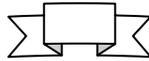


**E. CHRISTOPHER MARE**  
**FIELDING GRADUATE UNIVERSITY**  
**KA \* 717 – ORGANIZATION DEVELOPMENT**



Site Plan for "People's College" by Ariane Burgess, EDE Wongsanit 2010

**THE APPLIED COMPONENT: AUTUMN 2010**  
**DOCUMENTATION REPORT**  
**◆ ESTABLISHING THE LAND TRUST ◆**



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## Introduction

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This “KA\*717 – Organization Development” study came comparatively late in my generally self-organizing Human and Organizational Systems doctoral program. Since KA\*717 is one of the “core” knowledge areas, I think it is generally assumed that students will undertake this study in succession with KA\*702 and KA\*703 at the outset of their programs. There is an advantage to following this script, as I believe that a Master’s degree is awarded after completing the core package (including KA\*753a and KA\*753b). Life, however, was providing me with other opportunities in the beginning stages of my program and so KA\*717 didn’t appear until now, as I am simultaneously engaging my advanced studies in preparation for “Advance to Candidacy.” As self-organization would have it, “now” is the time when life opportunities make the subject matter of an Organization Development especially pertinent, and that will be the content of this Documentation Report. This is one of the real benefits of a self-initiated and relatively self-designed program like Human and Organizational Systems: school work is not something ‘separate’ that one does in between spaces of life work; rather school work and life work can combine, synthesize, and reinforce one another in a coherent, unified whole. Such is the case for me in the Autumn of 2010 as I prepare to document the applied component of my KA\*717 – Organization Development.

For the Overview component of KA\*717, I conducted a literature review of the Organization Development (OD) field, taking particular note of those theories, concepts, and lineages I perceived to be most relevant to my particular orientation and interests. Then, based on an interview with Mr. Charlie Seashore, a seasoned veteran of the OD field, I read three foundational books: Jay Galbraith’s *Designing Complex Organizations* (1973), Gareth Morgan’s *Images of Organization* (1986), and Peter Senge’s *The Fifth Discipline* (1990). Finally, based on my initial findings, I wrote an introductory paper in which I conducted a comparative analysis of two organizations I am presently involved with: (1) Village Design Institute – my own educational non-profit established in 2003, and (2) Gaia Education – an international consortium of educators established as a Scottish Charitable Trust in 2006. In the paper, I compared how Village Design Institute was inaugurated with detailed attention given to the *design* of the organization, based on principles of organic development, whereas Gaia Education was initiated rather haphazardly, without the focused intentionality of design. I then evaluated subsequent development of the two organizations up to the current period, noting how Village Design Institute is still pregnant with potential whereas Gaia Education, though far more out-funded, has become embroiled in conflict and misunderstanding and seems to have

spent the initial trust, goodwill, and freely given cooperation that was so palpable at the outset. Leadership approaches also were discriminatively evaluated in my introductory paper.

A keen interpretation by the assessor, Robert Silverman, remarked how common it is for organizations to lose that “magic” often present at the outset. Silverman queried, “What can be done to sustain that magic beyond the start-up phase into the daily routine operations of the organization?” That would have been a useful line of inquiry; however, the approach I will take here is to suggest that without the careful attention to intentionality that is the very essence of design, especially attention at the *very beginning stages*, any attempt to sustain the magic – or any other positive benefits accrued at the start-up – can only be left to chance: either you get lucky or you don’t. And, like a marriage that has entered counseling, the remediation of an organization that has lost its initial ‘magic’ – or let’s just settle for trust and goodwill – can only produce results that are, shall we say, “sustainable” – in the sense of “being able to be maintained,” yet not wholly desirable. I am reminded here of the Taoist saying, “How can you expect a satisfactory conclusion if you don’t get off to a good start?”

This Report, then, will explore some possibilities for perpetuating the magic, or exuberance, or palpable feelings of trust and goodwill present at the start-up of an organization on into the routine operational phases. I intend to demonstrate these possibilities “in real time,” as I am doing the research, by establishing a new organization of my own – the Land Trust that is to partner with my educational-non-profit. In that sense, this paper will represent somewhat ‘journaling’ in that I will pose the questions up front, then, as they are answered, I will document the evidence for the decisions that are made. Dates and times will be relevant, as will be the referencing of specific people, organizations, and precedents. By approaching the Applied component of my KA\*717 – Organization Development study in this way, I intend to synchronize theory and practice in a way that will produce tangible (maybe even magical?) results.

## Things to Do and Questions to Answer:

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### Village Design Institute:

- 1) I have not been able to locate recently the original Bylaws and Articles of Incorporation (!). There is a good chance they were stored in the laptop that was stolen a few years back, before I became so keen by that experience to make sure that there is always back-up storage. I sent copies of these documents to Zaida Amaral, the current Board member, when she was setting up a non-profit account at the Educational Credit Union in Albuquerque. I need to check with Zaida to see if she still has access to these materials – though there is a complication in that she moved back to Brasil this past Summer. Perhaps one of her associates in Albuquerque has retained copies? If not, Mary Beth DeHamer, the previous Board member, may very well have copies – as well as other materials that were documented during her reign. Once I recover the Bylaws and Articles of Incorporation, I need to triple-store these documents to prevent future loss. The Bylaws will need to be reviewed to see if the format is still appropriate to the current stage of organization development.
- 2) It's time to explore the steps to be taken to upgrade the non-profit corporation to 501c3 Federal status. How much paperwork is involved? What cost are the application fees? Is VDI really ready to make this upgrade? I ask this last question, especially, since a colleague previously told me that it's better to remain at the State level because of the additional maintenance documentation that becomes necessary at the Federal level. Perhaps there is a non-profit assistance agency located in town that can provide advice on all these matters? In any case, I will pursue these lines of inquiry now, as part of the Applied component of my Organization Development study.
- 3) The timely appearance of this study is emphasized by my recent disappointments with Gaia Education. I've put a lot of energy into that international consortium over the past several years – to the neglect of my own non-profit. Now I will reverse this trend by politely backing away from involvement with Gaia Education to put energy into Village Design Institute. A major consideration during this re-alignment will be raising the visibility of Village Design Institute – and this means, primarily, energetically upgrading the website! The VDI website was launched back in 2003 concurring with incorporation (coincidentally, all this work part of an M.A. study at Antioch). A friend helped me to set up the site initially, and a couple more friends over the years have helped me to make improvements; yet I've never learned how to manage the site myself. The result has been that much of the information on the site is seriously outdated. For example, the

opening statements on the Home page were all written back in 2003. I have grown so much since those days! My whole approach to the topic of Village Design has greatly matured and expanded. None of my doctoral writings are on there, nor is there the inclusion of any of the work from the Gaia Education days or from my four years working with a developer in Bothell. I have to admit, the staleness of my website at times causes me some embarrassment: occasionally I will get an email from someone who has just visited the site asking questions about content – yet they are inquiring into a stage of my work that is now almost eight years old! Interestingly, some of these folks have commented that the website is “great;” others have asked, based on what they saw in the website, whether I would like to join with them on some project or another. This makes me think that in 2003 I was ahead of my time, if the content that seems to me so outdated may seem to others still to be relevant. Also interestingly, over the years I’ve made a couple attempts to get into a web design class, yet some trip overseas has always usurped my ambition. I would resign myself to these delays by rationalizing: “OK, it’s a self-organizing universe; a more appropriate time may be yet on the horizon.” Let us hope that the manifestation of this KA-717 study is the “appropriate time” we’ve been waiting for. Indeed, web design instruction is now palpably within reach: my relocation to Bellingham has put me back in touch with Western Washington University, my alma mater. It turns out that this very (Fall) quarter a Web Design class is being offered through the Extension service. I have already been to the orientation session and believe I will put up the \$500 to step forth into this new phase of organization development. I’m very excited about the creative prospects that lie ahead!

- 4) I believe the time is ripe to take the Board to the next level of development, as was outlined in my “organic growth” strategy documented at start-up. Zaida has been an admired, trusted, and well-respected collaborator. She was the driving force behind the implementation of North America’s only full Ecovillage Design Education (EDE) course – the course conceived by Gaia Education – in Albuquerque of all places. I had an opportunity to work closely with Zaida during the planning and implementation of this course. I came to greatly appreciate her energy, enthusiasm, and above all her tenacity during this collaboration. Zaida and I have had several Board meetings via skype. She is consistent and reliable and seems to believe that her future interests and professional work align with the mission of Village Design Institute. I feel very lucky to have her on the team. The State of Washington prescribes that a minimum of Board shall consist of two members: a President and a Secretary – so Zaida and I have till now constituted this minimum. A third prospective Board member has now appeared who is a colleague of both Zaida and myself. Ariane Burgess is a native Scot who lived in New York City for many years. She almost single-handedly created an educational program embodying the theme of the organization she founded: “Regenerative Culture.” Ariane and I had a

chance to work together in a very exciting, co-creative context during the administering of two EDEs in Thailand. Ariane (as well as Zaida) was very keen on refining and advancing the Design Studio format that I was introducing as an integral component of the EDE. On one occasion, Ariane and I spontaneously managed a Design Studio that took one team of students through the process of designing an 'ecovillage' as well as – simultaneously and for the very first time – another team through the process of sustainably retrofitting a 'traditional village.' There was no precedent for this latter work; we were making it up as we went along in real time. I came to greatly appreciate both Ariane and the quality of our interaction during these exchanges. We even continued our collaboration between courses through several phone conversations in which we envisioned ways to incorporate more 'body awareness' into the Design Studio. And so, as an activity integral to the Applied component of my KA-717 study, I wish to invite Ariane to be a member of the Board of Village Design Institute. I will make this invitation formal by sending her a written request on VDI letterhead. What I find so very interesting is that, during the past Summer, Zaida has decided to relocate back to Brasil and Ariane has decided to relocate back to Scotland. The potential then exists that Village Design Institute will have a Board consisting of members on three continents: one in USA, one in Brasil, and one in Scotland. The opportunities for visibility and influence – and potential future work – are thus expanded greatly. I also want to mention that Ariane, Zaida, and I are relative newcomers to the Ecovillage Design community, in that there is a group of relatively old stalwarts who have been carrying the torch for the past couple decades. Our 'newness' brings freshness and innovation – and from my perspective, an opportunity to expand "Ecovillage Design" into the more-inclusive, fundamental, and far-reaching "*Village Design*:" ecovillage, urban village, traditional village. I would not want to invite any of the old stalwarts to be Board members of VDI!

### The New Land Trust:

The original intention behind incorporating as a non-profit was to provide a legal 'container' for the eventual acquisition of a land base to set up the Academy. The theory was that, at some point in time, the non-profit will have established a sufficiently impressive track record, as a leader in a field of such unquestionable social value, that a philanthropist would appear who would be quite willing to donate a piece of land to fulfill the mission of the non-profit. In this way, the non-profit would not need to assume the overhead of purchasing a piece of land; the land would be freely given.

I still believe this to be a viable strategy: There is plenty of land out there and plenty of people owning multiple pieces who haven't acquired the skills to manage productively even one of them. I also still believe that I have a 'product' worthy of philanthropic support. Yet I'm

not wholly convinced anymore that an 'educational non-profit' is the best choice of legal entity to secure the title to the land base. The mission of the educational non-profit is to provide education; and while the nature of the education administered by Village Design Institute inherently includes interfacing with a particular land base, the actual property management may best be the responsibility of a second, partnering legal entity – the Land Trust. At this point this is more of a hunch than a conclusion based on rational analysis; yet it has been my exposure to and involvement with several Land Trusts over the years that has produced this hunch.

In order to verify if this is the right track, I will conduct interviews with several people knowledgeable about Land Trusts. These people include:

- 1) Dean Fearing – Executive Director, Kulshan Community Land Trust; Bellingham, WA
- 2) Bill Sterling – Former Board Member, Evergreen Land Trust; Bellingham, WA
- 3) Sylvia Hales – Registered Agent for Village Design Institute, and a person who has worked with both Kulshan Community Land Trust and Evergreen Land Trust; Arlington, WA
- 4) James Turner – former Public Defender with a wealth of legal experience; Bellingham, WA

The outcomes of these interviews will determine which steps should be taken next...

INTERVIEW with Dean Fearing – Executive Director, Kulshan Community Land Trust  
Monday, 4 October 2010

Dean is actually an old friend of mine. We first met at our first Permaculture Design Course back in March 1993 in Happy Valley. A short time later, we both entered Fairhaven College and gravitated toward the “sustainability” circles and classes. I soon discovered that Dean was also in the Navy – I always feel a sense of comradeship with fellow ‘squids,’ even after all these years. With this kind of background, it was quite easy to send an email to his staff requesting an appointment with “Director Dean.”

I thought I’d write up a list of questions before the interview, as a matter of preparation; however, that produced a blank feeling, so I decided to just improvise and let the context and flow of the conversation decide which questions would be most pertinent.

It was great seeing Dean again. I’d been out of town for several years so we had a chance to ‘catch up’ as we walked from his office to a coffee shop. Somehow, the young child that he and his wife brought to the Permaculture Design Course had grown into a woman and was attending college! Dean still looked the same and I still felt the same, though the streetscape had changed a little. I’m always amazed at this progression called Life: Somehow we all get older though we never notice it happening. Then one day we come face-to-face with a bit of our past and realize there’s been not only change but some continuity as well.

We sat down at a small table and continued our dialogue. The subject of “Land Trusts” appeared spontaneously; when it arrived I took out my pen and began writing. Here’s the gist of the conversation:

“What is the purpose of Kulshan Community Land Trust?” – To keep a permanent stock of affordable housing. We now have 94 homes in the Trust. These homes will be perpetually off the market, appreciating at the standard rate of 1.5% a year. Once a home gets into the Trust it stays there forever.

“And who is your client base?” – The Community Land Trust market is for renters who want the pride and satisfaction of owning a home but who don’t qualify through the usual bank routine. These prospective owners are not considered “low income” but rather “sub-income” in that they fall below the usual standards for home purchase qualification. We make home ownership possible for them. KCLT makes up the difference between how much a buyer can afford and how much the home is valued.

“How does it work?” – Owners sign a 99-year lease, which means they can pass it on to other family members as they grow older. We get about 4 or 5 re-sales a year. In these cases, the seller still gets some equity though not nearly as much as if they had taken out a mortgage with a bank. If there ever arises a dispute or an “exception,” the Board is there to arbitrate.

