



BELLINGHAM, WASHINGTON



Regional Urban Design Assistance Team, Northwest Washington Chapter, American Institute of Architects Nov 19 -23, 1992

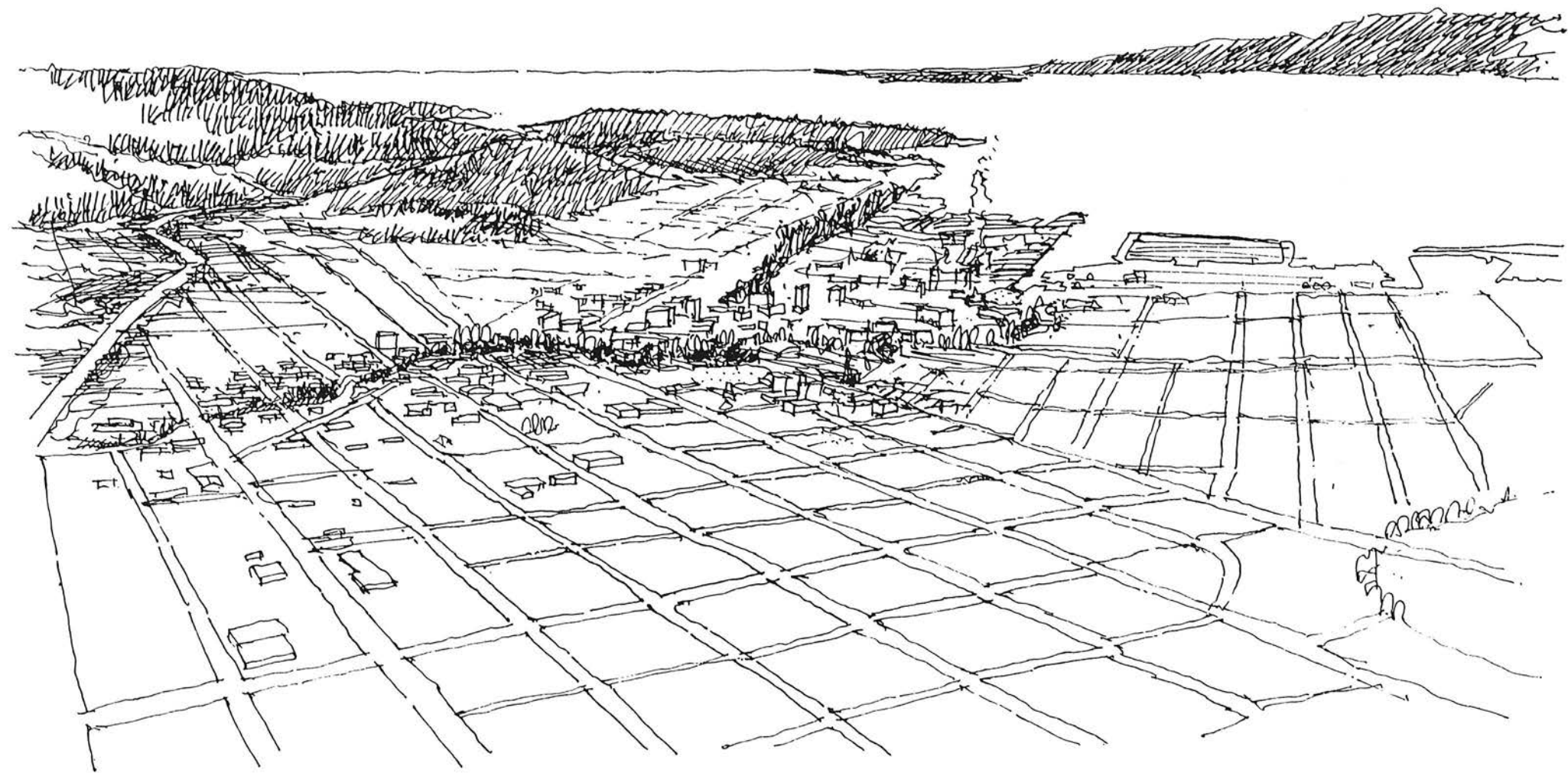
REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

Bellingham's Civic Center can, if properly developed, make a significant contribution to supporting the vitality of its Central Business District. The R/UDAT report recommends a number of steps that can be taken with the Civic Center and the downtown areas adjacent to it to achieve this goal. Among the most important are the following:

- **Civic Center:** Governmental functions and services should be concentrated in this area. These activities are of significant benefit to the Central Business District. Parking solutions that use land more efficiently are essential. Expansion of the Civic Center to the north and east must stop. Expansion to the south is highly desirable. Whatcom Creek enhancement as a natural corridor can be highly compatible with Civic Center development.
- **Cultural Crown:** The land on top of the bluff immediately west of Prospect Street is important historically and aesthetically. This "cultural crown" should be the site of significant civic structures and provide public opportunities to enjoy dramatic views of the Bay. The Post Office should be relocated from its current site.
- **Arts Center:** The R/UDAT enthusiastically endorses development of the Arts Center. A re-evaluation should be done, however, to find a better site along Prospect Street on top of the bluff or in downtown. Several sites and buildings offer the potential for greater benefit and better connection of the Arts Center to other cultural and commercial activities in the Central Business District.
- **Housing:** Immediate opportunities in the Central Business District may be limited, but units for students and artists in vacant or underutilized space in upper floors of downtown buildings should be pursued aggressively.
- **Creek Corridor and Connections:** Whatcom Creek can be developed as a significant natural amenity, serving public needs and providing habitat for wildlife.
- **Waterfront:** The connection of the Central Business District to the waterfront is incomplete. The community should begin now to plan and pursue a strategy to create public access and use opportunities on the waterfront west of Roeder Avenue.
- **Partnerships:** Effective implementation of the R/UDAT recommendations, as well as other Bellingham plans, requires the ability to forge working partnerships. In particular, the City must work as a partner with the County to address Civic Center development, and with business and property owners to address Central Business District revitalization.

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Bellingham with Whatcom Creek

INTRODUCTION

The R/UDAT Concept

The Regional and Urban Design Committee of the American Institute of Architects (AIA) has been sending Urban Design Assistance Teams to various American Cities since 1967.

The teams respond to problems as described by the local AIA Chapters and their community sponsor.

Each Regional/Urban Design Assistance Team (R/UDAT) is specially selected to include professionals experienced in the particular problems of the area under study. Team members are not compensated for their services and agree not to accept commissions for work resulting from recommendations.

The team acquaints itself with the community and its people, engages in analysis from a fresh and unbiased perspective, and offers its recommendations for planning and action strategies.

The process is very intense and includes team meetings with community groups, site visits and tours, public hearings and late night work sessions. This report is the end product of the four day effort.

Over one hundred cities with a combined population of more than 12 million citizens have been served and professional services valued in excess of \$2 million have been donated.





Closed Vista - Assumption Catholic Church

Making R/UDAT Happen

The R/UDAT program receives many inquiries each year from communities throughout the country requesting assistance. Communities that are selected for R/UDAT visits must demonstrate to the National Task Group community-wide support. This support must come from both the public and private sectors and represent broad support throughout all of the segments of the community. This support must be documented to the R/UDAT Task Group through letters, cash contributions, and in-kind services and contributions.

The citizens of the City of Bellingham, acting through their local R/UDAT Steering Committee, have clearly demonstrated their commitment to R/UDAT.

Study Methodology

The following summarizes the R/UDAT methodology and the team's approach to evaluating the economic, social, and real estate issues and opportunities in Bellingham. The R/UDAT team was selected to respond to the particular needs of Bellingham. This included a multi-disciplinary team comprising eight members in the following professions: economics, architecture, landscape architecture, urban design, transportation planning, urban and redevelopment planning, port planning, and city administration.

The R/UDAT visit is a fast-paced, intensive work session. The visit stimulates, focuses, and creates an awareness of issues and opportunities--not as an end in itself, but as a beginning. R/UDATs have often been described as a "plan for planning". R/UDAT teams examine local assets, analyze community

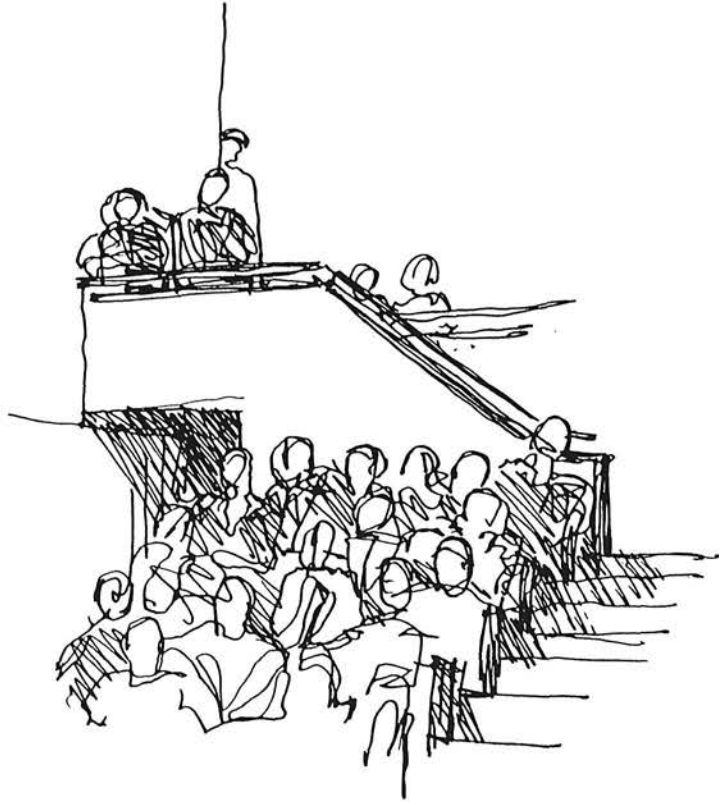
needs, and propose workable methods to resolve problems. It is an open process in which citizens' perceptions and inputs are critical and all who are concerned with the issues are asked to participate.

