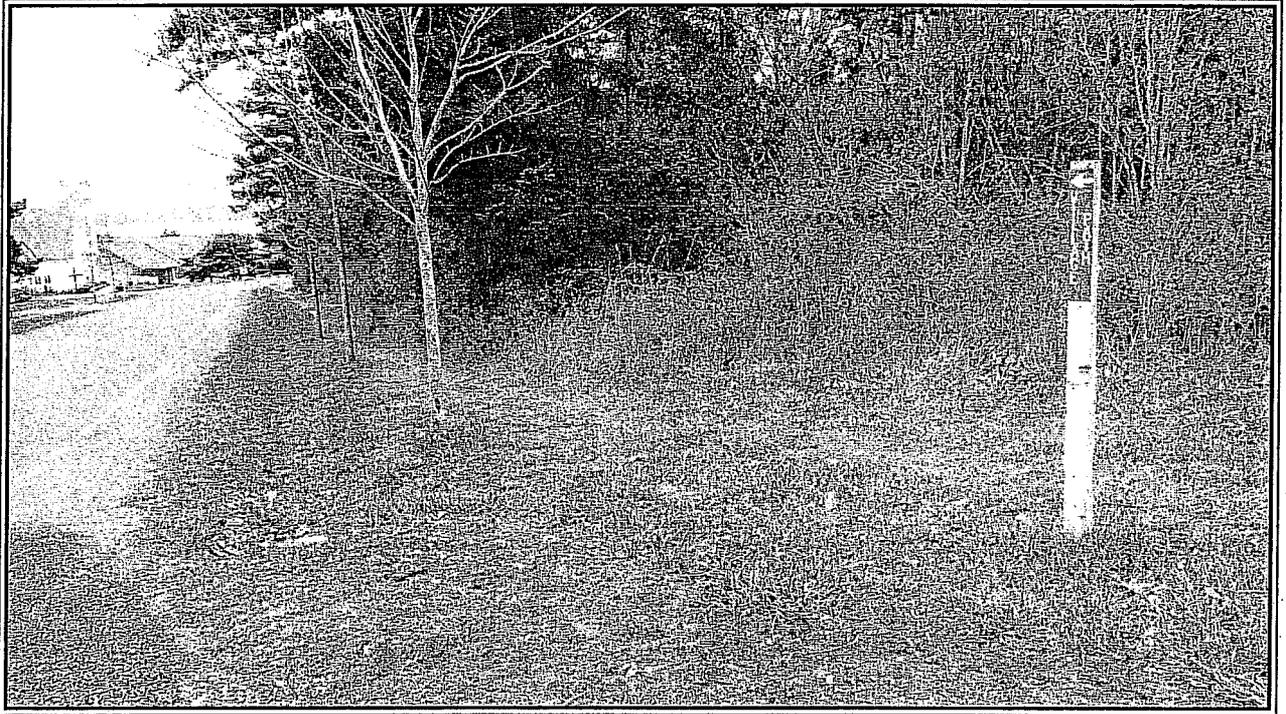


# TOWARDS A WALKABLE VILLAGE



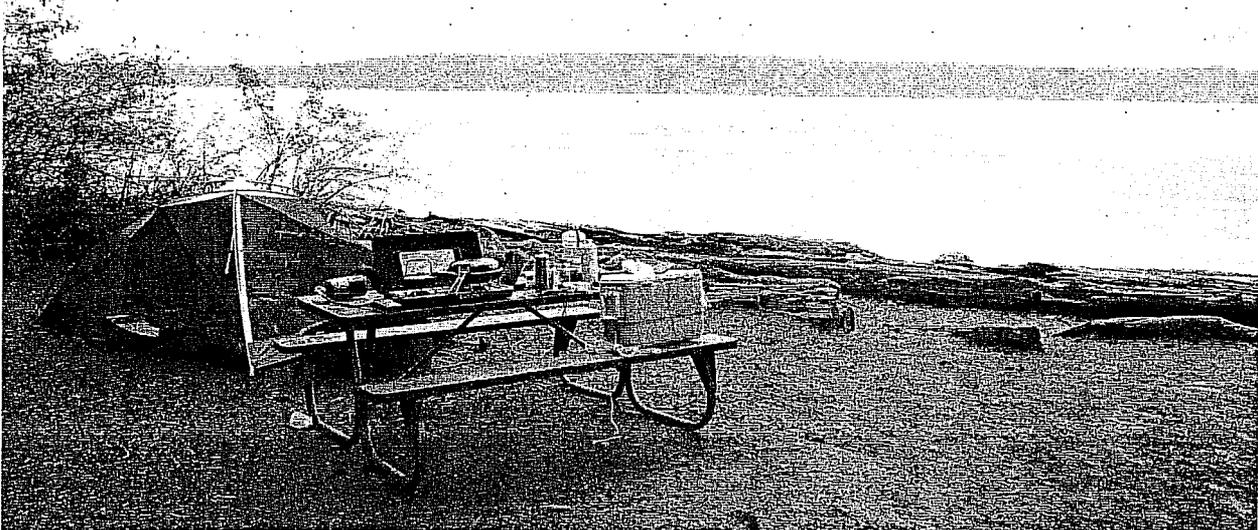
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CEP 460