“Are all Community Land Trusts “non-profits”?” – Yes. There are about 200 CLTs nationwide. Some are run by municipalities, others by Housing Authorities. In all cases there is a close working relationship between the CLT and the local government. We are provided with State, Federal, *and* local funds. KCLT’s money comes primarily from HUD and the Housing Trust Fund, a division of the Washington State Department of Commerce.

“Is Kulshan Community Land Trust also a 501c3?” – Yes!

At this point, it began to look like the KCLT model would not suit my purpose. The Community Land Trust was instituted specifically to provide “affordable housing” and my purpose is to set up an “Academy.” I reasoned with Dean that the Academy also would have a “residential component” – housing for resident faculty and students in residential programs – yet Dean insisted that the CLT model was organized to create “homeowners.” He then went on to describe that there are other kinds of Land Trusts; for example, the Evergreen Land Trust is organized for the purpose of setting aside land for “intentional communities.” It began to look like the choice of language is all-important in this business of incorporating legal entities.

I then zeroed in point-blank on my purpose for the interview: After giving a fairly lengthy account of my vision, I asked my old buddy Dean, “In my case, since I already have an educational non-profit, and since I’m wanting to set up a “research, training, and demonstration site” that will have an “Academy of Village Design” as its focus, does it make sense for me to also pursue the establishment of a Land Trust?” Dean did not hesitate with his reply: “Of course! The Land Trust can access pools of money that typical non-profits can’t always access. The Land Trust can create an infrastructure to manage the land while the educational non-profit can concentrate on educational programs – two separate revenue streams with two potentially diverse funding sources.”

My old school-mate’s forthright reply caused me to break out in a wide grin – apparently I *am* on the right track. I was encouraged to take my inquiry to the next level by positing a potentially more sensitive scenario. I asked Dean, “Do you think Bellingham is ready for an “ecovillage?” This question is potentially “sensitive” because in most places I’ve been, like my recent experience in Bothell, “ecovillage” is a taboo term reserved for so-called “hippie communes” or “back to the land” experiments. The question was important, however, because

many observers might regard my proposed project to be an “ecovillage.” This time it was Dean who sported the wide grin: “Yes, I think we’re ready. The current Director of Planning is actively pushing for such amenities as grey-water infiltration and alternative building codes. KCLT currently has a project in the works, close to Bellingham Technical College, that conceivably could be framed as an “ecovillage” – in this case a collaboration between CLT and Co-housing. There could be room in this project for an “educational center.””

After this exchange, it seemed that most of what needed to be said had been said. The conversation relaxed a bit from the somewhat imposed formality of an ‘interview’ to more of a casual sharing between friends. We both marveled at how much progress had been made since our Fairhaven days in the mid-90s when subjects like we had just been discussing were considered way out ‘on the edge’ – and, we both acknowledged how much more needed progress still remained. I could tell that, now being charged-up on coffee, Dean was anxious to get back to work. As we closed, he recommended a couple more people for me to contact and a few projects underway in the region that would be informative for me to investigate.

Returning to my bicycle, I felt a swelling of emotion. We were all so wide-eyed back at Fairhaven College, so certain that revolutionary social change was imminent. Looking back, it was all a bit naïve: we’re engaging with and attempting to influence grand cycles of social and planetary evolution. Dean, for the moment, has found a niche as the Executive Director of a Community Land Trust and I have gone on to become a professional student proposing the preposterous notion of setting up an “Academy of Village Design.” Someday – not too far off – we’ll both be grey-haired old men exceeding our active years. By what criteria will we evaluate whether we’ve utilized our short life-span for the good of the whole?

INTERVIEW with Bill Sterling – former Board member of Evergreen Land Trust  
Saturday, 9 October 2010

Bill Sterling is somewhat of a legend in the greater Bellingham area. I first got to know him when he was the most prominent figure at the River Farm, a local ‘intentional community’ experiment and perhaps the premier property of the Evergreen Land Trust. The River Farm would regularly host educational events and festivals. I arrived on the scene about the time the “Herbal Faire” was becoming an annual extravaganza. Like many others in my circle of friends, I would routinely go out ahead of time as a volunteer to help set up the Faire. You could always find Bill on site somewhere, mowing with a tractor or directing some work party. I always sensed that it was an effusive optimism that gave him such command of the situation. And so, with such a background, I was very happy that he agreed to meet me for an interview.

We rendezvoused at a coffee shop in downtown Bellingham early one overcast autumn morning. We opened with a few general words to re-establish rapport; yet with neither of us inclined towards idle chit chat, we were soon intently engaged with the matter at hand.

Similar to the interview with Dean Fearing, Bill used the opening rounds to provide background information on the Evergreen Land Trust (ELT) and his involvement with it. It turns out that he had been on the Board of the Trust for some 23 years – quite a significant investment of life span. The Evergreen Land Trust began in Seattle as a utopian social experiment featuring “consensus organizing.” Starting with the initial acquisition of an 11-room mansion on Capitol Hill, the Trust eventually came to hold title to several properties along the Salish Sea. The ideal was that none of the members would be owners yet the Trust would last into perpetuity.

It didn’t take long for Bill to begin speaking quite frankly about the results of the social experimentation. As mentioned, I had known Bill to be an industrious, optimistic sort of guy always putting his energy into setting up community events or managing his land base; so it was with an expected air of disappointment that he characterized typical ELT members as having become perhaps a bit too comfortable in their low rent, low maintenance, low accountability situations. It sounded as if, with no incentive to maintain high levels of diligence or attentiveness, the social ideals and the social idealists had gone the way of inertia. Typical Trust members were now more interested in defending their established privilege than in actively working toward – much less advancing – the Ideal. I wouldn’t say that Bill had become cynical; yet there was no doubt that his seasoned experience had led him to a more realistic appraisal of the human-all-too-human side of utopian community experimentation – especially as the trend-setters grow older.

Apparently, while still an active Board member, energetic Bill attempted to move the ELT members out of their complacency; but attempting to get consensus out of 64 adults increasingly set in their ways proved to be an unrealistic enterprise. Because of “abuse” and “lack of accountability” issues energetic Bill eventually resigned from the Evergreen Land Trust. Yet, while still active, Bill had a chance to attend some national conferences. Apparently there was a big resurgence of Land Trust idealism on the East Coast in the 90s. The models developed there – for example, using a 99-year lease instead of “ownership into perpetuity” – seemed to have more built-in accountability. Based on these East Coast models, it was Bill Sterling, along with two associates, who wrote the Bylaws and Articles of Incorporation for the Kulshan Community Land Trust – it’s a small world out here in Bellingham!

After Bill had said his piece, I saw a chance to outline my vision for an Academy and why I was looking into the Land Trust model. I didn’t expect Bill to be impressed, nor even necessarily supportive, though I did anticipate he would see the value of my proposal. Instead of all that, Bill’s response was to explain flatly that he could mention 5 or 6 people already in Whatcom County who have the vision of creating “educational centers” in the form of the “ecovillage teacher model.” He called this the “universal dream” – everybody believes they invented it! What followed was more seasoned interpretation by a veteran who has devoted his life to these kinds of issues. According to Bill, the presence of so many of these similar visions in one place creates conditions of competition: “these people are not cooperating with each other because they want *their* vision to be the one.”

I knew what he was talking about. It seems that people from all over the country gravitate to this little northwest corner to live the life of untainted “ecological consciousness” in the presence of others of like mind. Yet I’ve been around here long enough to perceive that sometimes there’s a pretension about it, a sort of overt emphasis on appearance without necessarily the internal transformation that would make that appearance truly authentic. For example, I often say that everybody in Bellingham believes they are already a permaculturist. Yet if you look closely at their methods, you may find fundamental errors in soil management or nutrient cycling – yet these people will never register for a Permaculture Design Course *because they already know it*. In a similar vein, everybody in Bellingham is already an Ecovillage Designer. Since I made “Ecovillage Design” the focus of two previous degrees, I often find myself in conversation about this theme. People will knowingly respond, “Ah yes, Ecovillage Design,” and then begin an account to reveal how knowledgeable they are about the subject. What they describe may be only one small sliver of the total spectrum that could include Ecovillage Designing – yet these people will never register for an Ecovillage Design Course *because they already know it*. I had to wonder if Bill’s 5 or 6 contestants wanting to set up educational centers had similar attitudes – it only takes the insertion of a ‘g’ to turn eco-consciousness into *ego*-consciousness.

It became important to inform Bill that I have no intention of entering this fray; I know from experience that what I've been working on is a qualitative improvement over existing ideas or projects. I know this because I've been working at the international scale, supposedly the best of the best, as a key player in the educational arm of the Global Ecovillage Network; and even their project became dysfunctional for me, not living up to my standards.

It also became important to articulate my value structure. For example, I'm going to stay far away from framing my project as part of any "social movement," especially one advocating "alternative culture," or even worse "tribalism" or a "back to the land" mentality. These are buzz words that send clear warning signs to decision makers and funders. Instead of "alternative culture," I want to explain the project I envision as a form of "*perennial* culture." What I am proposing will be received as matter-of-fact, obvious, something that's always been there as potential though no one had a name for it. I intend to be impeccably professional, world class, state-of-the-art – I want this project to be fundable! I sure don't need to impress people by showing them how "alternative" I am. I think this is where my grassroots friends are going to be forever trying to out-position one another over what may amount to a few scraps. I think I can transcend all that – and that's why I've been a full-time university student for 14 of the last 16 years.

While speaking with Bill Sterling, I found that I could have no slack – either in concept or approach. Bill's right on top of it all: he can easily distinguish a 'wannabe' from genuine potential. For that reason, I was somewhat amused toward the end of our two hour meeting when Bill looked down at my notes, held out his hand, and exclaimed, "When this project takes off I want to be the Land Manager."

I had to go deep with Bill, unraveling any knots or inconsistencies, occasionally alluding to a spiritual purpose. Yet our dialogue also produced some very practical insights and suggestions. I list them here as points instead of narratizing them:

- Besides the Community Land Trust there is also active in Whatcom County a Conservation Land Trust, and it would be wise to become familiar with them also. In fact, I realized that it's time for me now to go to the Secretary of State website and learn all the varieties of Land Trust that are recognized as legitimate for incorporation.
- There is also a legal model called the "Life Estate," where someone with like values will donate their property yet continue to live on the site until they pass away.
- I can set up the Trust first, independently, as a legal entity, and then co-owners can join later.
- It will be important to specify the exact relationship between my educational non-profit and the new Land Trust. I can imagine that eventually *for-profit* businesses

could be appended to this initial bipartite organization. The coming interview with my attorney friend will help to shed light on these relationships.

- Both my interviewees suggested partnering with existing non-profits – for example “Transition Whatcom.” I recognize the inherent value of broad-based, community-wide partnering; however, I honestly don’t think I will be able to engage that in earnest until after my degree program.
- It was suggested that it might be easier to infiltrate existing Trusts, rather than start one anew; for example, the River Farm could use someone with an educational background. In response to this sound idea I described my developing theory of “organizational DNA,” and how the establishment of the new Land Trust will be an opportunity to put into practice this developing theory.
- One idea with a lot of merit was to acknowledge the existence of 5 or 6 locations wanting to be educational centers as an opportunity rather than a source of competition. Perhaps what they need is an ‘umbrella’ or ‘meta-school’ to oversee or coordinate them all? It seemed quite apparent that the one able to attract the substantial funding would be the one in a position to offer direction – and so I emphasize once again the commitment to *professionalism*.
- It seems that the best examples of “sustainability demonstration sites” are hidden “oases” owned by people who are financially secure and who have been relentlessly educating themselves yet who prefer to remain quiet, without entering the boisterous clamor of competing interests vying for visibility. Apparently, it’s the projects lacking money that fall into this latter behavior.

As our meeting drew to its self-organizing conclusion, Bill mentioned that this opportunity to organize and verbalize his thoughts had been useful. He suggested meeting again – and this idea appealed to me: I consider Bill Sterling to be a valuable resource. Future meetings will be opportunities for me to continue educating myself on the finer points of Land Trust management.

After Bill’s departure, I lingered at the table for a while reviewing my notes. One thing he said really stuck with me, something about how if he was to do it all again he’d do so as a “benevolent dictator.” I could resonate with that, perhaps because it seems to be the approach I am using. By making this project the applied component of a doctoral study, I am able to retain complete control over the theoretical and conceptual inputs; I am able to dictate the pace of unfoldment and the preferred future direction; I am able to specify internal organization and differentiation; I am able to imprint thoroughly my own value structure – in short, I am able to program the organizational DNA. The last thing I’d want to do at this stage is to open it up for discussion!

INTERVIEW with Sylvia Hales – active member of both Evergreen Land Trust and  
Kulshan Community Land Trust, Wednesday, 13 October 2010

Sylvia also is an old friend of mine; I first heard her voice back in 2001. She called me on the phone after seeing an article I had written for *Communities* magazine. The article described how I was self-designing an education focused on the theme “Ecovillage Design,” and Sylvia explained that she wanted to do something similar. Our big summit of involvement occurred in 2003. My Graduate Design Project for my Master’s degree in Whole Systems Design was a meta-design project: designing an Ecovillage Design Course. I needed a location to implement, and Sylvia responded by generously offering the property she was co-managing. This property turned out to be Pragtri Farm, a 20-acre holding of the Evergreen Land Trust located about 10 miles outside of Arlington. We had absolutely delightful rounds of engagement as we prepared for and eventually delivered the Ecovillage Design course. After the course was over, we both remarked how it had been a high point in both of our lives.

I interviewed Sylvia by phone. Because of the nature of our previous involvement, the conversation quickly assumed the tone of an emotional sharing between friends. Sylvia explained that she was currently in challenging times, and I responded by saying that I could empathize because my situation was the same – and it could be said that the source of our challenges was similar. In Sylvia’s case, she had been managing Pragtri Farm for the Evergreen Land Trust for some 10 years and was absolutely fed up with the whole arrangement. In my case, I had returned to Bellingham after several years away, landing back on the loose community experiment from which I had departed but for which, in current circumstances, I could no longer identify. For both of us, the challenges stemmed from having to deal with the “social element” – people claiming to be “communitarians” or “alternative types” or even “hippies” – people advocating high-minded ideals in sometimes outspoken opposition to the “mainstream,” yet behaving in ways far below the ideals they proclaimed.

