

3/9/2011

Lopez Village Planning Review Committee

EMERGING DIRECTIONS FOR THE VILLAGE – D R A F T O N L Y

The following objectives or “preferred future conditions” for the Village were identified from the outcomes of the 3 workshops held by the Committee in 2010 and the plenary or introductory workshop as well as from indicators from the mental map survey conducted by the UW students and through community discussions at our presentations.

Preamble paragraph to be inserted: that summarizes some of the salient conditions of the Village including size, demographics and the range of users served by the Village, the two broad functional areas - public and private - that coexist in the Village, something about the unique ecological conditions of the site, something about the nature and value of the character of the place - combining natural and built environments, and something about expectations for change in say the next 2 decades.

There should also be a little preamble statement about having a Lopez Village-specific Plan, aka a Sub Area Plan including generally how it would work and fit into the larger context of the County.

Then....

1. A Walkable Village

Over the years a number of vision statements for the Village have been developed, including one drafted with Pat Mann of CPD and community members not too long ago. One consistent quality brought up time and again in all of the visioning is the desire for the Village to be noticeably and functionally pedestrian friendly - a place that invites and supports pedestrian and bicycle movement over the car.

The subarea plan would contain an element that addresses the Village’s long held planning objective for being a pedestrian-friendly environment - one that supports walking and biking as a primary means for moving around within the Village itself. This plan element - perhaps as a key part of a transportation or circulation element - would contain development standards for the pedestrian pathway system including functional intentions, modes to be accommodated, locations, dimensions, surface qualities, and indicators (signs or equal) of public accessibility. In general, the plan for a highly walkable Village would contain policy directions such as the following:

Strengthen and increase the pedestrian connections throughout the Village – and to important locations beyond the Village - to create a more coherent whole among the various activities and uses and to reduce the reliance on and the impact from the automobile in the Village environment.

- The pathway system should be a primary element in the overall image of the Village; a distinct and pleasant quality that unifies the public and private spaces and that is a valued part of the Island's identity.

- Pedestrian walkways should be appropriately scaled, located and constructed to be attractive – even compelling – for all kind of walking including functional (shopping and getting from place to place), recreational (experiential, enjoying the views and activities), social (interchange) and health.

The recent proposal by the Community Trail Network (CTN) group – to develop a path from the LoHo Hamlet south to the clinic and farmer's market, is a fine illustration of this objective. The intention is to construct this particular pathway with volunteer efforts; a means of implementation that can be used elsewhere although it cannot be the sole means for actualizing a pedestrian-friendly Village. Exactions on property owners undertaking new development can be a means to implement some of the walkability objectives as well as grants and public works.

- The Village walkway network should be sufficiently evident to users and clearly inviting to public use. In other words, they should be clearly public.

- Some degree of uniformity in pathway surface can be appropriate – perhaps on the main routes of the network – but variety (in alignment, materials, landscaping) is also to be encouraged – perhaps on the secondary links of the network. Community feedback during the the LVPRC workshops suggests that different types of path surface (such as the gravel desired by the Trail Network) are actually more desirable than having one standard type (as in proposed county regulations.)

- The walkway system needs to be clearly connected to the Village parking system to encourage and support walking once the vehicle has been parked.

- In addition, the walkway system needs to be appropriately connected to the trails envisioned by CTN for the rest of the island. Of special importance is the connection between the marinas on Fisherman Bay and the Village – a route that handles an impressive number of pedestrians but with few present amenities.

- Safety is important; pedestrian walkways should cross the vehicular routes at clearly marked locations and be designed to accommodate all users including those with disabilities.

Bicycles, motorized personal transport, skateboards and the like can co-exist on pedestrian routes but there must be sufficient right of way for multiple users and construction practices to support them. For example, a pedestrian-only walkway can be a minimum of 3 feet. Adding bicycles requires an additional 3 feet. Ideally, the Village routes will distinguish pedestrian-focused from bicycle accessible. In general, it will be preferable to reinforce a system of bicycle trails at the perimeter of the Village.

