

## “Transition Statement”

E. Christopher Mare

Fairhaven College

Autumn 1996

This Transition began two years ago upon entering the fascinating world of Fairhaven College. It was a transition from an eventful life of learning from the vagaries of personal experience to a new life where the learning was purposeful, structured, and goal-oriented. It was a transition from a state of pushing and extending boundaries to one of defining and enriching boundaries. It was a transition from a long and wandering search for personal meaning to a grounding and nurturing of the personal meaning discovered. It was the transition of a 35-year old entering university with a mission.

The years just prior to entering Fairhaven were full of growth and the opening of new vistas for I. Early in 1993, I took my first Permaculture Design Course and knew immediately I had discovered my life’s work. Afterward, I set out for the Okanogan to learn as much as I could in a rural setting. I worked at a garlic farm, became the caretaker of a 30-acre property up in the hills, and by early 1994 entered my biggest project to date: The community there had decided to establish a Community Center and they needed all the help they could get. I participated from the beginning: through the project definition and group congealing phase, into the legal and incorporation phase, onto the actual purchase of a building and conversion into a Community Center. In March 1994, I moved into the building and became the building manager, working tirelessly to transform an old abandoned relic into the vision of a Community Center. Throughout this process, I was acutely aware that I was operating at a level for which I was ill-prepared. My life-long dream of going to university now coincided with an actual need to be filled – and so I decided to go to college to learn the skills necessary to bring this vision to fruition. The Community Center was an integral part of a larger concept: the Village. The last chapter of *The Permaculture Designer’s Manual* is devoted to creating ‘villages’ as the logical conclusion and context for establishing a permanent culture. Likewise, the elders in the Okanogan community envisioned the village as the next step in community growth.

And so, shortly upon entering Fairhaven and experiencing my transition, I already knew my Concentration would be entitled “Village Design” – in effect, my exploratory studies had already been accomplished. Right from the first quarter, I began preparing the groundwork for this important study. All the classes I have chosen in my college career were meant to provide a comprehensive understanding for the needs of a Village Design (see course schematic). The first two years were invested gaining an appreciation of the human aspect: Anthropology,

Psychology, Human Geography, and especially Human Ecology, etc. I've mixed this now with two trips overseas to live, work, and study in actual ecovillages-in-process, and to interact, participate with, and learn from the people that are making it happen. This international forum has been invaluable beyond words because I have had the opportunity to experience first-hand the strengths and deficiencies of established ecovillages-in-process and so have developed a discriminating appreciation of what it takes for an ecovillage to succeed. Village Design is truly global in scope.

Now, with a scheduled two years remaining in an undergraduate degree, I would like to turn my attention to the 'hard' aspects of Village Design, courses intended to focus on some necessary building blocks for designing villages. Among the courses I've considered:

WWU/Fairhaven

Geology/Geomorphology  
Geometry  
Art/Design  
Group facilitation/Mediation  
Conflict Resolution  
Biology  
Fundamentals of Ecology  
Settlement/Town Planning  
Computer Skills/Internet  
GIS/Mapping  
Native American Studies

Independent Studies

Traditional Villages  
Sacred Geometry  
Deep Ecology  
Feng Shui  
A Pattern Language  
Ritual and Ceremony  
Natural Building  
Ecological Design  
Bio-harmonic Architecture  
Sustainable Communities

This will surely be a life-long education process; but my goal for degree upon leaving university is to be proficient as a Village Design consultant, to enter a design team and be able to meaningfully contribute to the actualization of one of the many ecovillages just starting up in the world. I see a real niche to be filled here. I've also discovered a weak point in the whole ecovillage movement: all these people are working on all these villages yet there are no standards yet to adhere to. Status quo developers are jumping on the bandwagon, capitalizing on the appeal of the phrase 'ecovillages,' yet putting no more thought into it than maybe adding a few more trees than usual (eco-subdivisions!). In the projects that could be properly termed 'ecovillages,' the coordinators are doing what they can but there are many missing links. I see a real opening for a book: *Fundamentals of Village Design*, where the working components of an ecovillage are clearly spelled out, thus setting a standard. I see the word 'village' being used all over too: Village Homes, Village Books, Village Lighting, etc. – the neighborhood of Fairhaven is even supposed to be a village; yet this term is being used carelessly, as if by some emotional return to a nostalgic past. I haven't heard anybody yet

adequately address the question, “What is it about an ecovillage that makes it a *village*?” I would like to fill this enormous gap by writing the book *Fundamentals of Village Design*.

I also see a tremendous opportunity for elucidating the necessary ingredients for designing community into an ecovillage. In the villages where this has been neglected, strife and conflict seriously threaten the evolution to self-reliance. ‘Community’ is a slippery term, and some people would rather avoid it hoping that it just happens – but there are definite steps that can be taken right from the start to ensure that real community has a chance to develop. Even slipperier, I would like to be a specialist in designing ‘spirituality’ into ecovillages. I was pressed on this point at a Village Design workshop in Australia by a very intelligent couple who have studied with Christopher Alexander. I was not able to respond clearly to just what I meant by “designing spirituality into a village.” My various ideas and impressions are not well thought out, and yet I want to have this theme permeate all my work. It is the essence of my work, and I would love to have some feedback here. By the end of the conversation, Buddy informed me, “I want to have your book influence my work.” Up till that point, I had not realized that I would be writing a book.

Also, I want this degree to be a precedent that others can compare to. This may be the first Village Design degree in the world but I’m sure there will be others to follow. I met a man who is working in England on getting permaculture accredited into a university program; that is, on creating a degree in Permaculture. He was very interested in what I have been doing and we plan on exchanging ideas to formulate a curriculum where Village Design surely will be an integral component – so this is also a consideration with my Concentration, to have it examined by others.

I see more travel being necessary as well. I’ve already been invited to India: the Global Ecovillage Network team will be meeting in Auroville the beginning of March and I’d love to be present. An Indian doctor said he would take care of I if I could participate in establishing permaculture in his village. Another man has mixed yoga in with his Permaculture Center (perfect!). At some point it will be essential to experience a traditional village and India may be the best place for that. There are also some budding ecovillages in the USA, and I’ve made a few contacts that I would like to follow up on.

Finally, I want to do some graduate work in Architecture, especially bio-harmonic/ecological/spiritual/sacred architecture – and I believe there is a school in the Bay Area that concentrates on that; if not, there is one in New Zealand.

Thanks for taking the time to read this. I fully appreciate any constructive comments or criticisms...

Christopher Mare  
3 December 1996