Sylvia, in a kind of outpouring, began to detail the source of her frustration. For example, she exclaimed that “Pragtri’s always on the edge” – meaning that in its entire period of existence, it has never been able to achieve a stable resident population. Part of the reason is due to the sub-standard housing: a leaky mobile-home and a sort of multi-room, industrial looking “Roadhouse.” These living situations, she said, attract “transients,” like people in their young twenties looking for a place to party for a while, but never sincere, committed, stable residents ready to invest their lives over the long term. Sylvia, it should be mentioned, lives in a very charming cabin on the site. To achieve this she invested \$60,000, money she will never recover if she leaves due to the ELT ownership agreement.

As the resident Land Manager and concurrently a Board member of the Evergreen Land Trust, Sylvia informed me that she has always felt pressure to be the one to congeal a more stable resident population – and this is another source of her frustration. She told me she would be happy if she never again had to participate in another consensus decision-making process: “It’s all so fake, these people pretending to be enlightened.” She doesn’t want to facilitate any more “visioning meetings” with new people moving onto the site; neither does she want to transcribe any more “minutes” at ELT Board meetings. At one point, Sylvia disclosed, almost as if it was a well-kept secret, that she’s ready to give up Land Trust life. She says she’s imagining now the sublime satisfaction of getting an apartment somewhere, maybe in Lynwood – “It would all be so simple then” – and she might have made the move already except that it would mean giving up her \$60,000 investment. Unfortunately, my dear friend Sylvia is feeling stuck.

And it’s all so ironic, because Sylvia, like Bill Sterling before her, was always so enthusiastic, so committed and determined, always the one to “go the extra mile.” In this, I also could resonate, for I have been one of these. I thought back to when I first returned to “the land” here back in May, how I would be energetically active in the increasing daylight up till 9pm, refining the existing garden and adding new garden plots while my “community-mates” sat on the porch “getting stoned.” I thought back several years ago, before I left, when I created with a burst of enthusiasm a beautifully sculpted and tiled pond system, a system that someone took a pick-axe to and removed after I left. It seemed that on some deep, perhaps subliminal level, the experiences of Bill, Sylvia, and I are quite similar: each of us has been one of the over-achievers, contributing and devoting our life energies to an ideal which we’ve felt at the core of our beings. Yet, it has become increasingly apparent that this is an ideal to which others readily prescribe without having nearly the same capacity of what Sylvia singled out as “commitment” and what Bill termed “accountability” – and to which I would add “integrity.” Like Bill and Sylvia, I am approaching cynicism: I think I’m ready to leave this social land experiment idea and settle for an anonymous apartment somewhere, a simple arrangement where I can focus solely on my own needs without having to deal with the “social element.”

No doubt based on her challenging experiences, Sylvia consistently tried to steer me away from considering any Land Trust model of project ownership. Among other things, she emphasized the restrictions on land use that may be applied to non-profits (Land Trusts apparently are always incorporated as non-profits). She then mentioned a project in California – the Occidental Arts and Ecology Center – that sounded very similar to the project I am envisioning. Sylvia has been in conversation with a director there, a fellow named Dave Henson, who is a firm believer that an LLC is the best choice for land ownership. An LLC, as a private entity, apparently has greater flexibility and a much wider range of options for land development than does a non-profit. So, here again, I was being dissuaded from my original

intentions. In the interest of more thorough research, it seems that I ought to give Dave Henson a call and try to arrange an interview with California.

My interview with my old friend Sylvia Hales turned out to be a deeply moving experience. Here was a person who had been touched enough by my idealism of a decade ago to give me a call from out of the blue. We then shared in this idealism for many years afterward; until now, with our matured perspective, we have become disillusioned and disheartened by the results of our idealism. As Sylvia is now considering simply walking away from her complicated situation, she told me between what I thought I detected as sobs, “It feels like the end of a dream.” For this I also could empathize. The “dream” that a group of well-intentioned, seemingly “enlightened” people are going to come together and somehow work out all the details of a cooperative, collective social experiment has simply faded away – it’s just too much work! And, like any dream, the reality always falls far short of the ideal.

And yet, I’ve been around the world enough to know that there are places where the dream has taken root. And while these experiments – or ‘models’ if you like – could be heavily critiqued, there are individuals living in them that have been able to maintain their commitment and fortitude over the long term. I really cannot say, at this point, what is the ‘difference that makes a difference’ between those that disband and those that persist. Maybe it has something to do with sustaining the ‘magic’ that I mentioned at the beginning of this Report? Despite my prevailing disillusionment with collective social experiments, I am still convinced that the world needs an Academy of Village Design. I realize now more than ever that if this project is to succeed, it must be approached very professionally, with all the sophistication and determination that a ‘doctor of philosophy’ can muster. I also realize that if I am going to make a living from such a project, I need to develop business acumen. What I am conceiving is a prototype – eventually every community in North America will need one! Oh *dharma* – why couldn’t I have had the calling to be, say, an accomplished grocer!

Maybe the first Academy could be a place where all the ‘over-achievers’ like Bill, Sylvia, and myself could come together for the first time? – filtering out those who are unable, for whatever reason, to sustain high levels of commitment and excellence. Would such a situation be akin to a clash of the titans?

INTERVIEW with James Turner – former Public Defender and now Freelance Law  
Consultant, Thursday, 14 October 2010

I met James Turner only recently, as I returned to “the land” here in Happy Valley in May. Jim was the newest addition to the loose community experiment I’ve been talking about; and yet, revealingly, he didn’t choose the place for its lofty social ideals but rather because it was the cheapest rent he could find! I immediately noticed Jim’s ‘gift for gab’ – so much so that I would usually try to avoid him as I was working in the garden lest I get caught up in a lengthy conversation and miss the chance to make some real progress in the work; nevertheless, I came to appreciate Jim’s almost down-home ‘people perspective.’ It seemed that his experience in the law profession had trained his mind to think in a no-nonsense, matter-of-fact way: he was able to dispassionately evaluate the objective evidence, compare that to established precedent, and then arrive at a set of realistic options. This sort of thinking was actually a welcome relief from the starry-eyed conjecturing that usually characterized interactions on “the land.” And so, as I entered this Applied component of my KA\*717 study, I naturally waited for the right time to request an interview.

I asked Jim to meet me at a local café instead of on “the land” where we both reside. I thought this would provide an opportunity to conduct a more business-like meeting separate in time and space from both domestic casualness and the residue of prior interaction. To this Jim readily agreed. We both arrived promptly at the appointed time and place.

Jim can be a rather imposing figure, a 280-pound frame that played defensive end for his High School football team back in Tennessee. This and his law background – for I have not had the chance to speak forthrightly with too many attorneys – compelled me to interiorize my thoughts and my position and conduct business as if I was a novice.

Jim had heard the outline of my project before, so I opened the initial rounds with a review. Jim responded by reiterating many things I’ve heard before – general principles of non-profit management and gaining respectable public visibility, etc. He suggested it’s time to beef up the Board and apply for 501c3 status, and recurringly emphasized the view that the IRS will take when considering my application. By this point, all the conversation had been in regard to my already established Village Design Institute. While he offered sound advice – for I already realized that it was time to take VDI to the next level – I was anxious to get to the part about partnering with a Land Trust.

I explained the results of my conversation with Sylvia, just the day before: how I had been advised to avoid Land Trust models and explore LLC options. Jim listened carefully yet the

growing wrinkles on his forehead presaged his response. According to the attorney, LLCs are incorporated for the specific purpose of making money while limiting their liability. He said that the project I was proposing would only succeed with broad community support, and so the non-profit model made much more sense. This then processed into a discussion about the absolute necessity of clearly specifying the relationships between the *educational* non-profit and the *land-holding* non-profit. Jim emphasized the need for making projects of this kind – projects purportedly incorporated for the public benefit – fundable from outside sources.

This gave me an opportunity to explain in more detail the total vision, how an Academy of Village Design is innately a project that would demonstrate creating an economic base out of the skillful management and designed productivity of a specific piece of land, such that making money was not *foreign* to the idea but rather was an *inevitable consequence*. Could this be justification for including an LLC in the more-inclusive organizational development of the model? At this point my new attorney friend conceded that he was a generalist, and the depth of my inquiry was beyond the scope of his experience. He suggested that I seek out a woman named Virginia, who manages the library beneath the courthouse. He was confident that she would have more insight into my questions and, if nothing else, would be able to direct me to the relevant documentation. Fair enough, I thought, let's expand this KA\*717 research even further; after all, the goal was to finally incorporate a new entity, and I did not yet have enough information to do so competently.

As with the other interviews, there was a noticeable climax to the energy of engagement followed by a gradual trailing off. In the trailing off stage of *this* interview, I felt free to openly share my excitement at the possibilities. If this project was approached very professionally – and if indeed it was fulfilling an evolutionary niche – then a well-conceived and well-organized Land Trust seeking holdings to establish “research, training, and demonstration sites” with an Academy of Village Design at their center might just receive gratuitous response. Someone in Kentucky might wish to donate 40 acres to the project; someone else in Arizona could easily spare a 5-acre piece. This does have to be presented as world class. We laughed at each other with the wild speculation that this could be the growth of an empire! My initial dabbling into organization development as a doctoral study could have wide-ranging implications: I may end up needing to develop proficiency at managing a distributed network of learning.

If nothing else, my interview with the attorney reassured me that the Land Trust model is the way to proceed. Next: interviews with Dave Henson and Virginia at the courthouse.

INTERVIEW with Guy Burneko, Ph.D. – Director of the Institute for Contemporary Ancient Learning, Saturday, 23 October 2010

Dr. Burneko is a former professor of mine from the Antioch days. More than any other professor I've worked with during my extended academic career, it was Guy who seemed to care enough to offer incisive critique of my writing, *productive* critique that instilled in me the desire to improve and mature. After Guy, I could no longer simply throw a piece together but had to carefully scrutinize and inspect, review and review again, until the piece was an accurate reflection of what I was thinking and feeling, free from ambiguity – or even worse *ideology*. I remember taking a class with a title something like “Eco-consciousness and Contemplative Leisure” in which Dr. Burneko laid out his vision of a “community of contemplative scholars.” As an ecovillage enthusiast, this vision has always stuck with me: it seems not only an especially viable adaptation of ‘ecovillage’ but also an intimation of a secret belief that I've been carrying, a belief that the current version of civilization is climaxing and will soon enter a regression phase, a phase previously termed “Dark Age.” During the regression phase in a cycle of civilization, monastic communities appear for the purpose of preserving the intellectual and cultural achievements of the preceding expansion phase until such time that they will be needed again. From this purview, an Academy of Village Design and a Community of Contemplative Scholars have many points of intersection.

I interviewed the now semi-retired professor at the “galactic headquarters” of his Institute in Ballard. The interview was the aftermath of one of the ongoing symposia we've managed to maintain. I consider these symposia valuable opportunities for me to continue to refine my thinking in dialectic engagement with a formidable intellectual presence as well as to take notice of the thread of understanding – or at least inquiry – that has defined my noetic quest. Since Dr. Burneko speaks in a sort of out-flowing oratory that references and cross-references numerous sources, sequentially building conceptual analogies and metaphors that seem to arise spontaneously from a narrating and incessantly questioning internal mind-space, I can only paraphrase the responses to my questions in the interview.

Did you coin the term “Community of Contemplative Scholars?” – The idea can trace its influence from Classical Greek and Buddhist tradition. It's also influenced by the book *Leisure: The Basis of Culture* by Josef Pieper as well as the writings of Thomas Merton. The word ‘school’ is derived from the Greek *skhole*, meaning leisure; thus real schooling ought to follow this course: taking a break, engaging in contemplative rather than instrumental learning.

Is the Community of Contemplative Scholars a residential situation? – In my case, yes, due to my nature as a ‘home-centered’ person. It is certainly something more extensive than semester or term-based learning. The temporal period is less important than the attentiveness that is stimulated by the context.

What would be the course of study? – This is a premature question. The course of study would arise out of the interest of the people involved and the nature of the emotional involvement. It would begin with the questions, interest, and wonder of *persons* rather than through adhering to the reductionistic packaging of *disciplines*. Whoever is involved will define the course of study. By definition, it will be the genuine concern of the unfolding of an eco-humane universe in dialogue with itself.

What would a typical day look like? – “Chop wood, carry water.” Make meals and meditate always with an eye toward combining technical needs with genuine interest. How does it come about in actual events? You have to wait to discover personal eccentricities.

This sounds pretty flexible – Begin with the interest of learners, ultimately thinking in terms of transformation, the transformative learning of a Mezirow or Freire.

Would a Community of Contemplative Scholars be of use for the world at large? – What is the use of a newborn baby?

How would a Community of Contemplative Scholars support themselves? – It begins with a simple lifestyle. It would help if they were doing something valuable, something useful in interaction with the surrounding community.

This starts to sound a little like Plato’s Academy – I don’t know enough about the Academy to say for sure. I think it would be more like a marriage between Plato’s Academy and those funky old Taoists who would settle down someplace to commune. In this case, you have to give up big powered engines and fancy clothes. It would seem to make sense in these days – a simplified version of bounty.

What kind of people would be attracted to participate in this type of community? – Obviously, people who find themselves thinking and talking about such things to begin with.

Will you ever live in such a community? – I don’t predict, but if the chemistry was right, who knows?

Could such a community be ‘designed’ or will it happen spontaneously? – Some of this needs to be designed; the rest will happen spontaneously. What is design anyway? Will it be *ego*-based or *eco*-based?

The transcription here is a very simplified account of a good half-hour of questioning followed by ornate discursive response. As with all the other interviews, there came a point when the energy peaked and it was obvious that the interview had run its course. After a few closing remarks, Dr. Burneko and I got up from the table and proceeded to the next phase of our lives.

As I was reflecting on what had just transpired, I found myself sympathizing on some deep primordial level with the vision; yet, since this was part of an Organization Development study, my thinking began to speculate on how to make it all *real*, tangible, manifest in 3-D physical form amidst a society where an ever increasing percentage of the population is scrambling just to pay the rent each month. Central to this dose of reality was considering how to make such a project *fundable*; and this has been a recurring theme – perhaps the foremost theme – in this Applied component to my KA\*717 study. From what I’ve gathered, there is no dearth of visions, including my own; what seems to be lacking is a systematic process for *bringing vision into reality*. Is this where the magic comes in?