2. Village-appropriate Parking

Parking is a necessary function to support users and residents of the Village. Parking will be an important element in the subarea plan.

The amount and location of parking needs to be appropriately sized to support the users but not overwhelm and denigrate the experience of the Village as a connected, integrally functioning place of commerce and public use.

The present amount of parking – in private lots and on streets – is probably sufficient in sheer numbers for projected commercial growth over the next 20 years.

Because the present supply is not necessarily where new development will occur, some new parking may be necessary but new development can take advantage of existing parking as well.

And when new sites are developed that add parking to the Village supply – preferably tucked away behind the street front – hugging buildings – this parking should be included in the Village's parking supply balance.

Going forward, a relatively easy, implementable approach to parking would be to remove some of the restrictions of the current code.

- For example, new or expanding businesses should be able to

- A) take advantage of existing public parking in their site planning and parking calculations,

- B) Fee in lieu of building more parking spaces: New developments, in lieu of developing their own parking – except for handicap accessible spaces - could be required contribute to a Village mobility fund which could be used to support clustered parking lots, walkway systems and perhaps (at some point) a small-scaled van system connecting the Village to the ferry and marinas.

The fund could also be used to augment County improvements for County-right-of-way and street parking, or for improvements on other community property.

This fee in lieu approach provides for parity between existing developments - who had to provide on-site parking - and new developments, that may take advantage of the existing supply.

Of note: the Eastsound subarea plan has a parking element that allows fee in lieu of spaces but apparently it is not used. Perhaps it is not well publicized or not well understood.

The objective is to limit parking and to share parking; to maximize the use of existing parking and of any new parking that is developed. Parking maximums, rather than minimums should be in place.

Another possibility would be to provide incentives for providing alternatives; such as installing bicycle racks or building appropriately-attractive and functional pathways.

Clustering the parking supply

Going forward, the Village's mobility and circulation planning should aim to cluster and connect the parking supply - making it into a coherent system that is well connected to selected roadways that are designed for major vehicular use, and also connected to the Village's pedestrian walkway system.

The Village is beginning to see some clustering of automobile circulation - the bank, grocery, post office .

Two zones of parking: commercial and residential

Residential developments will require on-site parking. In most cases a minimum of one space per unit. Eventually, flex-car programs and the like may help to reduce this target, but this will not happen right away.

Thus, this on-site supply condition of residential developments suggests that such development should be encouraged to occur outside of the immediate core of the Village. Push for commercial uses to be developed within the core - perhaps with ancillary residential units - and for residential uses to be developed on the outside edges of the core.

Parking development standards

There would still need to be standards for the construction of parking stalls if someone chose to develop them (standards for size and surface rather than number).

3. Advantages of Fisherman Bay and the Village Ecology

Fisherman Bay is a primary ecological determinant of the Village itself – it shapes the form and topographical conditions of the Village – including the spectacular, meaningful views, it serves as the catchment area for the Village’s drainage, it supports a good deal of the commercial and tourist activity including boating and fishing and it is the epitome of the Island’s treasured context of land and water.

The quality of the Bay and the quality of the Village are inextricably connected, and as the Village grows and takes steps to improve itself as a Village, it needs to do so in relation to the Bay itself. Let the Bay be a primary determinant for planning the Village.

Village Drainage and Natural Landscape Systems

As the Village develops, build on the inherent, ecological connections between these two systems – the Village with urban surfaces and the natural context in which it exists. Some of the significant, present open space system in the Village is associated with ecological drainage patterns, including the wetlands to the south and the watercourses demarking the public areas of the Village Farmer’s market and Center for the Community and Arts.

Build on this existing system; strengthen its ability to support ecological functions and the quality of the Bay, and use it as well to strengthen the unique character and image of the Village environment.