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## **Introduction**

This report is a summary of research conducted over two months coupled with recommendations for methodologies to conduct a participatory pedestrian planning process given the unique characteristics of the Lopez community. Our research focuses specifically within the boundaries of Lopez Village. We evaluated current walkability and assessed the community's interests and concerns related to participation within a pedestrian planning process. Our purpose is to provide a toolkit for the Lopez Village Planning Committee to facilitate a community process to create a pedestrian plan for Lopez Village.

In this report we outline our methods, provide an analysis of the information we gathered, and conclude with recommendations. Attached to our report are tools that the LVPC can use to engage the community in the process:

The purpose of our research is to provide recommendations based on community concerns and needs related to walkability.

## **Methods**

### **Observations**

Observations began with a visit to Lopez Island, specifically within Lopez Village. Observations included an assessment of pedestrian infrastructure, village layout and the connections between community assets within the village.

In regards to pedestrian infrastructure, assessment of effectiveness and accessibility were defined by the condition, frequency and effectiveness in connecting pedestrians throughout the village as a whole. This was achieved both by experiencing the environment first-hand, and by gathering opinions from business owners and their employees, which will be discussed later in this report. Images of existing pedestrian infrastructure were gathered and used for further analysis to help isolate and define recommended areas for improvement.

Observations also included an assessment of the village layout as a whole, more specifically, related to connecting community assets within the village. These assets include businesses within the village, as well as public amenities, such as the library and post office. Again, these observations were reinforced by interviews within the community to better assess effectiveness over time.

### **Interviews**

To reinforce our observations and to better inform our analysis, we conducted interviews with business owners, their employees, and their various patrons. Our interview questions were developed based on previous observations of the pedestrian environment with intent to uncover concerns and recommendations related to the walkability of Lopez Village. Conversely, our interviews were intended to assess the degree to which the community is both available and willing to participate in a community pedestrian planning process. While the interviews were informative and effective for our initial analysis, the limited number of interviews does not allow for an accurate depiction of Lopez community opinions as a whole.

### **Interviews with Planning Professionals**

To better inform our analyses and recommendations, we interviewed various planning and community development professionals who vary greatly in background and experience within the public and private sectors of their respective fields. The questions asked of these professionals were related to their experiences both with effective design of pedestrian infrastructure and the design of community participation processes.

# Analysis

## Walkability

### *Our Observations*

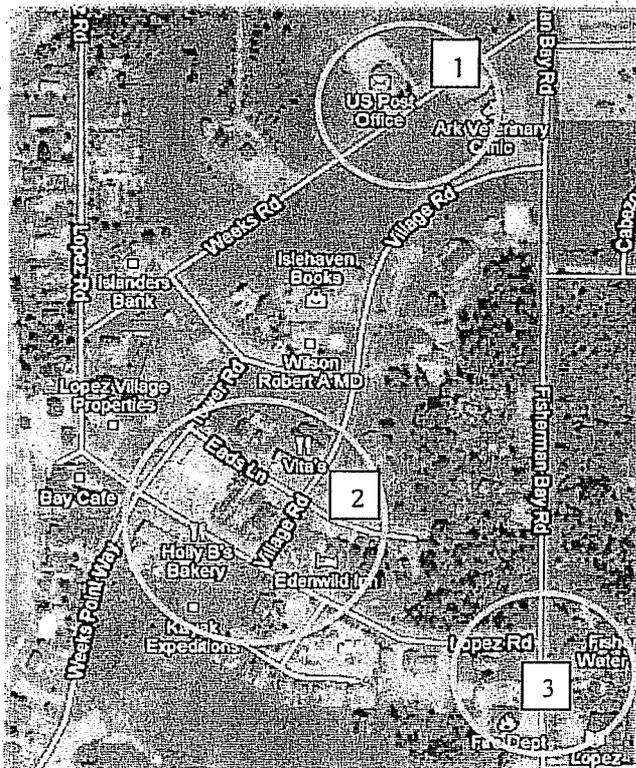
Our initial perceptions about the walkability of Lopez Village were: there is a lack of pedestrian infrastructure; there are very few paths that link businesses to one another; the paths that exist are not physically safe; the paths are not accessible to strollers, walkers and wheelchairs; and there are very few well marked crosswalks.