Co-incidentally – very coincidentally – after I left Guy’s house I went to a Fielding Seattle Cluster meeting. At the meeting, two alums presented their vision for a “Life-long Center for Third-Age Adults.” Here was another variation of the ‘educational center’ motif! This is evidently a meme that is transversing the globe! As the conversation progressed, it became clear that the presenters had a wonderful, very relevant vision yet were searching for suggestions on how to make it all real (i.e. fundable). I had a chance to relay what had just happened at Guy’s house, hoping that there would be some cross-purposes, yet it seemed that the presenters were attached to their vision just the way it is. I thought back to the chapter “The Shared Vision” in Peter Senge’s book, *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization*. Senge describes what a challenge it is, how much ongoing effort it takes, and yet how vitally important to the success of an organization it is to forge a shared vision. I wondered if the Academy of Village Design, the Community of Contemplative Scholars, and the Life-long Center for Third-Age Adults could possibly forge a shared vision? If that were possible, it sure would make it a lot easier to procure funding.

INTERVIEW with Dave Henson, Executive Director of Occidental Arts and Ecology Center  
Sonoma County, California – Monday, 25 October 2010

It was Sylvia Hales who recommended that I speak with Dave Henson of the OAEC. Sylvia thought that it was important for me to gain Dave's perspective; for here was a person who had established successfully an educational center similar to what I was envisioning, yet who was a firm proponent of having an LLC own the land rather than entrusting it to a Land Trust. OAEC has a very good reputation among sustainable community educators so I reasoned it would be necessary to pursue Sylvia's lead. Dave graciously allotted me time for a "short" phone interview knowing very well that "these things always take longer than planned." I sent a copy of my CV ahead of the interview so my informant could "gauge the level of my commitment" and then rang up the number at the exact appointed hour as a sign of respecting the donation of his time.

Dave seemed enthusiastic to have his knowledge mined, explaining that other groups have sought his advice as well. He then congratulated me on the contents of my CV: "I think it's great the things you've been doing with your life." This was a very positive opening which afforded me the opportunity to relax in my seat and prepare for taking notes.

Dave began by giving the background to the establishment of the OAEC. Apparently, a collection of activists and artists out of college started meeting to envision a "land-based community," a place to continue and advance their social justice work. A core group of a dozen finally congealed and, from what I could gather, all are still involved with the project. I didn't get any specific dates but surmised from what I knew already that they are about ten years my senior. Dave directed me to Diana Leafe Christian's book *Starting a Life Together: Ecovillages and Sustainable Communities*, in which there is a chapter about the start-up of the OAEC.

Dave spoke in a rather forceful manner, laying out an energetic monologue for five minutes or so followed by a short pause in which I had the chance to mutter an "Oh, I see" before the next train of verbiage. Yet I didn't complain; for the information was very valuable indeed and was being given liberally.

Apparently, Dave had had some experience starting non-profits but that wasn't enough, so he went to Law School to learn more about "social change organizations." Upon hearing this, I retracted a little, for "social change" is one of those buzz words from which I want to distance myself. There was even more cause for concern as my informant entered a rambling discourse about some legal confrontations the project has encountered recently. The OAEC had been lobbying counties around the Bay Area in an effort to get GMO foods officially banned. They

must have been making some impact because big corporations like Monsanto responded by sending in their lawyers to investigate the books. From this I learned that the OAEC is a non-profit, and non-profits must disclose their accounting to the public upon request. Dave said this openness makes non-profits “super vulnerable,” since a thorough scrutiny of any modestly funded non-profit, whether by corporate attorneys or by the IRS, will almost certainly reveal a discrepancy or oversight.

I have to admit, I admire the courage of “social change organizations” like Dave’s; and, his story only reinforced the conviction that this is not my line of work. I don’t want to fight anybody; I want to be free to build something new. I also wondered why the OAEC would engage in such activities when non-profits, by law, are supposed to be *a*-political. The lobbying effort was a curious *non sequitur* since the OAEC website is arrayed with images of gardens and wind generators and quaint cottages, with a full listing of upcoming educational courses. If these folks are ten years my senior, then they would have been in college in the late 60s (perhaps in Berkeley!) so that would explain it.

After a couple more “Oh, I see,” Dave was off to his next discourse, and this was where it started getting meaningful.

Back at Law School, Dave developed a model whereby the *residents* of the sustainable community will own the land as partners in a Limited Liability Corporation (LLC). The educational non-profit – OAEC in this case – definitely will *not* own the land, as per the vulnerability issues mentioned above, but instead will lease the land from the LLC. So, in Dave’s model, there is an explicitly specified, legal reciprocal relationship between the entity holding title to the land and the entity doing the public service educational work. The specific purpose of the LLC – in this case owning the land for a community – will be defined in its “operating agreement.”

Another good reason for not having the non-profit own the land is because, by definition, no equity can be accumulated. Equity, being considered profit, must be funneled back into the non-profit and cannot accrue to any of its members. Dave said he saw too many examples where a group of individuals committed to a project would inevitably disperse – there is an inherent disconnect between “diving in for life” and not being able to build equity. Without the reality of “ownership,” these committed individuals would always be “looking over their shoulder to see where they will ‘finally’ land.” Staff at a non-profit center, no matter how much work they contribute, will tend to cycle in and out if there is no chance for building equity. Dave said the upkeep and maintenance for a land-based center are significant, so the people involved need to be committed for the long-term.

After another “Oh, I see,” I received a cursory education about taxes. The LLC has an advantage in that the entity is not taxed for income; the income is immediately distributed through a “K1,” a term I certainly will need to research further. This gives the LLC “incredible flexibility” according to the design of the operating agreement. The partners in an LLC can only

be liable up to the amount they have invested. The LLC structure also allows for the distribution of decision-making authority, such that only decision makers become liable. This means that partners with “deep pockets” need to be officially kept out of the decision-making loop. Dave provided many more facts about LLCs that make them attractive as land-holding entities; yet I have to admit it was all new language for me so it didn’t really sink in as I was listening and taking notes. I finally got the advice to get a book called *How to Form an LLC*, by Nolo Press in Oakland, a self-help legal publishing house.

After this set of instructions, a large enough pause opened up for me to begin asking a few questions. I inquired into the commonly held notion that one benefit of the Land Trust arrangement is that the land can be preserved “into perpetuity.” To this, my legally-educated informant responded that the actual legal definition does not go that far. I tested him about my long-held scheme, to the effect that if I create an attractive enough proposal based on an irresistible vision – and backed up with real solid experience – someone will donate land to my non-profit to see the vision manifest. Dave informed me this was not realistic: “Why would someone give you some of their wealth without wanting to direct the outcome?” He thought the only cases where a Land Trust is the right answer is when a donor appears *first*, or when someone with money wants to buy a piece of land and *then* set up a Trust. This sure deflated my whole idea of setting up a Land Trust initially to be the container for receiving a ‘gift’ of land.

I then had a chance to inquire about the idea of setting up a “Development Corporation” to guide the establishment of a sustainable community educational center. Dave thought this idea had merit, and then proceeded to fill in the blanks: First, such an initiative certainly would be an LLC organized in such a way as to attract investors. These investors may not want to live on the site but would be “alive with the same values.” These investors might be prepared to lend money at only 2% interest in exchange for participation in the project. Dave then outlined his idea for a “four-member LLC structure” that would fit this purpose, where one of the members is another LLC. This other LLC could contain up to fifty members; yet since they are not in the “decision-making loop” their investments will never be in jeopardy. In such a situation, I would need to draw a bubble-map of the organization of decision makers. In all cases, I will need to approach investors with a well-conceived business plan.

I have to admit, my interview with Dave Henson provided more than I expected. I started to think that I’m getting in over my head. It occurred to me that this Applied component of my KA\*717 study may need to settle for just doing the research without necessarily taking any legal action. Then again, there’s still a few more people I want to interview. I’m still in the information gathering stage so will postpone judgment till later.

INTERVIEW with Virginia Tucker, Law Librarian, Whatcom County Courthouse  
Monday, 8 November 2010

This was more of an ‘investigation’ than an ‘interview;’ nevertheless, I include it here because I was advised to speak to the Law Librarian during a previous interview with James Turner, the former Public Defender. After the requisite metal detector entry, I proceeded down to the basement of the courthouse where I discovered a large room full of volumes of legal precedent. I approached the window where I caught a glimpse of Ms. Virginia Tucker perched on a stool, brow furrowed in an obviously intense research on her computer. I assumed that Ms. Tucker must spend eight hours a day in this position, which would mean that she has accumulated more law research experience than anybody in the county! Seated at one end of the long polished oak tables was a short, rounded kind of man with a Miami Beach tan, busily flipping through one of these volumes of law precedent. By the nature of his dress, I assumed this man was a successful attorney hot on a new case. The whole atmosphere was foreign to me, rather stuffy; yet I reasoned that I would proceed if only to discover what an exchange would be like in such an environment.

After I caught Ms. Tucker’s attention, I stated the reason for my presence: “I’m currently pursuing a doctoral study called Organization Development, and an attorney friend of mine suggested I come here to see what I might find.” I proceeded to describe to Ms. Tucker my idea for establishing a Land Trust as the legal entity to hold title to a piece of land that would become an educational center. I could tell by her blank unresponsiveness that she had never heard of such an idea in all her long hours of law related research, so I spouted more details of the vision as if that would give her more clues on how to proceed. She finally seemed to have an inkling, saying “Let me check on that.” I waited patiently at the window, perfunctorily flipping through my notes in an effort to not seem *too* present; yet it was taking Ms. Tucker an exaggeratedly long time to make a response. I started looking around the room wondering if I had made an error in coming to this place; after all, I could probably make more progress on my own! Ms. Tucker finally got off her stool and entered the main room where the stacks of legal precedent stood in straight, clean rows. She came back with a couple large books that had torn pieces of paper marking sections in the books. She placed them on a small table up against the wall informing me that I might find a place to begin in the marked sections. I took off my jacket and sat down at the table noticing that it was dimly lit in comparison to where the successful attorney was sitting. The table also was placed in a position where Ms. Tucker, sitting on her

stool, could observe my activities from a side window in her office. Perhaps I wasn't dressed well enough to be offered one of the large oak tables?

The books she gave me were volumes from the series *American Jurisprudence, Second Edition* (2005). I opened the first book with a sense of exhilaration at my first exposure to legal precedent. The language was easy enough to comprehend, yet the level of detail was tedious: whole paragraphs devoted to the distinction between one term over another. I soon realized that she had provided with the volume concerning an introduction to the legal definition of "Trust." For example, one of the torn sheets of paper was inserted in a section entitled "Distinctions between Trusts and Other Concepts of Relationship." Here is an example of the language used in *American Jurisprudence*:

A trustee is not an agent of the trust estate or of the beneficiary, but acts for him or herself in the administration of the trust estate, although under restraint of the terms of the trust and of the law of trusts (Volume 76, p. 41).

I discovered that "Trust" is a very broad term with many possible applications – of which "Land Trust" is just one category with multiple varieties of its own. It seemed to me that in all cases, Trust was used to define a relationship whereby wealth was transferred from a donor to a beneficiary, mediated through an administrator called a "trustee," and bound explicitly by the terms of a "trust instrument."

As I read through this new, often tedious language, I took pause on occasion to glance up at the lights and contemplate the implications for my own vision. I reasoned that with such a hefty section of *American Jurisprudence* devoted to Trusts, of all kinds, this activity of transferring wealth from a donor to a beneficiary through the conditions of a "trust instrument" must indeed be more common than I would have at first surmised. I started to feel a glow or tingle inside: familiar body language telling me that I was on the right track. With this internal affirmation, I concluded that my purpose for this visit had been fulfilled.

I returned the volumes to Ms. Tucker at her window, thanking her and inquiring into one word in particular: "fiduciary." Instead of translating in her own words, she got up and located *Black's Law Dictionary*. According to this reference, a fiduciary is "One who must exercise a high standard of care in managing another's money or property." As an example, "the corporate officer is fiduciary to the corporation." I figured that my non-profit could be fiduciary to a large holder of land who resonated with the vision of having one part set aside for the purpose of establishing an international Academy of Village Design. Maybe, contrary to Dave Henson's opinion, this vision is not so far-fetched after all? There seems to be a major consideration here in maintaining control of the vision. The exact nature of the relationship would need to be explicitly defined in the "trust instrument."

INTERVIEW with Connie Clement, Director for Whatcom Land Trust  
Thursday, 18 November 2010

This wasn't really an 'interview' in the sense of a planned meeting; for I stumbled upon the office of the Whatcom Land Trust by chance. Deeming this serendipity, I decided to go inside and see what I might discover.

I opened the door to what was a warmly 'den' type of environment rather than the typical cold, sterile office. There was a big old comfortable-looking couch up against the wall lined by home-spun paintings. The front desk was partially hidden behind a chest-high bookshelf stacked with magazines. After I finally got my bearings and noticed someone seated at the desk (who had already noticed me), I introduced myself: "Hi, I'm currently involved with a doctoral study in which I'm looking at the possibility of setting up a Land Trust and I was hoping to get some information." The friendly-looking receptionist acknowledged, "Oh, information – then you'll need to speak with the Director." She then called out, "Connie, we need some information." Connie Clement, who was seated at a large desk in an adjacent room, yet one without a dividing wall, immediately sprang to her feet and approached me with searching eyes. I once again described the purpose for my spontaneous visit in a more loquacious manner.

The Director of the Whatcom Land Trust listened carefully to my explanation and then responded by saying, "None of our properties have any built structures on them." As she proceeded to describe the characteristics of their holdings, I realized that this was a "conservation" Land Trust. Since what I had in mind would require another type of Land Trust, I thought it would be useful to explain in a little more detail how I envisioned the Land Trust as a strategy for securing land to set up an "educational center." Connie did not seem as enthusiastic as I was about this strategy. She informed me that in today's "economic climate," educational centers are struggling and nobody's giving land away. She then reiterated the point that the properties in the Whatcom Land Trust do not have any built structures on them – they are conservation easements. With this reiteration, I finally realized that she perceived the purpose of my visit as one to explore the possibility of me securing land through *her* Land Trust!