To that end, the local Steering Committee spent approximately 27 months organizing and planning for the team's visit and evaluation. Team members were selected and received a data package prior to their arrival in Bellingham. The Steering Committee was responsible for setting up all meetings, and coordinated the term's entire schedule during its four days in Bellingham. During its four day visit, the Bellingham R/UDAT team participated in the following activities.

Site Visits

- Met with approximately 75 to 100 public and private officials, city department heads, organizations, and others with an interest in the revitalization of Bellingham. This dialogue served to define and clarify local problems and opportunities and bring diverse groups within the community together to communicate issues of importance to the R/UDAT team.
- Participated in a series of walking tours throughout the study area to identify physical issues, access and visibility, development opportunities, potential environmental constraints, and urban design and planning concerns.
- Observed the cityscape and regional development patterns during a series of flyovers of the Bellingham area. This provided an opportunity for team members to evaluate geographical and topographic concerns, highway patterns, and land use policies.





- Evaluated physical distance, drive times, and visibility issues on each of the major vehicular approaches into the downtown area. This analysis served as the basis for identifying concerns such as signage, parking, and highway access with site-specific development opportunities.

Public Hearing

- Conducted a public hearing at Bellingham City Hall to provide an opportunity for citizen input. Approximately 50 citizens participated in the three hour hearing to voice issues of concern about the city, its services, and its problems and opportunities. Citizen participation is the essence of the R/UDAT process and is, in fact, basic to all planning projects. The public hearing provided an opportunity for citizens to reveal problems not apparent to decision makers. The intent of this and all R/UDATs in the citizen input process is to provide a non-partisan vehicle to serve all citizens.

Time For Action

This is not simply another plan to add to the growing stack of reports, feasibility studies, development plans and committee recommendations collecting on shelves in downtown Bellingham.

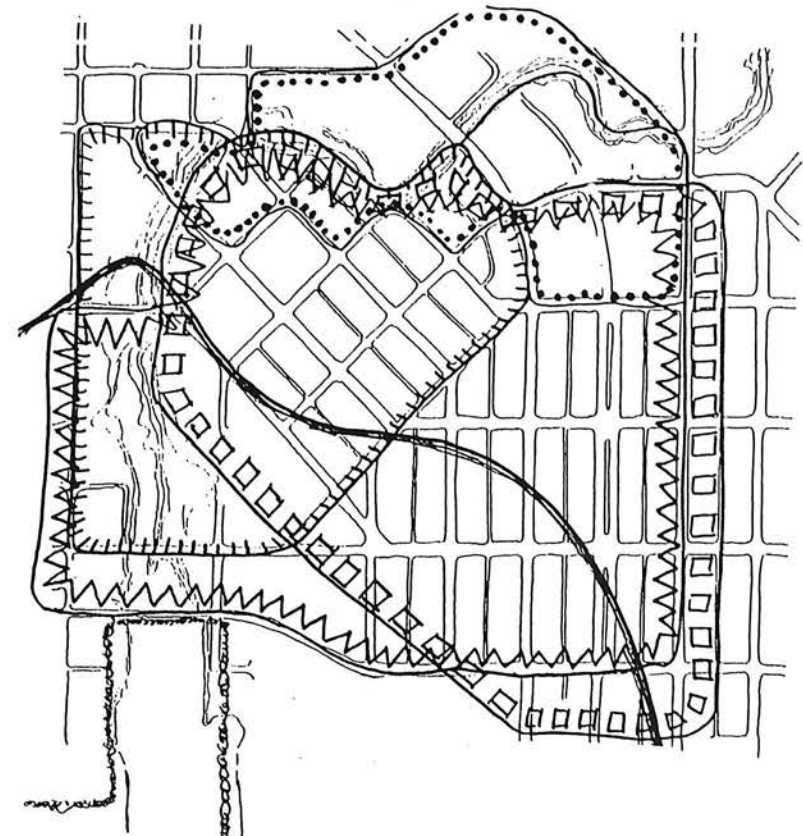
The R/UDAT product is a call for action. The time is right to make decisions on both the process and substance for improving the economic, social and environmental quality of Bellingham's historic core.

