

# chapter 13 taking the long view: final thoughts on preparing for climate change

What are the basic actions that you can take as a public decision-maker today to ensure a positive lasting influence on your government and community, so that future generations do not bear the worst effects of climate change? In summary, here are a few final thoughts on how to prepare for climate change effectively:

## **In order to prepare your community for climate change impacts, focus on reducing your vulnerabilities and risks.**

In order to reduce your vulnerabilities, you must either reduce the sensitivity of systems in your priority planning areas, or build your adaptive capacity (e.g., by constructing a new or improved sea wall). In order to reduce your risk, you can seek either to lower the probability of an impact occurring or to reduce its consequences, by avoiding high-risk choices (e.g., preventing new development in a floodplain).

*It is my job as an elected leader to put in place the infrastructure so people in the future don't feel the impacts of climate change. Things will change, but we must do the work so people are not living in an age of crisis, that they have a good quality of life. We do things now to adapt to help preserve the quality of life without people really knowing it. It is my job to prepare.*

*– King County Executive Ron Sims*

## **Have foresight – establish institutions to deal with climate change impacts on an ongoing basis.**

Even if you build a team of talented individuals who can motivate and guide others across your government and community to take action on climate change, you will still need to leave strong systems in place that last well beyond your term. Ask your team, your government and your community to have foresight. Incorporate climate change considerations into long-range planning documents, “mainstream” climate change preparedness into infrastructure investments and basic budget decisions, and try to establish a culture of climate change preparedness.

## **Remain flexible and expect surprises.**

As a public decision-maker, you probably already know how to plan under conditions of uncertainty very skillfully. In the future, climate change preparedness will demand that you make even more decisions with incomplete and evolving information. Continue to seek the best new information about climate change in your region; you may find answers to some questions that you have about climate change impacts to your community, but you may also find that some major scientific uncertainties remain. Try to build your preparedness process to be flexible to a range of climate change scenarios. Expect surprises.

**Take action.**

We are all forced to prepare for climate change effects now because we have not reduced our contribution to the problem of climate change – global greenhouse gas emissions. Work with other governments to reduce your greenhouse gas emissions now, so that the chain of climate change cause and effect will be broken. At the same time, prepare for the climate change impacts you know are already underway. Seize the moment – to slow climate change and protect quality of life for future generations.