It seemed apparent that we weren't really connecting. As she provided even more evidence to deflect me away from my mission, a compassionate love for this woman started to swell inside me. I figured that, as the Director of a non-profit, she probably works long hours for little pay. It was probably a sense of wanting to do 'good' that first got her involved with non-profits. And now, here Life set us up in a spontaneous exchange that wasn't going anywhere, an exchange in which she apparently felt the need to firmly delimit the purpose of her organization. I imagined her position was motivated by the reality of increasingly scant

resources being divvied up among the existing non-profits in the area – so how could she possibly support the idea of a new non-profit/Land Trust entering the scene?

I reasoned that there might still be a chance to glean something useful from our exchange, so I decided to modify my angle. I told her that I searched the Secretary of State’s website but could find no information on setting up Land Trusts. I inquired, “How was the Whatcom Land Trust incorporated?” In the ensuing round of communication, I came to understand that a “Land Trust” is just another category of “non-profit” – the distinction is merely in the details of the purpose as articulated in the Articles of Incorporation. In all cases, the goal is to get 501c3 status so as to be able receive federal funding and tax-deductible donations. This simple realization suddenly shed light on my entire proposed Project! Why would I go through the protracted effort of setting up another “non-profit” – including convening a Board with the necessary periodic Board meetings – when, as a full-time doctoral student, I can barely keep up with the commitments to my existing non-profit?

Upon revealing the final destination of my vision, that is, establishing an “ecovillage demonstration site,” Connie Clement directed me to the Kulshan Community Land Trust. I quietly smiled inside as I replied, “I’ve already spoken with Dean” (Dean Fearing: my old buddy from Fairhaven College!). I was informed that the Board of Kulshan is open to new and innovative ideas (I met a couple of the Board members at a Halloween party at Dean’s house!). With the infusion of all this new useful information, I assumed that the purpose of our serendipitous meeting had been consummated. I graciously thanked Connie for her time and made a polite exit.

In the culminating hours since our meeting, I’ve come to feel that the activities of my KA\*717 Applied component have likewise culminated. I’ve come to accept (with a little sigh of relief) that there is no need for me to establish another organization – indeed the effort would be counterproductive. The most opportunistic plan of action I can now embark upon is qualitatively improving the presence and perceived professionalism of my *existing* organization – the Village Design Institute! Once my non-profit is up to speed, so to speak, I can focus on cultivating beneficial relationships with already established non-profits in the area – including Kulshan Community Land Trust, Evergreen Land Trust, and Whatcom Land Trust. They already have the infrastructure in place. I can now imagine focusing on the strategy of *partnerships*. This takes me back to my earlier interview with Bill Sterling, who suggested this very same option. What I’m left with is the potentiality of settling into my old hometown of Bellingham as the President/Director of an internationally connected educational non-profit, forging mutually-productive relationships that will have the benefit of bringing world-class education to existing projects in the area. We are all friends and neighbors.

What about the option of setting up a *for-profit* LLC development corporation to partner with Village Design Institute? What about the organizational DNA? What about the magic?

## Academy of Village Design Project Overview



In order to appreciate the need for an Academy of Village Design, some preliminary understanding needs first to be integrated. This understanding is based upon recognizing two fundamental principles:

- 1) The Age of Oil provided the means, through cheap and available energy, to allow the proliferation of settlement patterns that are vastly unsustainable. Whether in the dense concentration of cities, the institutionalized sprawl of suburbs, or the dispersed piecemeal agglomeration of rural areas, these patterns can only persist with a continuous influx of cheap available energy. Any future scenario that includes 'energy descent' – that is, downgrading to conditions of less available energy – will require the re-organization and retrofit of these existing settlement patterns.
- 2) The perennial 'village,' with all its intrinsic multifarious characteristics, is the most sustainable of settlement patterns and is therefore the model to emulate during any re-organization and retrofit scenario.

These two principles stand as axiomatic, the basis for all subsequent inquiry. I have produced a copious body of literature over the years to substantiate these principles. This body of literature is available through the website of the Village Design Institute – [www.villagedesign.org](http://www.villagedesign.org). Once these principles have been integrated, it becomes apparent that the comprehensive solution for an anticipated scenario of 'energy descent' requires the articulation of "Village Design" as both a coherent body of knowledge and a systemic process of re-organization and retrofit.

There does not yet exist anywhere in the world an institution devoted to these goals. There are, of course, in these days, numerous initiatives attending to one aspect or another of the overarching theme 'sustainable community design,' yet nowhere am I aware of an effort to place all these aspects into a rigorous, multi-disciplinary, multi-dimensional, whole educational package that can lead to professional development in this emerging field. This absence opens up the niche for an Academy of Village Design. The Academy of Village Design will have as its purpose educating and training professional "community leaders" in the emerging field of Village Design.

When I say "Village Design," I am thinking of three primary applications: ecovillage, urban village, and rural (oftentimes described as 'traditional') village. While each of these applications is relevant to particular contexts, they all share the incorporation of the same basic Village Design principles. In order to illustrate the different contexts in which these variations may occur, it will be useful to speak about each in turn:

- 1) Ecovillage – The Ecovillage is primarily a “research, training, and demonstration site,” a sustainable community prototype. For the past 30 or 40 years, various ecovillages have been popping up around the globe as the vanguard of the sustainable community transition. Each of these ecovillages emphasizes, to varying degrees, the four pillars of sustainability as defined by the Global Ecovillage Network – Economic, Ecological, Social, and Worldview (or Cultural-Spiritual). The purpose of the Ecovillage is to demonstrate how the various leading-edge technologies of these four pillars may be integrated and applied in a real-world community setting; as such, the Ecovillage is inherently an educational model. Indeed, thousands of people every year flock to the Ecovillages to learn about the various aspects of ‘sustainability’ and to experience what it’s like to be on the vanguard of planetary evolution. The Ecovillage, however, is generally conceived as an “intentional community,” a close-knit group who has come together for a specific purpose – and this limits its universal applicability, for the majority of the world’s population is not yet ready to immerse themselves in social experimentation of this kind. Nevertheless, the ecovillage has a real purpose, for the proliferation of “research, training, and demonstration sites” in existing communities all across the globe is urgently needed.
- 2) Urban Village: The Urban Village could be considered the fundamental retrofit pattern for the transition of existing cities to a more sustainable form – and sub-urban areas also could be included here. The term “Urban Village” is currently enjoying widespread support among the planning profession; however, in a recent doctoral study which included a broad survey of this usage, I found the applications consistently falling short of their potential. Part of the reason, I believe, is that urban planners are generally not educated in broad, trans-disciplinary, systemic thinking – yet another reason lies in the fact that the concept is still a theoretical construct, lacking specific examples to draw from. In far too many cases, the term Urban Village is being applied to frivolous developments like “upscale shopping districts,” or is simply relegated as an expression of the far more conceptually limited “New Urbanism” idea. In a book entitled *The Urban Village: Synergy of Ecology and Urbanism*, I presented in some detail a more systems-oriented approach to this emerging theme that would give it more of the qualities of a real village. For example, each Urban Village ought to have a well-defined center and a well-defined boundary, and ought to begin moving towards instituting internal economies, agriculture, and political self-determination – in short, each Urban Village ought to become a sustainable unit unto itself. In the palette of Village Design applications, the Urban Village still has enormous potential for creative conceptualization.
- 3) Rural Village: I often used to insist that the ‘traditional village’ is the model to emulate; however, I’ve been around the world enough now to realize that the ‘traditional village’ is more a sentimental reminiscence than an actual operational reality. Through the medium of ‘globalization,’ pop consumer culture has infiltrated every nook and cranny of the globe, and ‘traditional villagers’ everywhere are scurrying to throw off their perennial ways so that they may appear ‘modernized.’ Unfortunately, modernization in this sense usually means superficially adopting the external trappings of progress while consequentially undermining traditional sustainable ways. In this process, the people are indiscriminately

and whole-heartedly infusing the very *unsustainable* ways from which educated people in the developed world are attempting to extricate themselves! The sad irony is that the former traditional villagers will never be able to achieve consumption levels – and the satisfaction that these are supposed to bring – that the developed world has come to take for granted. Nevertheless, the basic pattern of ‘traditional village’ the world over still has intact essential infrastructure that will enable a scenario of energy descent to be far more painless than it will be for random assemblies in the civilized world lacking this infrastructure. As such, whether in Tuscany or Thailand, there is still much to learn from the perennial village pattern.

Perhaps now, by understanding the applications, it will be easier to recognize the nature of both the coherent body of knowledge and the systemic process of re-organization that will constitute the curriculum and the pedagogy of the Academy.

Curriculum – What does one need to know in order to design a sustainable village? The prevailing academic strategy of gaining expertise in one particular discipline simply will not do! Quite to the contrary, the competent Village Designer will need to be able to access many fields of knowledge simultaneously; thus the curriculum for the Academy is inherently inter-, multi-, and trans-disciplinary. I approached my self-designed B.A. – “Village Design: Ekistics for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century” – as if it were to be a proto-curriculum for this emerging field, so the basic structure of that curriculum would be a good place to start. I chose as the overall theme “Human Ecology.” This over-arching theme was split into three branches: “Physical Human Ecology,” “Social Human Ecology,” and “Applied Human Ecology,” or Permaculture. Physical Human Ecology was subdivided into two categories: “Natural Sciences” and “Natural Processes,” while Social Human Ecology was more diverse, including the categories “Psychology,” “Anthropology,” “The Arts,” “Spirituality and Religion,” “Economics,” and “Human Relationships.” Each of these categories had at least four and up to eight course titles within it. For example, Natural Processes included the course titles: Patterns in Nature, Bioregionalism, Ecological Design, A Pattern Language, Geomancy/Feng Shui, Systems Theory, Introduction to Organic Astrology, and Awareness through the Body. Some of the course titles were offered at the university; those that were not, yet which I considered to be vital to an education in Village Design, were organized as Independent Studies.

The point here is not to suggest that every course title I chose to place in this proto-curriculum would be relevant for everybody in every application; this is, however, an heuristic example of a ‘whole systems design’ approach to education. The overarching branches and categories listed above may be replicable, in the similar way my current doctoral program uses a core set of “Knowledge Areas” as a framework. The purpose of the curriculum is to provide a broad inter-, multi-, and trans-disciplinary introduction to the fundamental principles one needs to know and integrate in order to become a competent Village Designer. Specific course titles in a program at the Academy would be adapted to an individual’s inclination and goals; however, a core curriculum should remain mandatory so that everybody’s speaking the same language.

Very important is the inclusion of the Applied component to the curriculum. As knowledge is gained, it is translated into *knowing* through application and the modification of behavior. In

my case, I had a chance to travel to various sites around the globe and participate in real projects while taking courses organized by pioneers in the field. I also took the opportunity to study some traditional villages. This is a precedent worth repeating because it strengthens the network and provides valuable cross-cultural perspectives. In the Academy, students will initiate design applications – at multiple scales and in real world contexts – from the very beginning of their programs; thus “design,” as a discipline, will need to be one of the core knowledge areas.

Pedagogy – Pedagogy describes the process of teaching. In this regard, I wish to refer to the original Academy, Plato’s. In the original Academy, there was not a firm distinction between “students” and “teachers:” everybody was considered to be self-motivated learners at various stages of inquiry. The primary pedagogical tool was ‘dialogue.’ Small groups working on similar problems would engage in conversation for the purpose of bringing to light and clarifying the nature of the problems. ‘Dialectic’ was a special form of dialogue in which a series of questions would be posed to a learner for the purpose of sharpening thinking. One would expect that both dialogue and dialectic would be most productive among groups of individuals who had read widely beforehand; thus, there will be an inherent scholarly appreciation at the Academy of Village Design. Unlike many academic programs, where reading can be followed by writing in an almost private exchange, the new Academy will foster a process of extensive reading followed by expansive dialogue *before* the writing. All three stages are essential – and with such a multi-disciplinary curriculum, the reading, dialoguing, and writing could range widely indeed, yet would always remain centered upon the 1 fundamental problem: how to create sustainable communities at village scale.

While reading, dialoguing, and writing exercise primarily the left hemisphere of the brain, the pedagogy at the new Academy will give equal measure to exercising the right hemisphere – and here I am speaking of fostering an atmosphere of unbounded creativity. While it is generally known that activities such as drawing, painting, and playing music stimulate this left hemisphere, it is not so widely known that storytelling also can contribute to this function. We can imagine a lively campus setting with ongoing musical concerts and theatrical performances orchestrated by the students themselves, followed by mysterious storytelling around the campfire at night – this is how mythologies are generated! All this creative activity finally gets focused and structured in the Design Studio, where students begin applying their developing knowledge and burgeoning creativity to the solution of actual design problems. The methodology in the Design Studio will emphasize sketching and freehand drawing, and the production of detailed site plans with manual tools. Computer-aided graphics will be used only to prepare presentations for the public, including city councils.

Nature and the apprehension of natural processes also will be included as pedagogy; after all, Nature is the primary model to study in the design of sustainable communities. In order to grasp the essence of natural processes, gardening will be practiced by everyone. Here, students get a chance to plant seeds and then care for them as they sprout and grow. Soil needs to be prepared and beds tended. Companion planting will be practiced, with annuals and perennials alike, until diverse polycultures are formed. In my opinion, there is no better way to study Nature than to observe how these polycultures grow and interact over time. Permaculture is introduced

to encourage systems thinking at the interface of natural and human systems, where plants, animals, energy, construction, water catchment and waste recycling are all conceptualized as a coherent, inter-connecting, sustainable whole. Finally, depending on the season, students will harvest the plants and animals they have cultivated, creating meals and value-added products for themselves. I used to like to say, "How can you design a sustainable village without first knowing how to cultivate a thriving garden?"

One more pedagogical strategy needs to be introduced in this Project Overview, a strategy that can be summarized with the expression "whole body awareness." Effective design is understood as a process engaging *all* the senses; it is not merely the outcome of the implementation of a set of theories contained in the head. The new Academy will be a place where 'consciousness' is understood as a whole-body phenomenon; as such, there will be a deliberate focus not only on exercising the body (what the Greeks used to call 'gymnastics') but also on maintaining attention to body awareness throughout diverse activities, including design. For my upcoming doctoral dissertation, I intend to design a Design Studio process that can be framed as 'yogic' practice. This will become a distinguishing characteristic of sustainable community design as practiced at the Academy of Village Design – for 'yoga' means union, union with the Divine.