Water Planning and Management

In the workshops, the community has expressed interest in finding appropriate ways to maintain and improve the health of Fisherman Bay and its associated wetlands, waterways and land/water interfaces. Water management is a critical planning component including factors such as:

Freshwater input is critical to the health of the Bay; many of the former waterways that supplied the Bay have been interrupted or compromised. This original system can be restored to benefit the Bay and reinforce the unique identity and character of the Village.

Run off management, including constructed bio - remediation, is necessary to reduce chemical impacts on the Bay from the Village development.

Going forward, planning for climate adaptation and for critical infrastructure - storm sewers, roadway integrity, water levels in the Bay, storm wave impacts – should be an integral part of the Village plan.

Occasional storm surge flushing of Bay was part of the area’s natural process and overall health. Finding ways to reinstate this occasional function within the context of an urbanizing Village is an objective of the plan.

Storm Water and Runoff planning

Workshop discussions explored the value of open ditches, swales, wetlands and covered culverts as part of a Village storm water/runoff plan. In some cases, open water courses can be attractive, inexpensive and an integral part of the natural ecology. In other cases, covering the waterways or diverting the water courses, can provide for access or be used to increase roadside parking.

An overall storm water basin plan would be more effective than a village - only plan. In planning, accurate mapping of the basin's and Village's historic and existing water networks would be essential.

The plan should identify where each approach is most appropriate, based on weighing a number of considerations including ecology, hydrology, historic precedents, aesthetics and view, functional demands of accessibility - pathways and parking, and others.

Because the focus in the UGA is on increased density, individual lot solutions to runoff problems are often not practical, so a combined or shared solution would be more efficient and appropriate.

4. Village Built Environment

Over the years, the Village has steadily developed as a core of commercial, residential and public uses. It has benefitted from some strategically-important development decisions including the preservation of several publically-used open spaces, the Library, the Center for the Community and the Arts, Family Resource Center, the Hamlet and the LoHo housing complexes, as well as the several commercial building complexes, tourism facilities and the Market.

The Village and the Urban Growth Area are close to one and the same. The present Comprehensive Plan projects much of the future growth to occur in the Urban Growth Area including housing and commercial uses.

Two types of development

Currently the whole Village is zoned village commercial, envisioning a general mix of various commercial and residential as well as community or public uses. One of the ideas coming from community feedback would be to have somewhat more distinction in the future as to what happens best and where in the Village.

The emerging vision for the Village is for a commercial, mixed - use core surrounded by a more residential zone that is connected both to the core and beyond to the more rural development patterns.

Commercial core made up of two related areas

Previous patterns and recent development have begun to gently shape the Village into roughly two commercial areas, each with its own needs and character. One, along Weeks Road and associated with the new Market, is becoming the automobile – oriented Village space and the other, associated with the former market site and surrounding uses, is emerging as a more quiet-paced commercial environment.

Development standards could be articulated to help to reinforce the character, nature and functional demands of each area. In both areas, it is clear that reinforcing the pedestrian, walkable qualities will help people to use and enjoy the Village as a whole.

Encourage commercial and residential in different areas

In general, commercial is more appropriate where lots have substantial abutment or connection to a county road for vehicular and service movement. In the UGA, lots meeting this general condition could be designated as commercial and other lots as more residential.

Another option would be to require that for all lots more than 5 acres, all commercial development must be constructed within x-feet of a county road.

Commercial developments in the Village should adhere to some common development standards. Each commercial area may be the basis for establishing some common preferred development types and patterns.

In general, commercial development should be encouraged to make the most of its site. The Island's UGA is fairly limited and holds the only potential for development in order to preserve other Island land for agricultural and non- commercial uses. (A key component of the County's long-range growth strategy is the accommodation of a large share of the growth in the UGA)

Residential in Village

Housing mixed with commercial is appropriate throughout the Village, although developments that are primarily residential would be better in the areas surrounding the present commercial core rather than in the core itself.