An example of where pedestrian infrastructure is missing is along Village Road, which crosses through the main shopping area of the Village. Village Road bisects the main roads that border the village. At one end it winds between senior housing and the community center, then passes by the pharmacy, ending across the street from Blossom Organic Grocery. There is only a narrow dirt path along one block, which is separated from the road by a ditch. The structure of this path is typical of other paths in the village. We are concerned that such paths are dangerous for people with disabilities to traverse. Also, to access the senior housing and community center one must walk along the street for a majority of the way.

These were our initial observations and we identified Village Road as a major concern. However, interviews with community members told us of different concerns.

### *Interviews*

After our fourth interview it was evident that patterns had developed. To confirm these patterns we interviewed five more people. Two things were apparent: First, most of the interviewees identified three areas of concern pertaining to walkability. Second, most interviewees had different ideas about how to address concerns.



Three areas of concerns:

Without leading interviewees into thinking about specific areas of concern almost each of them identified the area around the library, post office, and grocery store as being areas that need the most attention.

#### 1. Post Office

- Need a crosswalk from senior housing to new path
- Too congested with traffic
- Dangerous to cross driveway leading into post office
- Too far away

It was also evident that most of the people we interviewed preferred to drive to the post office rather than walk, even at times when they will be in the village to shop, work, or conduct other business. We probed into this and discovered that two factors are at play here: time and distance. Many of them visit the post office during their lunch break and do not want to spend a large portion of their break walking. Although the distance from the crosswalk on Lopez Road, located in front of the Red Apple, to the post office is less than a 1/5 of a mile, many consider this to be a long distance.

## 2. Library

- Crosswalk is difficult for cars to see
- Path up the driveway difficult to walk up
- Crosswalk does not connect to library path
- Parking lot can be difficult to negotiate
- Concerned about accessibility from overflow lot to the library

Many interviewees were concerned about the path leading up to the library from Fisherman Bay Road. They thought that it was unsafe for strollers, wheelchairs, walkers, and people who generally have difficulty with walking. Some expressed similar concerns with the walk from the overflow parking, especially; they were concerned about the lack of proper lighting along the path that parallels Lopez Road. Nearly each interviewee was puzzled by the placement of the crosswalk and the fact that it does not match up with the path to the library.

## 3. Grocery Store

- Parking restrictions
- Poor pedestrian linkages between businesses
- Crosswalk dumps off into a parking lot
- Crosswalk is not very noticeable to cars

Many interviewees are concerned about the relocation of the Red Apple grocery store. Several expressed their ideas about what could replace the store, such as, food processing facility, post office, and community space. Some people were concerned about the restrictive parking at the Red Apple grocery store. They noted that one of the reasons that they often do not visit other businesses when they come to the village to shop is because the Red Apple parking lot is for Red Apple customers only. Interviewees said it is inconvenient to park, shop, park again and shop. Many interviewees were critical of the crosswalk on Lopez Road in front of the Red Apple, citing that it is not very noticeable from inside a moving vehicle. Many also thought it did not make sense to have a safety crosswalk that delivers pedestrians into a busy parking lot.

### *Ideas*

We asked each of the interviewees if they had ideas about how to improve the walkability of the village. The answers were random and very few interviewees had the same ideas. Some examples are:

- Don't allow cars in the village during the summer - Provide parking on the fringe
- Create a path that links the marina to the village

- Cover the ditches that run along most of the roads and pave them – to be used as sidewalks
- Do not change any infrastructure. Instead, educate drivers about pedestrians and bicyclist.
- Comfortable walking on the side of the road
- Lack of paths cause chaotic pedestrian behavior
- Need to focus on a better path from senior housing into the shopping area

### *New Paths*

Each of the interviewees also commented on the two new paths in the Village.

Fisherman Bay Road (Lopez Road to Weeks Road): Overall, people were pleased with this path. There were a couple of comments that question the relevancy of this path and ask why, out of all the areas that need a pedestrian path, why this one first? Some thought it would have made more sense to start at the library and pave towards the marina.

Weeks Road (Fisherman Bay Road to Lopez Road): Overall, most of the interviewees had several concerns about this path.

