative sparks so they can be part of the creative center rather than just living in it.

And getting the jobs and filling the support roles of all the aspects of the creative-center culture and industry benefits even those who don't care to explore their creativity.

For an example of the kind of institute that could be done here on a smaller scale see www.loft.org, a literary, private, non-profit organization. For some concise information see the link to the New York Times article at the bottom of their "About" page. It is an example of the kind of organization that, brings in outside arts funding, hosts events and workshops with the best people nationwide in the organization's field, and serves almost like a specialized community college providing lots of involvement and benefit to the locals.

Possible adaptations

The area immediately around the square is a cultural and commercial gem, but it seems to have a hard time expanding. If the idea of a creative center worked well there would be much greater demand for goods and services in various commercial/retail centers around town, but especially downtown. There would also be need for more office space and in-town apartments. There are plenty of ways to encourage that with a little planning. The following ideas are raw, even whimsical, but are seeds to get the ideas going.

In the first couple of blocks of North Montezuma are a couple of open lots and parking lot, all of which could become developed space. At Cortez and Willis is a private parking lot and a lot with an ATM. The ATM will one day be a full bank building which could include a some office space above. If Mile High school ever did outgrow that space it certainly would be a good place for the "square effect" to grow. Of course the corners of Montezuma and Goodwin are planned, and the corner of Montezuma and Carleton has potential. The biggest

single plug that would stop the square effect from expanding is all the government offices on South Cortez. It interrupts the flow of the downtown district. If wishes could be had, ideally the offices in the city hall and police buildings and other government offices there (not the old post office) would move somewhere close enough to keep the jobs downtown but off that block so the retail district could grow there. Maybe those government offices could move to the Mile High space some day. That's imagining far forward, but that's first step in ensuring that when growth pressures do force such questions, that we've already started considering the best solutions.

Finally, the county has threatened to move the courts out of the old courthouse in the past. That may very well happen someday. When it does either the city or some non-profit on the city's behalf should lease the courthouse and make it the hub of the culture. Imagine a little history museum on the top floor. In the middle floor some real events, performance events or classes or workshops or things locals can participate in so it is still used and visit by locals, and that re-enforces to visitors that creativity is at the hub of Prescott. On the bottom floor a restaurant vendor to bring food out to a half dozen tables around the outside. And of course the grounds still being a park and a place for events.

Distortion of the vision

As an idea like this gets discussed it will be subject to second and third hand summaries, descriptions colored by the interests and bias of individuals, for or against. It will be important for those discussions to be about the actual vision and not some mangled version of it.

It is not government or anybody else dictating what can and can't be done. Anybody can still do whatever business or venture they want.

It is not about Prescott becoming a tacky, touristy, "arts" town indistinguishable from many other South West "arts" tourist towns. On the contrary it saves Prescott from that fate.

It is not a just a lot of high priced art galleries, though they can be part of it.

It is not about overly restrictive architectural review boards and dictating details of how stores look and such. Only the grossest proposed buildings that would directly conflict with the overall welfare of the city would need to be restricted. An attractive city is desired but it is only with some room for variety that we discover what will continue to be attractive far into the future. The most attractive old neighborhoods have individual houses, no two alike. If Prescott wants to consider dictating details, that is an entirely separate issue that this integrated vision is not at all dependent on.

It is not about a bunch of liberal artists or starving artists turning it into a starving artist town. The creative center concept is much broader than just the arts, and is about preserving and enhancing all that is creative and historical about Prescott and using that strength to be a solid economic foundation.

It's essential

A creative culture, for Prescott, is not just a nice addition if we can afford it. It is essential and at the core of what is needed for a viable Prescott of the future that has not lost its character.

Sample idea for promoting Prescott as a creative center

Sponsor Conferences of select groups.

A sample of a way to get Prescott known as a creative center in a relatively inexpensive way would be to contact some of the second-tier think-tanks and some notable economists and offer to provide Prescott as a free space for them to hold a conference on the future of the economy. Offer to put them up in the Hassayampa and the St. Michaels, offer the Sharlot Hall house for small groups and other scenic or pleasant spots for larger meetings, put on a dinner by some local restaurants with some local jazz musicians playing, take a little of their time for a presentation about Prescott, and give them the courthouse steps as a place to give a final statement. They fall in love with Prescott and it's culture, come back next time, tell their friends, etc. Given some time and creativity there are many means of modest expense to promote these goals of an arts and creative center.

Bait and Switch

One of the most likely distortions of this vision is to focus almost entirely on the jobs aspect of it. City leaders,

both in government and business, might decide this is a good way to brand Prescott for promoting it to the nation. They do that and use it to lure tech jobs, and nothing else related to the vision is pursued. No effort to create that knowledge-industries conference center. No effort to draw the best artists and performers to Prescott, to help promote the creative people already here to the outside world. No diligence to make sure the downtown retail area isn't degraded by guarding against such simple mistakes as letting key properties be turned into permanent parking lots. No efforts to try to encourage new developments that really feel like part of Prescott instead of just accepting those "parking lots for houses" kinds of developments. It would be an unintentional bait-and-switch. The vision is found to be desirable and is used as a marketing tool, a few tech companies are sold on it and move it, but no substantive follow through on actually moving Prescott in that direction. New developments grow on the edges that feel like any suburb of Phoenix, the downtown becomes an anachronism, an antique itself. Prescott culture gets a little more watered down. And ironically, our real strengths for a solid economy are not nurtured. Just taking the vision as a jobs plan, just using it as a marketing tool, misses the vision of the creative center. When that mistake begins to be made it should be pointed out that that's not the vision, that's just packaging. That's selling Prescott as if it's a place that is actively nurturing its strengths, when in fact no extra effort is really being made to do so. That's a very short lived plan that will not lead to the benefits that could be achieved.

Avoiding Polarization

This suggested vision is not connected with any group, project or person other than myself. It has grown over several years. It was provided to the 2050 Envisioning group to encourage the idea of an integrated plan rather than a list independent goals, but it is not connected with that project. It has been provided to many other groups and individuals. It is hoped it will be used for public discussion and be improved by that process, while maintaining the goal of focusing Prescott on how to thrive in the future based on its existing strengths and desirable qualities. Feedback is welcomed.

There will be people who like this vision and people who like some other vision, but the overall question of what the future of Prescott should be is not a question that belongs to any group or faction. Every group and individual has input to it and it should be whatever comes out of that public discussion that becomes the guide for the future. If you have some variation of this vision to suggest, find a constructive way to get that into the public discussion. If you have some alternative vision, find some constructive way to get that into the public discussion. If you think there should be no vision, put that out there constructively. Although there really is no such thing as "no decision" on the future. Every decision on whether to spend public money encouraging tourism is a decision about the future. Every decision about pursuing this or that type of industry, what we approve in the way of developments or industrial or research parks, all planning of infrastructure, are all decisions about the future. It's just a question of whether each of those decisions happens in isolation, or whether there is some overall forethought as a guide. If this vision moves you to add something to the public discussion, do Prescott a favor and do it in a productive way. Just sell your idea, and let the best ideas come to the top, and let the public, by their support, indicate what ideas they choose.