This has been an overview of the curriculum and pedagogy that will be instituted at the Academy of Village Design. Now, what about the setting, including the actual physical characteristics of the site?

Such a program obviously will work best as a residential arrangement – a model "ecovillage" in the sense of "research, training, and demonstrate site" for "sustainable living in community" or "modeling low-carbon lifestyles." Faculty and staff will have their respective residential clusters; there also will be two residential clusters set aside for "students" – thus four clusters total, oriented to the four directions. The residential clusters will be situated around a multi-use community building at the center. This "community center" will house office space, an industrial-grade kitchen with adjoining dining hall, laundry facilities, mailboxes, a recreation room, a music room with recording equipment, a HAM radio station, child care, and guest rooms – similar in function to the central house of a co-housing arrangement. As such, it is assumed that meals will be taken communally and the community center will be the nexus for domestic activities. Upon the grounds adjacent to the community center will be a "green," dominated by a solar-powered outdoor stage with plenty of dance space, and flanked by a volleyball court, various tables and seating arrangements, a barbecue pit, a substantial kitchen garden, and a playground for youngsters.

Situated at some remote walking distance, depending on the size and characteristics of the site, will be the educational complex. Included here will be classrooms, a well-stocked library with reading rooms, a state-of-the-art computer lab, and a full-featured Design Studio full of drawing tables and all sorts of artistic media. Within the confines of the educational complex will be found demonstration gardens and test-plots, a large multi-purpose greenhouse, and a large multi-purpose workshop. We may also imagine outdoor classroom space for the fairest of weather.

Situated at some other remote walking distance from the community center will be found the "ashram." Here will be located the meditation hall, a studio for yoga and tai chi, and adjacent rooms for the practice of the healing arts, including massage, ayurveda, acupuncture, energy work of various modalities, and wholistic counseling. In an earlier version of this Project Overview, I described the ashram as being the "yin" component complementing and fulfilling the "yang" presence of the educational complex. In this sense, spiritual practice is understood to be an integral and vital aspect of not only "living in community" but also of understanding the more subtle dimensions of "sustainable community design," for there was an integrating spiritual core to every traditional sustainable village culture.

As a Project Overview, this paper is not the place to indulge in too much detail; yet there remain a couple more points that ought to be covered in order to get a more complete picture of the project as a whole.

First, the student body: The Global Ecovillage Network formulated a vision they called "Living and Learning Centers." These were to be organized as a network of educational complexes spread out across the globe, comprising many of the existing ecovillages and also including potential "research, training, and demonstration sites" like the one being described here. As a network, students would have the opportunity, resources permitting, to travel from Center to Center learning and integrating whatever specialties were inherent to each particular site. The Academy of Village Design would serve as a strong anchor in this network since its 'specialty' is offering rigorous, multi-dimensional education in the Fundamentals of Village Design. Such a program would be ideally suited to complement existing university degree programs or to become a comprehensive accredited degree program of its own. Thus the student body would be a lively mixture of inquisitive learners at various stages of inquiry and commitment, and comprising in totality an international cast. Faculty and staff would be the permanent residents, ideally building equity through their participation.

The second closing point elucidates the significance of the term "demonstration site." The first big design challenge will be designing the Academy itself – for this will become a place where people come to see how it is done, how all the various systems of 'sustainability' are integrated together into a working whole. Yet beyond that, this Project has the chance to explore virgin territory: recently I've become fascinated with the prospect of 'designing for consciousness.' This is an idea still in gestation, yet some of the principal features include creating an environment that optimally stimulates the nervous system, incorporating "sacred geometries" as the foundational layers to the site plan, and practicing various geomantic arts, including Feng Shui. The opportunity exists to have manifest a finely-tuned energy field, a vibrantly pulsating dome of light wherein consciousness is expanded just by moving about the place. These qualities would make the Academy of Village Design an educational center of the highest order, a gateway into the 3<sup>rd</sup> Millennium.

Project Overview prepared November 2010 by:  
E. Christopher Mare – President, Village Design Institute

## Sustaining the Magic in an Organization

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What is “magic” anyway? A survey of the academic literature reveals two primary orientations: 1) Various practices of pre-literate societies – such as shamanism, voodoo, sorcery, etc. – designed to make contact with and influence the supernatural realm (see for instance Hammond 1969; Jeffers 2007; Malinowski 1979; Palmer, et al. 2010); and 2) Special feelings of wonder, awe, and amusement usually reserved for childhood (for example Gunn and Cloud 2010; Hickling 1994; Wooley et al. 1999). Neither of these orientations has much relevance to the field of Organization Development. My trusty American Heritage dictionary is a little more helpful: “magic” definition number 4 states: “Any mysterious and overpowering quality that lends singular distinction and enchantment.” We could probably work with this one; yet it is still rather vague and far too singular. What I have in mind when I think of “magic,” based on personal experience, is more of an all-pervading atmosphere, an atmosphere where qualities like “wonder” and “enchantment” may indeed be present, yet where practical accomplishments also are greatly facilitated.

Outside the realm of academic literature, I found a very useful book for helping to understand “magic” as it may be applied to organizations – *Everyday Miracles: The Inner Art of Manifestation* by David Spangler (1996). Spangler, a self proclaimed “free-lance mystic,” was an influential figure at the spiritual community of Findhorn during the early 1970s, a time when the community was growing rapidly and earning a global reputation as a center of “magic.”<sup>1</sup> What made the community magical was a shared sense of openly participating in what could be called a “higher order reality.” As an example, the community’s founders would often go into meditation to communicate with “devas,” or nature spirits. The devas, as the legend goes, would provide specific instructions for how to grow vegetables in the surrounding nutrient-sparse sand of their beach spit, northern Scotland location; and, miraculously, these vegetables would grow to enormous size, attracting the attention of visitors from around the world.

Spangler emphasizes the spirit of “manifestation” that permeated the place in those days. In his book, manifestation is defined as “the act of making something invisible visible. It is the act of turning something abstract into something concrete and something potential into something real (p. 3).” As an example of manifestation in action, the story is told of how the community was constructing an important building called the “Universal Hall,” a large auditorium where performances would be held. As the building was nearing completion, the construction team ran out of materials. Very soon, a lorry driving by on the highway adjacent to

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<sup>1</sup> See Paul Hawken (1975) *The Magic of Findhorn*, New York; Harper & Row

the community unexplainably spilled some construction materials onto the side of the road – and these turned out to be just the materials the community needed to finish the project! Or there was the time when some tiles had been gathered to floor a studio, yet nobody in the community had tile-laying experience. On the day the project was scheduled to begin, a visitor entered the community who just happened to be a professional tile-layer! Extraordinary synchronicities like this became so commonplace that the community assumed they were living in a higher order reality – though, of course, techniques of visualization, affirmation, and positive thinking were practiced assiduously in the belief that these would ensure the continuation of the magical manifestations.

Therefore, using Spangler’s material as a guide – though I wish to expand on his notions by adding some ideas of my own – in the context of this essay I wish to define “magic” as *a heightened state of awareness in which conscious connections are made with the creative flows of the universe offering expanded potentials for bringing vision into reality*. Perhaps this is not so different from the anthropological explanation after all?

The initiation of a new project, idea, or vision is fresh with unobstructed opportunity and anticipation. Accordingly, a palpable sense of “magic” may be present at the outset, perhaps going so far as a feeling that the new initiative is somehow riding the wave of planetary evolution. However, the excitement, enthusiasm, and optimism that generally characterize the start-up of an organization usually diminish and recede as the organization enters its routine operational phase. The question then becomes, “What can be done to sustain the magic?”

I will answer this question from three complementary perspectives: 1) The energy present at the very moment of initiation is crucially defining; 2) There are measures that can be taken periodically to renew, refresh, and revitalize the initiating energy; and 3) Attitude is all important. Each of these perspectives will now be taken in turn.

The start-up of an organization can be likened to a birth – in a very real sense it *is* a birth: the birth of a new entity on the world stage. Just as a human being will be born with defining characteristics, so too an organization will be born with the same. The characteristics of a new-born human being are defined by its genetic inheritance, understood to be carried in the pattern of DNA in its cells. Further, the pattern of DNA ascribed to any particular human being is the unalterable consequence of the combined DNA patterning of its donor parents, given at the time of insemination. Therefore, if we use DNA as a metaphor for the genetic inheritance of an *organization*, we can imagine a situation whereby the DNA patterning can be designed or programmed, and not left to a perhaps chance encounter as it may be in a human being.

Spangler devotes a whole chapter to a general “Genetics of Manifestation,” principles which we can apply to the particular “manifestation” of an organization.<sup>2</sup>

Imagine the DNA molecule. You have probably seen pictures of the two strands twisting and curving about each other. Each strand contains four nitrogenous bases: adenine, guanine, thymine, and cytosine...It is at these four bases that the two strands are joined by bonds of hydrogen, a bonding that unites the strands and forms the double helix.

With this image in mind as a metaphor, consider yourself and the object of your desire. You are each strands of identity, strands of being, curving from the most particulate level of material existence to the wavelike levels of the enfolded order, unity, and the mystery of the sacred. Like chemical DNA, you seek to connect at four points: as forms, as patterns, as essences, and as participants in unity (p. 122).

Spangler then proceeds to articulate the process whereby the four connecting points to the double helix can be visualized as four aspects of the manifestation project: the form, pattern, essence, and unity introduced above. “In practical terms, the double helix will take the form of a psychological and spiritual construct or image” (p. 123). This is translated as the “Seed Image.” Exercises are then provided as guides to visualizing the four aspects in relation to the particular manifestation project underway. If the manifestation project was giving birth to a new organization, then the form, pattern, essence, and unity of the organization each would be given separate space for purposeful visualization followed by documentation of the results. The visualization exercises could be done individually or within a core group. Once some clarity had been achieved, a ritual could then be performed whereby the comprehensive “Seed Image” would be metaphorically “planted” into the fertile ground of an objective reality. Ideally, the fertile ground would be prepared in advance, for obviously you would not want to plant a potent Seed Image into infertile or unreceptive objective reality!

I find Spangler’s manifestation process to be an interesting example of using the biological structures of life as a framework for purposeful human adaptation. Morgan (1986) already emphasized the necessity of replacing “mechanistic” metaphors with “organic” metaphors in the complexity of the modern organization development climate. However, I would make a distinction between the “creation” and “manifestation” phases of the process. In my conceptualization, “creation” is the outward moving, directed energy of the visualization sequence; “manifestation” is the receptive awaiting to see how the creative flows of the universe respond to our initial outpouring. According to this view, we do not or can we ever “manifest;” rather the project manifests *itself*. We can be very careful and attentive in *creating* the Seed Image; however, we cannot control how the universe will respond in *its* manifestation. This distinction may be subtle but I believe very important. In an earlier paper, *The Tao of*

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<sup>2</sup> I enclose “manifestation” here in quotes because later I want to make an important distinction between “creation” and “manifestation,” concepts which Spangler seems to use interchangeably.

*Manifestation*, I explained how the creative outpouring phase could be described as the *yang* and the receptive awaiting phase the *yin* of a total 'tai chi' symbology of organic development. Sometimes you advance and sometimes you withdraw. While beyond the scope of this paper, these considerations add a further layer to the conscious attention that may be given to ensuring an auspicious birth to a new organization.

A colleague of mine, Ariane Burgess, founder of the organization Regenerative Culture, has further insights into the use of the DNA metaphor as applied to organization development. I quote from an email she sent on 3 June 2010, part of an ongoing conversation we've been having concerning these thought processes:

On the DNA – through observation I see that when something is conceived to be manifest that the moment of conceiving is really crucial – we need to be as conscious as we possibly can with what we choose to put into the seed form we are creating. Of course this is a challenge because unless we are enlightened there will always be unconscious elements that sneak in – these are there for our growth benefit.

Ariane displays here her sensitivity to not only the "seed form" but also to what might be called the "seed moment." Who was it that first said "timing is everything?"<sup>3</sup> Part of Ariane's insight comes from having moved recently from New York City to the Findhorn community, where her mother lives. Ariane observes that Findhorn began in the mid-1960s, and the original founders were born sometime in the 1920s. According to Ariane's sensitive impression, this legacy carries a psychic imprint that is noticeably present in the community of today. Apparently, the community is feeling "stuck," with ingrained patterns of behavior and worldviews preventing them from moving forward to establish a posture more consistent with contemporary realities. There is even an effort to reinvigorate the practice of communicating with nature spirits so as to recapture some of the original "magic." So we see here that even a community like Findhorn can embody life-cycle dynamics characteristic of an "organization."

Yet let's look a little closer at this idea that "the moment of conceiving is really crucial" because it carries the tone – and even the language – of the birth metaphor. When was Findhorn actually "conceived?" Unlike an "organization," where the instant of conception can be accurately pinpointed to, say, the moment when a group of partners decided with a handshake to move forward with the project – or even more specifically, when the organization was actually incorporated as a legal entity in its own right – the conceiving of Findhorn must have been much more nebulous. We can verify that the founders arrived at the location sometime in the mid-1960s and that others started to be attracted to the place shortly

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<sup>3</sup> "In all events, influence over coincidences is everywhere the ambition of magic...Working with Malinowski's approach, I propose to define magic as any effort to produce miracles on demand. Although some miracles are claimed to violate laws of natural science, many and perhaps most are natural events whose miraculous character consists of their *timing*" (Merkur, 2009, p. 148, emphasis added).

thereafter, but there is no way of accurately recalling the moment, much less the defining qualities inherent in that moment, when “Findhorn” became a unique entity leading an individualized existence in its own right. Indeed, Findhorn calls itself an *un-intentional* community since nobody ever *planned* for its appearance nor prepared something like a mission statement to guide its development. It all just sort of happened.

