Let's Shop in Salem Catalog of Dreams

Dreams are free. And fun.

So let's bust out of the mind-prison that prevents Salemians from freely envisioning how our city could be, breaking the bars of "never could happen," "costs too much," "wouldn't fly politically."

John Gear, local attorney and LoveSalem blogger, has called for a Salem Catalog of Dreams. Great notion.

Everybody in this town has a favorite vision of what would make Salem a better place. I'm enamored with making downtown streets two-way with two-lanes, surrounded with beautiful vegetation, wonderfully bikeable and walkable.

That's one of my dreams. Others share it.

Plans for a downtown Streetscape have been drawn up. A rough price tag has been estimated. Chalk up one item for the Salem Catalog of Dreams. It's easy to think of more.

Weekend bus service. A Freaky Salem parade celebrating our diversity. Requiring employers to offer paid sick leave.

Salem Community Vision, a group I'm involved with, likes the idea of bringing together citizens to talk about our varied dreams for Salem's future.

This wouldn't be completely blue-sky. Gear proposed a billion dollar limit on what could be bought with an imaginary credit card in the Salem Catalog of Dreams.

A billion dollars may seem like an outrageous amount of money, but it is about half of what City officials want to spend on an unnecessary third bridge across the Willamette.

Imagine what else could be bought with the \$450 million cost of the bridge. Visualize other ways of spending that money here in Salem. How might we get more of a quality of life bang for our bucks?

Of course, some people think half a billion dollars for a third bridge is a top priority. OK, they'd be able to buy it in the Salem Catalog of Dreams.

Then find they've blown half of their spending limit on a massive chunk of concrete and asphalt. Meanwhile, other people will be able to purchase many other items with the money not spent on a third bridge.

It'd be fascinating to do this shopping for Salem in a group setting.

When I took part in a discussion of John Gear's idea, it struck me that choosing between catalog items could be akin to how my optometrist decides what lens prescription I need for optimum vision.

"Is this better than that?" she asks, flipping between ocular options as I express my opinion. Likewise, there are simple ways to learn a group's overall view about what's best for Salem to pursue.

We live in polarized times. Choosing items in a Salem Catalog of Dreams would be a way to involve diverse people in a common endeavor.

Liberals and conservatives. Young and old. Rich and poor. Religious and non-religious. Withdrawn and involved. Everybody has ideas about what would make Salem better.

Problem is, the Chamber of Commerce doesn't sit down together much with the Marion County Democrats, nor the Realtor's Association with Salem CityWatch.

Let's all embark together on a Salem vision quest, a citywide communal dreaming.

Strange Up Salem seeks to lift our city's Blah Curse. Give us a Facebook like. Brian Hines blogs at hinesblog.com