

Happy Valley Urban Village Project Description



In November 2004, the City of Bellingham published a document entitled “Adaptable Space/Urban Place: Report and Recommendations for Bellingham’s Community Forum on Growth Management.” The report’s main purpose seems to be making a case for using an “infill” strategy to manage growth. The Executive Summary states: “This report establishes the location of 23 “urban villages” in Bellingham, identifying the scale and characteristics of each. It also proposes a universal design methodology intended to guide the overall planning and development of each village.”

This sounds very promising; yet the report falls way short. The meaning of the key term “urban village” is never actually defined but only hinted at, as in “The 23 new villages... are located in various areas of the community, providing a mix of residential, commercial and institutional land uses,” or “this report draws the link between a more compact urban form and a more efficient urban system. People drive less, walk more and live in smaller housing when their urban setting is more compact.”

“Mixed use,” “compact form,” pedestrian friendly” – this is all New Urbanism terminology; but is that all it takes to make a genuine “urban village?” Surely there must be more to it than that!

The Happy Valley Urban Village Project will take this potentially potent term, fecund with meaning, and extend it to its logical conclusion: “urban village” will be defined as the “sustainable unit of human settlement in a post-carbon future.” Using a broadly multidisciplinary approach, grounded in scientific validity, the Project will delineate and describe in detail a truly self-reliant, self-contained, self-maintaining, self-regenerating human habitation system appearing within the current confines of the neighborhood of Happy Valley.

Specific objectives include:

- Producing a map, or a series of maps, showing placement and positioning of all the necessary elements to include in a truly sustainable Happy Valley Urban Village in a 100 Year Plan. This mapping project will utilize the thematic overlay technique developed and expounded upon by Ian McHarg in his seminal *Design with Nature*.
- Producing a publishable report to accompany the graphics that includes not only a description of the product but the process. With enough care and diligence, this package could very well become a book.
- Presenting the cumulative findings to the Bellingham Planning Commission, and so influencing the quality and form of future development in the city.

During the design process, initial reference will be made to the “Urban Villages Forum Briefing Sheet,” produced by the Institution of Civil Engineers with support by the Prince of Wales – available at www.ice.org.uk/rtfpdf/BS-Urban%20Villages.pdf ; however, we will be expanding the potentials even beyond this authoritative Briefing Sheet to include the considerations put forward in *The Urban Village: Synergy of Ecology and Urbanism*, a recent paper coming out of the Village Design Institute.

This Project is being organized by the Village Design Institute in conjunction with community advocates.