What does this say about the idea that we can sustain the magic in an organization by designing or programming its DNA? For here is an organization world-renowned for an ongoing quality of magic, yet there was no conception, no starting point, and therefore no possibility of interpreting its DNA. I do not have any answers at this stage of my inquiry; though I imagine a clue can be found by recognizing the fervor of “manifestation” that infused the community in its early days. Perhaps Findhorn really was the manifestation of the creative flows of the universe operating at a higher order reality? Contemplating this extraordinary notion gave me a little shudder when I recalled that the last time I was there an emotional topic of discussion was the fact that Findhorn lies below sea level and is very close to the North Sea. The anticipated sea-level rise during a scenario of global warming will one day inundate the community, after which the stories of magic will become legend for future generations to ponder.

I have some insights of my own regarding this perspective that sustaining the magic in an organization has something to do with paying careful attention to the conditions present at its “birth;” and this insight comes from a nearly 30-year investigation into the dynamics of astrology. While I know that astrology often gets bad press and is usually dismissed as frivolous or fanciful – or even worse, “occult” – nevertheless, I have discerned recurring patterns of order and meaning through its study. The approach I use in astrology is called “evolutionary:” it looks at the diurnal motion of the planets (including Sun and Moon), their interactive interrelationships, and how these dynamics are reflected in events and life-cycles on Earth, including the lives of individual human beings. While far too detailed to entertain an adequate discussion here, the essential point for our concern is that meaningful analysis depends on the accurate construction of a “birth chart” displaying the pattern of planets and their orientation to a particular place on Earth at a specific point in time. A birth chart can be constructed for an individual, an event, or even an organization and becomes a ‘roadmap of potentialities’ that can guide the growth and development of the entity over time.

I used this knowledge when incorporating my educational non-profit, Village Design Institute, in 2002. Around the time in my life when setting up a non-profit seemed like an opportune strategy for advancing my goals, I began consulting my ephemeris to locate an auspicious arrangement of planets in the near future. I noticed a particularly creative pattern peaking on December 12<sup>th</sup>. This pattern was not only creative in itself, it made numerous beneficial aspects to my natal birth chart. Accordingly, I decided that this date would be a very good ‘birthday’ for my new organization. With the benefit of this knowledge, I sent off the incorporation papers requesting that the new entity be officially recorded on 12 December

2002. I even added a little note asking if the exact time of day could be noted for the very reason that I wanted to practice studying the astrology of the new corporation. To my delight, the office of the Secretary of State responded by sending me my official papers with a slip from a teletype branded with the information “recorded at 2:02.” Thus, I was able to construct an accurate birth chart for the educational non-profit Village Design Institute.

The advantages of having a birth chart for issues of organization development are twofold: 1) Deep understanding can be gained into the innate qualities and characteristics of the organization, its ‘personality,’ including how this personality may be perceived by the outside world; and 2) The dynamics of unfolding opportunities over time can be accurately perceived and analyzed, thus offering a tool for decision-making. This second benefit, especially, can be very valuable for the timing of actions. By monitoring planetary transits as they relate to and interact with the natal chart, recommended periods of advance and withdrawal can be discerned clearly; periods for investment and risk-taking can be compared with periods when it’s obviously more favorable to assume a conservative posture. A new opportunity that appears to be very promising on the surface may reveal underlying dynamics that could lead to contention or misunderstandings. As an example from the Village Design Institute, I know that transiting Pluto will be making a conjunction over the next few years with the organization’s natal Mercury. The symbolism here is that this will be an excellent time to communicate the organization’s purpose to the world. Investment in presenting and distributing ideas and writings should be handsomely rewarded; or at least I know that this is the time to focus on such activities.

So we see that utilizing the discipline of astrology as a technique for influencing the qualities and characteristics of an organization at the moment of conception can be another way to sustain the magic. Potential peak periods can be energized for maximum effect. By doing so, we are connecting with the “creative flows of the universe” to offer “expanded potentials for bringing vision into reality.” Soon I will be setting up a Limited Liability Company to partner with my non-profit – and you can be sure that I am already scanning the horizon to locate an auspicious planetary configuration to serve as the birth pattern for this new organization.

The second consideration that was introduced as a method for sustaining the magic in an organization was described as “there are measures that can be taken periodically to renew, refresh, and revitalize the initiating energy.” The people I talked with about these ideas unambiguously encapsulated this second consideration as “ritual.” My trusty American Heritage defines ritual as, “The prescribed form or order of conducting a religious or solemn ceremony” – to which I would reply, “Nonsense!” Why can’t rituals be celebratory and uplifting, even pompous or flamboyant, maybe even at times outright silly?

I prefer the approach taken by my friend Sylvia Hales, registered agent for the Village Design Institute. According to Sylvia, “In community we hold magic through intent, and we imprint the intent through ritual...Magic is a way to come into harmony; daily and seasonal rituals sustain the magic through meaning-making and intent” (personal communication, 1 December 2010). I have been to some of the rituals at Sylvia’s place and I can say most assuredly that they were not anything like “solemn.” For example, there was the annual solstice ritual in which a maypole was raised, festooned with brightly colored ribbons and crowned with a bouquet of fresh-cut flowers. Children dressed in fairy costumes and grinning adults grasped the ribbons while walking in a circle to wrap the ribbons around the pole, all the while affirming something to the effect, “Thank you for our many blessings; may you continue to shine favorably on all our activities.” This particular ritual was designed to maintain beneficial relations with the annual solar rhythm. Another seasonal ritual at Sylvia’s place is the annual autumnal “Cider Press Fest,” a time when friends are gathered to harvest the abundant apples on site and convert them into fresh cider. This ritual, besides the very practical function of coordinating a collective apple harvest, is designed to reaffirm the original intentions for starting the community. Seasonal rituals like these can be complemented with daily rituals such as performing a morning “sun salutation” or even simply by offering a prayer before a meal. Each of these rituals has a common purpose: reconnecting with and sustaining the magic – that is, the heightened awareness of opportunities for expanded potential – that was originally felt or embodied at some defining “seed moment” in the past.

And while Sylvia sure looks enchanting in a fairy costume, she is not at all starry-eyed about these matters. Her experience has led her to recognize that situations and relations in a community – and, we can extrapolate, in any organization – can sometimes go down into deep, dark places; yet, for Sylvia, that is the very reason for conducting the rituals in the first place. No matter how high or exalted or promising the feelings in a collective enterprise may be at some particular point in time, those feelings will eventually, inevitably fade – we can lose the magic. And so, rituals are instituted to keep reminding everyone of those special times and to renew, refresh, and revitalize the initiating energy. For Sylvia, it all comes down to *intention*. If we were never sad, how would we know what it’s like to be happy? Therefore, renewed intention keeps us on course amid the vagaries of a collective enterprise; and deliberate ritual sustains us in between those high energy surges that we call “magic.”

Another point deserves attention here, a reiteration of the “manifestation” versus “creation” theme of sustainable magic. In July of 2003, I implemented the Graduate Design Project of my first Master’s degree. This Project was the design of a 5-day residential Ecovillage Design Course, and the site selected for implementation was Sylvia’s Pragtri Farm. In my design of the course, I wanted to give special attention to the notion of ‘whole body awareness’ as a pre-requisite for good, competent design. Accordingly, there were many activities, some blithely playful, designed to get participants more into their bodies before entering the design

phase. I also did not skimp on food, but considered a well-fed cast to be a reliable source of good morale; as such, I hired a professional chef who turned every meal into a sumptuous feast. My point is that I made conscious decisions to ‘create’ a loose and lively, festive atmosphere in the course; yet what transpired was a magic beyond my wildest expectations – the magic manifested *itself*; I could not have created it.

Of course, Sylvia was a big part of this. For months beforehand we worked together to plan the various activities and to situate them at their best locations on the property. Sylvia calls this “creating the container.” By creating a suitable container and by conducting ourselves in an appropriate manner, we in effect *invited the magic to come in*. The magic came in the form of unexpected and unplanned occurrences, the high energy of the final presentations, and a heightened overall atmosphere of happiness and togetherness that at times approached giddy. All the participants played a role in this. The essential point is that we did not *create* this magic; the magic manifested *itself* – we were more like humble stewards. Of course, our attitude and openness to such things sure helped – and that brings us to the third consideration.

I first met Brita Adkinson in 1996, during my initial visit to Findhorn.<sup>4</sup> I was enrolled in the “Experience Week” program and Brita was our workshop leader. Experience Week is often a person’s introduction to both Findhorn *and* living in community. The week is arranged as a series of events – various games, exercises, and shared group activities – designed to accelerate “community building.” My Experience Week group included 24 fascinating people from all around the globe; and, I must say, the techniques devised by the Findhorn community were exceedingly effective: by the end of the week, this total group of strangers was feeling like an extended family, ready to go out and form a new community of our own! The experience was at once profound and cathartic. As a demonstration of this, at our closing circle, a mature gentleman from London broke down in tears, explaining between sobs, “This has been wonderful but I don’t think I could ever do it again; it’s all been a bit too much.” His barriers had been penetrated; his soft and tender inner nature had been revealed to the group and perhaps to himself for the very first time. He was feeling vulnerable.

Brita had a way of weaving magic into our activities. With her bright eyes twinkling, she was always so sure and confident when providing the instructions for our next round of exercises. She was masterful in her timing and execution of an activity, and usually knowingly shared in the laughter that followed the penetration of another barrier, the expected aftermath of another community building exercise. Brita’s husband originated from my part of the world, the Bellingham area. When she found out that I was a student at Fairhaven College, she invited

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<sup>4</sup> I did not anticipate when conceptualizing this paper that Findhorn would play such a prominent role; it just sort of worked out like that. I guess this reveals both my own orientation to organization development and the special place Findhorn holds in the world of magic.

me to her home for dinner, for it turned out that her son Paul had reached college age and was considering moving to the homeland of his father to attend Fairhaven College! I must admit, I felt pretty privileged seated at the dinner table of our Findhorn workshop leader – but then again, I had already made myself open to these kinds of synchronicities, meeting the right people at the right time in the right place. Some would call that magic; I would say it's more of an attitude.

Anyway, Paul did move to Bellingham to attend Fairhaven College – perhaps influenced by my sterling recommendation – and several years later Brita followed. She now lives in a magical house in the foothills, a custom house with unusual geometries built by her husband (who has since passed away) and his expert carpenter brother. The house is named Wambeliska, after an enchanted fairytale land, and has become the host-site for Transformation Game workshops. I describe all this here because I think the whole story is rather magical – it arises from the heightened awareness that comes from participating in a higher order reality.

I'm still in contact with Brita, so naturally I thought about interviewing her for insights into sustaining the magic in an organization. We met at the upper story café of Village Books, overlooking the village green of Fairhaven. Brita's eyes still twinkle; she seems to embody a perennial quality of youthfulness, a never-fading excitement about life's possibilities. I asked her, "What sustains the magic?"

Brita can be an animated storyteller, so I sat back in my chair and listened to some old tales of the Findhorn days. Apparently, there was a feeling in the community in the early 70s that they had a mission to bring out "deepest spiritual truths and distribute these to the public." According to Brita's interpretation, by the late 90s this mission had been fulfilled: there were yoga classes everywhere, environmental consciousness was on the rise, alternative healing techniques were widely accepted, spiritual matters could be discussed openly, etc. Perhaps this 'having completed its mission' would help to explain the lack of purpose that Ariane detected in the community of today? I still wanted to know more about the magic.

Brita relayed the tale about how she was working for the Education Committee but got fed up with the politics and ego contests. She even described a situation where one group pillaged the funds of another to fill the hole made by their mismanagement. This is not the kind of stuff one sees during Experience Week! Brita adapted by resigning from the Education Committee to become trained as a workshop leader – and there she found the magic again, by working with the wide-eyed students coming through the place who were experiencing the magic for the very first time. Brita concluded at the time, "This place is magic *in spite of* the people running the place."

As our conversation progressed, my former workshop leader assumed a much more personal, almost advisory tone: "Hold onto your vision like a precious seed and don't let it go. A vision is vulnerable. What's most important is to keep the magic alive inside you. Magic by

definition has to be re-created and re-inspired. Life is a river, so review from time to time your mission statement and your goals. Obstructions are there to give us greater clarity.” Then, sounding like a wise crone yet one with the sparkling eyes of an adolescent, she re-admonished me, “Hold onto your vision. Keep the magic in your own heart.”

As I returned home and reflected on what I had just heard, I had to acknowledge the immense importance of it; for, any organization, be it an ecovillage or a corporation, is merely the assemblage of so many individuals. Any magic that comes through the place is going to begin with these individuals, as a consequence of their actions and as a reflection of their attitudes. Even so, I can never control the thoughts and behavior of others. That means that if I want to see some magic around here, it’s got to begin with me (or you!). “Keep the magic in your own heart.” This may be the most valuable perspective of all.