- Waste of money
- Wrong side of the road
- Hard to access because of the ditch between the road and the path
- One part of it has a steep dip that is unsafe
- Interviewees are upset that they had no input into the design/location

### **Parking**

Arrays of comments were made about parking. Some comments about parking have already been presented in this report. What has not been reported are concerns about whether or not there is enough parking in the village and whether or not it is easy to find parking all times of the year. Interviewees were split on the questions we asked about these issues. Further research, perhaps a different set of questions, is necessary to determine perceptions on parking in the village.

### **Community**

Our analysis of information captured in interviews and less-structured interactions informed us of the unique relationships Lopez Island residents have with each other. A pattern developed amongst residents that conveyed to us they are very familiar with one another, familiar enough that they are often aware of others actions, opinions, and history. While this type of familiarity is often associated with a romanticized notion of community, we became aware that such a familiarity also has consequences.

#### Characteristics we used to describe the community and environment

- |                            |                   |                               |
|----------------------------|-------------------|-------------------------------|
| • Rural                    | • Business owners | • Agriculture                 |
| • Small population         | • Labors          | • History                     |
| • Seasonal                 | • Tourist         | • Friendly                    |
| • Familiar with each other | • Bike friendly   | • Comfortable with each other |
| • Fisheries                | • Involved        | • Nature                      |
|                            | • Engaged         |                               |

Our interview questions asked about interviewee's willingness to participate in a community process to develop a pedestrian plan for Lopez Village. Many people were willing and excited but were also concerned. Some requested that meetings be held in the evenings and that childcare be offered. One concern that came up several times had to do with past experiences they had in community meetings:

- "We get caught in these endless discussions"
- "We never get anywhere"
- "You try organizing a group of people that share a lot of history, good and bad"
- "Too many strong personalities"

These were just some of the comments. It became apparent that familiarity can cause barriers in community processes. This was interesting because at the same time, they want to also take part in the process. We asked why? Many of the answers were similar: They want to make sure their ideas and concerns were a part of the process. If not, as someone said, "we get paths like the one on Weeks Road."

This was a pivotal moment for our project. It became evident that we should focus on how to create a process that engages the community and will involve them in the design process.

To better understand community processes we interviewed several professional planners. Specifically, we asked them how to facilitate a community process in a place like Lopez Island. The results of these interviews are drawn out in the following recommendations.

## Recommendations

Given the information we have gathered and analyzed here, we will now offer some recommendations to help move the Village pedestrian planning process forward. These recommendations include strategies for gaining initial community interest in the process itself, ways to facilitate community participation and suggestions for turning ideas into action.

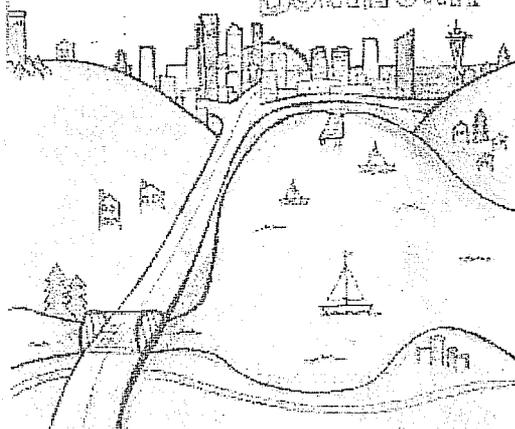
While many communities may feel comfortable moving through design and construction without adding any input in the process, through our observations and community interviews, it is clear to us that gaining community support and input early on in the planning process is key to reaching a level of community support and guidance to allow the process to move forward.

## Community Survey

Given the small size of the Lopez community, we suggest conducting a survey that will serve to both bring awareness to the project and highlight major community concerns, useful in gaining community interest before the community meetings begin. This survey may also be used to gain a rough estimate of the number of community members interested in the planning process. Also, the input gathered through the survey may give weight when attracting attention from the county when the detailed planning stage begins.

7. Write or draw directions or attach a map describing your favorite walk. (optional)

Wallingford to Downtown



Yes, I'd like to stay involved to help make Seattle the most walkable city in the nation.

Name: DOUG NIELSEN Email: doug@nielsen.com

Mailing: 1000 PRAIRIE PL NE, SEATTLE, WA 98109

Please return this survey to: 1500 1st Avenue, 10th Floor, Seattle, WA 98101. We will use the information you provide to help us better understand the needs of the community and to improve our services. We will not share your information with any other organization.

Along with the community survey, we also suggest handing out a drawing template at the Market to allow community members to draw their "dream Lopez pedestrian plan" - this method was successful in Seattle's pedestrian planning process and may be a low-stress way to get community members to think about how a diagram may flow and help them to identify aspects they care most about.