Residential use area within the Village should still allow for cottage industry (which is defined primarily by the number of car trips a cottage industry requires)

Traditional experience of a Village – density, design and mix of uses

The character of the Village built environment should be derived from logical and relevant building practices that will sustain and support the quality of the environment of Fisherman Bay itself. The Village has some excellent examples along these lines and as a community, has expressed a general commitment to finding new and appropriate ways for development in relation to the environment.

In the Village commercial area, zero lot line development and bringing buildings up close to the street line and pedestrian pathways – not set back as in suburban, low intensity developments – would be appropriate.

Encouraging buildings to line the street – as in traditional town development patterns – helps to support walkability and a coherent Village experience. Where new parking is absolutely necessary – including residential – in general – except for disabled parking - it should be tucked away, behind the buildings.

The urban form of the Village can certainly be intensified; there is an adequately sized road system and room for greater density of development . Building heights could be increased to 35' to allow for a full 3 stories of use. Roof forms at this height could be encouraged to be pitched but this need not be a blanket requirement.

Views are an important quality in the Village – where possible view corridors should be preserved and enhanced and locations for greater building heights need to account for preserving the sense of view out as well.

Uses can certainly be mixed; live/work developments and the like are appropriate.

Design standards

Lighting in the Village should be minimal; the much-treasured night sky conditions are part of the draw and quality of Lopez and development in the Village should work towards preserving this quality.

Signage in and around the Village should be adequate to support the visitor unfamiliar with the community but it should not create a sensory overload for resident or visitor alike. Some degree of uniformity is useful, but wholesale uniformity is not.

{others could include transparency – pedestrian abilities to look in, avoiding blank walls where trying to encourage pedestrians, pedestrian-scaled elements – such as signage, lighting, plant materials, sun and rain-protection devices, and public art: safety- including auto/pedestrian junctures; landscaping

Low Impact Development

The community and committee are interested in proposing low impact development as a sustainable standard for new construction in Lopez village. There is a feeling that this is important not only to sustaining a livable ecology but also as a strategy for supporting the economic survival of Lopez village.

A sustainable development handbook could be developed for Lopez village that is similar to the historic preservation handbook used in Friday Harbor. The implementation of development standards can take a step-wise approach with

objectives and directives that don't get acted on 100% at this juncture. The purpose of standards for Lopez would be sustainability and we would take pains to avoid something that would instead be focused on creating a "cute village".

The plan would be based on local standards rather than something like the LEED ratings. Standards would need to address the community interest in keeping Fisherman Bay Clean.

5. **Transportation: Mobility and Accessibility**

The future of the Village is inextricably linked to transportation and mobility – and the plan should address this at various scales and modes including:

- Vehicular and Service
- Bicycle
- Pedestrian
- Air
- Marine

Fundamentally, the objective is to develop a viable, integrated, safe and well-functioning system that accounts for and balances economic, environmental and community/cultural objectives and visions.

(noted elsewhere: Connectivity and linkages, safety, ...such as integrating pedestrian pathway system with parking system, connecting the marina areas with the Village functions, reducing reliance on automobiles by providing attractive, secure alternatives...)

6. **Two Significant Limitations: Energy? Water?**

The Islands Energy Coalition is working with San Juan County to update some land use codes (section 18). In doing so we have found that Waldron sub-area plan allows renewables and Olga does not. The renewable energy issue is complicated but worth following. The city of Seattle just adopted a change to their code allowing wind - the generation is from a 'ball' attached to the home (or other residential building) and not a tower. You can see them at <http://nwwindpower.net/>. There was a discussion of renewable energy generation within the village. The current ordinance covers treats both wind generator towers and cellular towers. The county will start work on the renewable energy sections or code revision in mid-to-late January.

There was a discussion of personal wireless communication facilities. There is a draft ordinance being discussed that would allow antennas in village commercial zones.

A subarea plan could include a restriction on rooftop and side cast antennas in addition to the existing restriction on towers within the UGA.

7. **Land Use** – further thinking and development of what are appropriate and necessary uses and activities for the future viability of the Village. How is this monitored, encouraged, shaped?

8. **Air, Habitat, Water**