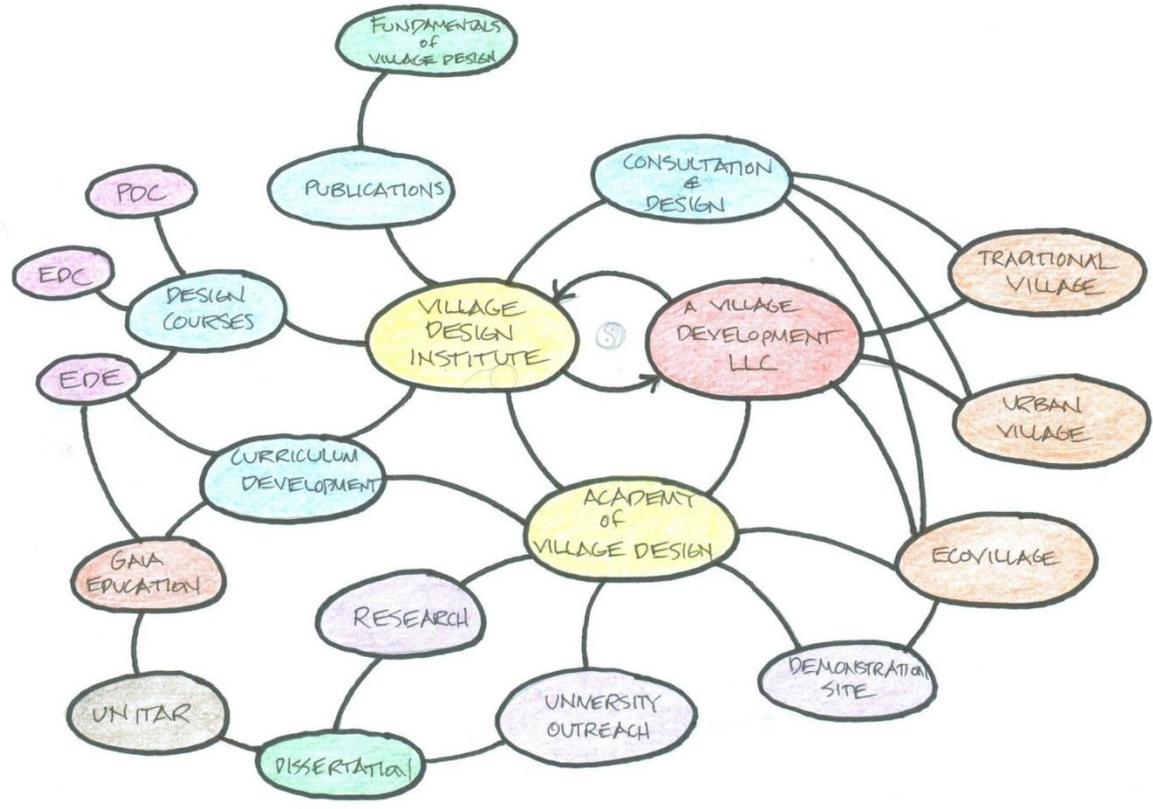
You know how men have always hankered after unlawful magic, and you know what a great part in magic words have always played...That word names the universal’s principle, and to possess it is after a fashion to possess the universe itself. “God,” “Matter,” “Reason,” “the Absolute,” “Energy,” are so many solving names. You can rest when you have them. You are at the end of your metaphysical quest...But if you follow the pragmatic method, you cannot look on any such word as closing your quest...It appears less as a solution, than as a program for more work, and more particularly as an indication of the ways in which existing realities may be changed” (James, 1907/1951, p. 131, as quoted in White, 1998, p. 13, emphasis in original).

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ORGANIZATION DEVELOPMENT  
VILLAGE DESIGN INSTITUTE



## Epilogue

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During the course of this Applied component to my KA\*717 Organization Development study, I had the chance to review the documentation of my existing nonprofit, Village Design Institute. I had a hearty laugh when I read the Minutes to our first ever Board meeting, back in January 2003, just a month after incorporation – for there it was in writing: one of the first items on the Agenda was the need to explain to the new Board how this non-profit had been set up primarily as a container to receive a “gift of land” for the establishment of a school! Indeed, I remember back in the ‘90s in my BA days envisaging this “gift of land” idea as a viable strategy for proliferating schools. Well it took almost 8 years and the appearance of this study to finally test that idea and put it into perspective.

By the time this study appeared, I had reasoned that the educational nonprofit would *not* be the best container to receive land but that a separate entity “Land Trust” would be more appropriate. I arrived at this conclusion not by careful investigation but simply based on what I had seen or heard or been exposed to over the years – yet whether through educational nonprofit or Land Trust, the idea of “gift of land” remained central to the strategy.

Now that my Organization Development study is coming to a close and I *have* had the chance to investigate, I am choosing to abandon this “gift of land” idea, based on the following learnings and/or realizations:

- 1) A piece of land that has fallen into the category of being suitable to be given away as a “gift” will not be a prime holding. If it is part of a portfolio, it invariably will be the least desirable piece, either because of lack of resources or lack of proximity to resource centers. The preferred strategy now is to draw up a list of characteristics – size, location, features, etc. – that will be critical for the auspicious establishment of an Academy, *and then go out and find the piece.*
- 2) It seems that even as a registered Land Trust, holdings entitled to a nonprofit do not necessarily have security of tenure.
- 3) The mere posturing of waiting to receive a “gift” sets up an undesirable precedent; for acquiring the land is only the first step: after the land is acquired comes the even higher hurdle of rapidly building the infrastructure – and the infrastructure needs to be built rapidly or otherwise the school will flounder in its visioning stage. Will this infrastructure also wait to be “gifted?”

- 4) If this Project is to be a prototype, a model that can be replicated at other locations on the continent, then it cannot be assumed that others will understand or have access to the theory of “gifting.”

Therefore, based on the learnings and/or realizations engendered during the course of this study, a new strategy has emerged: In order to establish a 21<sup>st</sup> century Academy, the educational nonprofit will best be partnered with a Limited Liability Company (LLC), a private development group whose purpose as articulated in the operating agreement is “securing land and building the infrastructure for a world-class educational center,” a replicable “research, training, and demonstration site” – or, for some audiences, a “model ecovillage.” In this arrangement, the LLC becomes a money-maker funneling revenues into the nonprofit, which becomes semi-autonomous thereby, not needing to depend on grants or donations for survival. The nonprofit, in turn, educates the LLC.

This strategy embodies a very different sort of posturing, for now we are no longer passively waiting for the land to come, we are actively going out to make it happen! Included here are all the sub-sophistications of investment capitalism: writing business plans, courting investors, creating a profitable ‘product,’ forging a professional image, projecting virtuous public relations, nurturing beneficial relationships, etc.

I’m actually quite excited about the shift that has occurred as a result of this 717 study. Everywhere I look now, people are talking about “sustainable communities” as the direction of the future. For example, Fritjof Capra writes in the Preface to his *The Hidden Connections* (2002):

[T]he key challenge of this new century – for social scientists, natural scientists and everyone else – will be to build ecologically sustainable communities, designed in such a way that their technologies and social institutions – their material and social structures – do not interfere with nature’s inherent ability to sustain life.

If Fritjof were here, I would explain to him, “My good fellow, not only can we build communities that do not *interfere* with nature’s abilities; we can build communities that actually *enhance* nature’s abilities. This is going beyond mere ‘sustainability:’ this is regeneration.”

Truly, I believe that what I am proposing as an organization development is urgently needed. If that is so, then why should it not be generously capitalized? Why should we wait around for a few crumbs to fall when we are nose-riding the wave of the future? I believe that if this is presented correctly, there is a fortune to be made – the entire continent needs to be retrofitted! I am reminded here of the sagacious words of Sri Aurobindo: “The money belongs to the Mother.” If that is so, then let’s continue to do the work for the Mother by educating people how to build not just *sustainable* communities but totally *regenerative* communities. This is the work of the Academy of Village Design.

To: Ariane Burgess – Director, Regenerative Culture  
From: E. Christopher Mare – President, Village Design Institute  
Subject: Expansion of Board  
Date: 15 November 2010

Dear Ariane,

During our chances to interact and work together, including opportunities for dialogue over the phone and through skype, I have come to appreciate your sense of commitment, your understanding of larger issues, and your ability to apprehend and organize complex educational presentations. I think the highlight of all this interaction was when we facilitated an ecovillage design scenario *and simultaneously* improvised the retrofit design scenario of an existing village. That experience gave me some real satisfaction – I wish we could do it again!

I also appreciate your professional demeanor and the work you've accomplished through your organization Regenerative Culture. I think you have a natural knack for and a bright future in matters of organization development.

For all these reasons, I want to extend to you an invitation to participate in the development of the educational non-profit Village Design Institute by becoming an active member of the Board of Directors. When I first designed the organization, I envisioned a slow but steady 'organic' rate of growth, where new members would appear at strategic junctures of opportunity. We are at just such a juncture now and I can't think of anybody I'd rather see included more than you.

Of course, Zaida Amaral has been on the Board for the past few years. The potential configuration for the current stage, still relatively early in the organization's life, would be you in Scotland, Zaida in Brasil and me here in Cascadia. As a Board, we would hold conference calls three or four times a year to discuss strategy, direction, and implementation in support of the mission statement. I anticipate exciting possibilities arising from this dynamic interaction, possibilities that should accrue benefits for all.

With Very Best Wishes,

E. Christopher Mare  
President

## Meeting with Ecovillage Designer Max Lindegger – January 2009

### “Evaluating the Progress of the Ecovillage Design Education (EDE)”

- The EDE is an *introduction* to Ecovillage Education, not a comprehensive curriculum
- What is the expectation of people coming out of EDEs? That they will be able to design ecovillages? Probably not. The EDE doesn't prepare people for actual ecovillage design or implementation.
- How are we going to prepare people to be designers of ecovillages?
- Going back to the meeting at Thy, Denmark (1998) – Hildur had a vision of “Living and Learning Centers,” where students who had enthusiasm could travel to appropriate ecovillages and learn under supervision what is necessary for them to become designers or implementers.
- The EDEs do not produce competent ecovillage designers.
- There is a need for an advanced version, a *real* design education to produce competent ecovillage designers.
- How many people are actually qualified to teach designers? Do they exist in ecovillages already?
- What we think is needed is a full 4-year degree, where, after a couple years of preparatory studies, students go to certified Living and learning Centers.
- How do we get a 4-year degree accredited when it will be so unique in its structure? Teachers from mainstream universities will not be qualified.
- Traditional villages need to be modified to include modern comforts and conveniences.
- We can approach Village Design with multi-disciplinary teams.
- The full education will involve staying for a time at traditional villages.
- Would Permaculture Design be a component of the Design School? What about the Social and Worldview dimensions?
- We should distribute a questionnaire among the GESE and EDE graduates concerning areas of expertise, thus forming a central information bank.
- Internships/apprenticeships are the wave of the future

Afterwards, my own thought process included the following questions:

- How much would it cost to set up an office? A budget will need to be worked out.
- Perhaps I should build up a business and then sell it! That means I need to set up a *for-profit* company.
- Focus on research – Research Center or Institute.

## Notes Taken from an Organization Development Symposium

### Preliminary to this KA\*717 Study:

#### “Germinal: Preparing for the Appearance of “The School””

- A curriculum that promotes “ecstasy” by reframing human beings in their various orders of consciousness – a curriculum that is place-based and human-centered
- A curriculum that promotes and prepares for a new order of human – reframing what it means to be a conscious human being (in environment)
- Learning about evolution; taking over the evolution; becoming responsible for the evolution; consciously directing the evolution
- Participating in the life of Creation, not merely representing it
- Thomas Berry’s cosmology: “Spontaneities of the Earth;” according with the rhythms/cycles of natural processes; being the form that contextualizes or *giving a voice to a continually developing universe* – this is functional cosmology
- Re-inhabiting Place: a curriculum founded in re-situating people in their place; person-centered, community-centered, bioregional-centered, cosmic-centered
- Not something to teach but something to allow, something that wants to come forth already; we are already over-burdened by our trivial concerns
- Cosmos is the first teacher – the already potential modes of cosmic self-expression, upon/as which we can re-create, re-conceive, re-embody, re-enact the ongoing unbroken continuum of cosmogenesis
- Reference Riane Eisler’s “Partnership Curriculum”
- The biosphere is nurtured by that part of the biosphere that is also nurtured by the human
- Re-instill a sense of deep connectedness
- Marcilio Ficino’s Renaissance Academics – preserving culture
- Ervin Laszlo’s “The Connectivity”
- **Post-modern monasteries** – “Medieval” as a mentality, a stage in social evolution, *the beginning of a new Medieval mystique* – integral, non-divisive, wholistic
- The whole evolutionary process itself cycles over courses of chronological time; Seminarian evolution, *phases of a process aware of itself* – emphasizing the intensification and expression of those mutually-interacting energies in the lives of its most sentient forms
- Scandinavian community learning circles

- *A society premised on learning rather than consumption* – we are inescapably co-learners
- A tendency toward communion among living things (as per Thomas Berry)
- University curriculum an encapsualization of the Medieval sensibility
- Re-habituaton and the Mystical Experience

Revisiting the Curriculum  
Christmas Eve 2007 – Hua Hin, Thailand

A curriculum is wanting to present itself. From several quarters, dialogue is being offered to me concerning the establishment of a school. I have initiated the process on numerous occasions, and so now the dialogue is feedback as to the direction it could take.

I am committed to setting up a “design school.” All my writing, the impulse of my education, has been defining a “sustainable community design” at “village scale.” I’m still very excited about this theme – increasingly so as new opportunities present themselves – so I will continue to shape the curriculum in that direction.

Let’s call it the “heuristic application of a cosmos-centered epistemology defining the emergence of a human-in-environment mode of consciousness aware of itself as an active agent – the self-aware motive – in the ongoing unbroken unfolding continuum of cosmogenesis.” From this basis, “sustainable community design” becomes the conscious creation of contexts in which human beings can experience their potentials as co-creators in the evolutionary process, learning eventually how to become the process itself. This is inherently a place-based curriculum founded in re-situating people in habitation systems that can facilitate the re-creating, re-conceiving, re-embodying, re-enacting of the very impulse that originated Life itself. Experiencing, framing, contextualizing – giving form, breadth, and dimension to – the evolutionary impulse means differentiating among, across, and between scales: person-centered, community-centered, bioregional-centered, earth-centered, galactic-centered, and ultimately cosmos-centered – each of these scales necessitating respective design criteria. This is a curriculum that brings to light phases of an evolutionary process aware of itself, emphasizing the intensification and expression of those mutually-interacting energies in the lives of its most sentient forms.

How do we bring this around eventually to a grounding in Ecology?

So what we’re doing, then, is defining an educational system that can bring out the best in human beings by providing a context in which they can experience the full extent of their human-ness, not abstractly, without context, but rather as a mutually –co-defining creative co-expression as the sentient aspect of the living energies of a particular place-in-time.

This means becoming aware of mutually interpenetrating ecologies across scales – identifying with the life-force of a place from the ground up.

I’ve not yet perceived how to build upon the EDE curriculum, with its 4-fold structure, *and*, I believe this task is essential, if only to affirm the work I’ve already accomplished. I also believe that the trajectory of the current EDE is falling short of its potential...How to expand the EDE curriculum to make it more relevant to academic contexts and deliveries?

The four-fold structure is sound.

I feel now it is very important to get in touch with Jonathan Scherch at AUS, to begin making this part of a graduate program.

And set up a development corporation...

### Closing Prayer

The Mother preserves me; the Mother keeps me clean and whole and pure. I move through the Mother, ensuring the viability of her inter-connections, taking care of her from within as She unfolds before me in all Her splendor.

Keep me clean, oh Mother – I have so much work to do yet. I am, in fact, beginning a whole new stage of development. I have been initiated here in Thai '07. I am a world-worker – my context is the whole world! Oh grant me the privilege to continue working on your behalf. So many beautiful treasures await!!!!