Both the survey and drawing template can also be utilized during Saturday Farmer's Market by setting up a "Pedestrian Planning" booth to obtain both community and visitor input. This would allow the community to get acquainted with the process in a positive, active way.

## **Website/Blog Development**

The creation of a simple Lopez Village website or blog would allow community members to stay involved with the process and add comments as desired. This is often a good way to keep people up to date with information and to post meeting outcomes for those who may not be able to attend.

## **Community Facilitator**

Through interviews with community members, interviews with experienced planning professionals and through previous experience in small, tightly-knit communities, we suggest – if resources allow – finding an outsider to the community to facilitate the community pedestrian planning process. That said, the facilitator should be open to and should work toward understanding the community before the community process begins. While selecting a skilled facilitator will require more work and resources in the short-run, it may ultimately end up causing less work and delay in the long-run. Here, we outline three reasons why it is important to select an outsider for this process:

1. In small communities, a strong sense of familiarity may inhibit a community's ability to clearly state and define goals and objectives, which are key in moving the community forward and ensuring that the process ultimately fulfills clearly stated objectives.
2. While the Lopez Island community has continuously proven its capacity to get things done with successful unity, a skilled facilitator may be able to facilitate further community learning and aid the process along in a way that may not have presented itself in the past. This may allow for greater efficiency in the process.
3. A skilled facilitator will have experience taking communities through a process, from the brainstorming stage to the working stage. Between these phases, a community may become stalled and it is the work of the facilitator and community to move past this place.

## **Community Meetings**

While we feel a facilitator will be very valuable in this process, we realize resources may be limited. In that case, we will make some recommendations regarding the organization of community meetings.

This process should involve at least 3 meetings, more if time and resources permit; one to launch the process, one to work on clearly defining goals and objectives, and one to conclude. These meetings should be conducted at a time when the majority of the community can attend and should be held at an accessible, familiar place. We recommend these meetings be structured as follows:

1. The first meeting should involve a slideshow (Compact Disc) in which community members are instructed to rate each slide on a scale from 1-5 (1 being undesirable, 5 being very desirable). There should be no more preparation or instruction than that. This information can then be used by the facilitator to gain insight into design preferences of the community. For example, the facilitator may find that 40% of the community rated artful, colorful crosswalks as a "4" while the same 40% rated white, reflective crosswalks as a "1" – from this, the facilitator can then begin to create workshop "kits" tailored to these themes of design desirability.
2. Meeting two should involve breaking community members into deliberately organized groups, each group focusing on a different, specific topic. This kind of deliberate organizing may involve separating strong personalities into separate groups or incorporating different assets and strengths into each group. When community members have been split into groups, they should be given a specific task or area of focus. This may be a specific intersection or piece of the village. We recommend assembling physical "kits" with maps of Lopez Village, markers, paths cut out of cardboard, trees made out of push pins and any other way the community members can express their individual desires within the group. Each "scheme" or set of ideas should be presented to the entire group nearing the end of the session. We recommend this meeting take place at least 3 times to accommodate those who may not be able to make the first or second meeting.

### **Informal Coffee Shop Meeting**

One of the planning professionals we spoke with, Chris Cares of RRC in Boulder, Colorado, also recommended conducting an informal coffee shop meeting session in the morning following the 2<sup>nd</sup> meeting and perhaps more if time allows. This will allow community members an informal setting in which to voice their concerns or to ask further questions.

3. Meeting three should involve a clear shift in focus from "brainstorming" to "next steps." This may be the most difficult part of the process and may involve multiple meetings. The meeting should be conducted in a U-shaped seating pattern to break down any existing power structure. This discussion may involve assigning "next-step" tasks such as selecting important pedestrian focus points in the Village or writing a proposal to the county, or any number of other recommendations that came about through the workshops. This is where a skilled facilitator can begin to help the community define what work needs to be done in order to move the process forward in attaining goals.

The facilitator should be constantly assessing the community's capacity and should not move forward prematurely. This may involve scheduling more meeting times or spending more time on any one topic than was previously planned. In essence, this process is not smooth, but can be rewarding and useful in gaining support and consensus within the community.

## Possible Next Steps

While these will be largely based on outcomes from the community process, we will outline a few steps you may take at this point or in conjunction with the process.

1. There may be graduate students from the University of Washington Landscape Architecture department who may be willing and ready to help the Lopez community develop design concepts for a pedestrian plan. This may include their participation in the community meetings to help them to understand the goals and objectives of the community.
2. Assemble the details required to submit a proposal to the county for a specific project. This may include proposing the repair or installation of key walkways or crosswalks designated within the community process.

## Timeline