All of the necessary ingredients are present for meaningful decision making on the short and long-range future of downtown:

- a focus of concern and sense of urgency by the public officials, businesses, and residents due to recent negative impacts on the downtown following the development of shopping centers and office parks along I-5;
- the establishment of goals and objectives through the visioning study and the current city/county comprehensive planning effort currently underway;
- a wide variety of ideas, plans and specific detailed improvements to choose from, developed by numerous recent planning efforts; and
- existing agencies in place for implementation (Port District, City, County, Whatcom Transit Authority).

The only missing ingredient is the willingness of the key decision makers to "do it!" in a coordinated and cooperative manner.

It has been observed by the R/UDAT team that there is no lack of imaginative plans and solutions to the problems of downtown. In fact, there may even be a surplus, evidenced by the sheer number of separate documents collected for review by the team. However, the lack of coordinated effort to establish priorities and develop a consensus of support for specific improvement proposals has led to "paper planning" and limited follow through.



KEY

- □ Parking Feasibility Study 1991
- • • Bellingham North Downtown Study 1992
- ⌞ Downtown Development Strategies 1989
- ⌞ Civic Center Parking Study 1984
Civic Center Plan 1978
- ⌞ Coastal Zone Management Boundary 1977
- ⌞ Shoreline Masters Update 1988
Shoreline Access Study 1976

Area Covered by Previous Studies

By responding to the community as a whole and not to special interest groups or a single client, it is hoped that the recommendations of the R/UDAT team can avoid the historic pattern of fractionalized planning and garner the wide spread support needed for implementation.

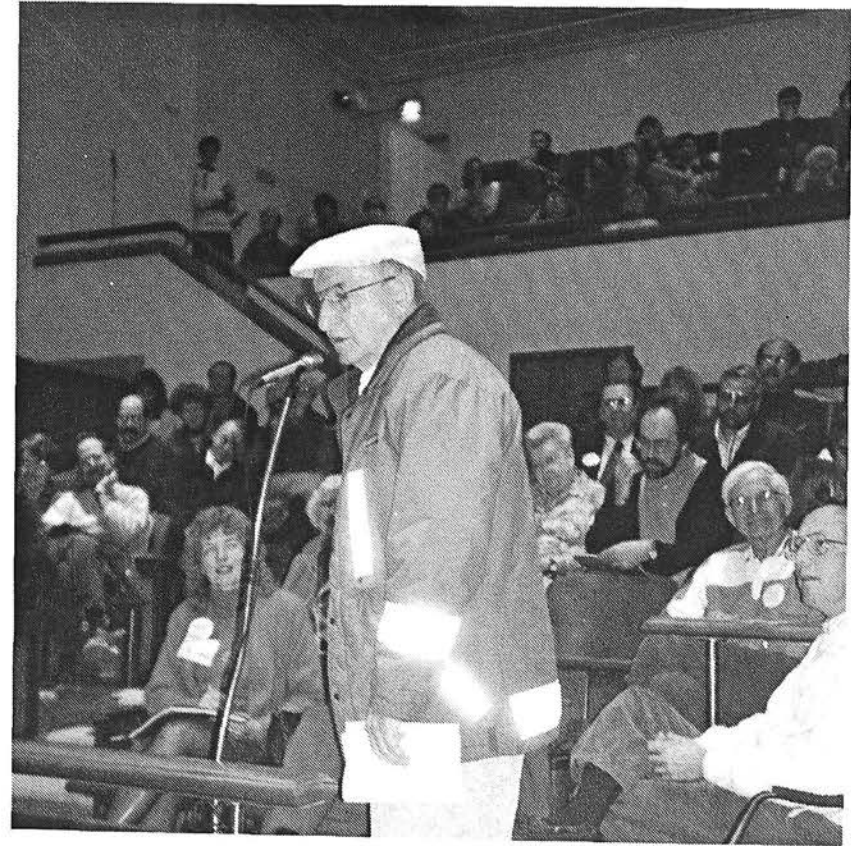
We are optimistic that Bellingham can begin to make real progress in the downtown area. The enthusiasm and concern is evident from all parties with which we have dealt over the past few days, and we hope that our suggestions will form a realistic and workable framework to accelerate action on downtown improvements.

Focus of R/UDAT Effort

The initial and primary focus for the R/UDAT was in response to the need for a master plan for the expanding Civic/Cultural Center in downtown.

As a better understanding of the problems and potential impacts of the Civic Center evolved, the task for the R/UDAT expanded to include:

- the interface of the Civic Center with the rest of downtown and Whatcom Creek /Waterfront areas;
- strengthening downtown activities;
- leadership and cooperation issues for decision-making and implementation;
- coordination of diverse planning efforts;



- the role of the Port District in improving downtown economy;
- downtown access, parking and vehicular/pedestrian circulation; and
- future cultural activities and institutions in downtown.

While the basic and most intensive planning by the R/UDAT team is within the civic center, the context of the larger downtown has been addressed.





CONTEXT

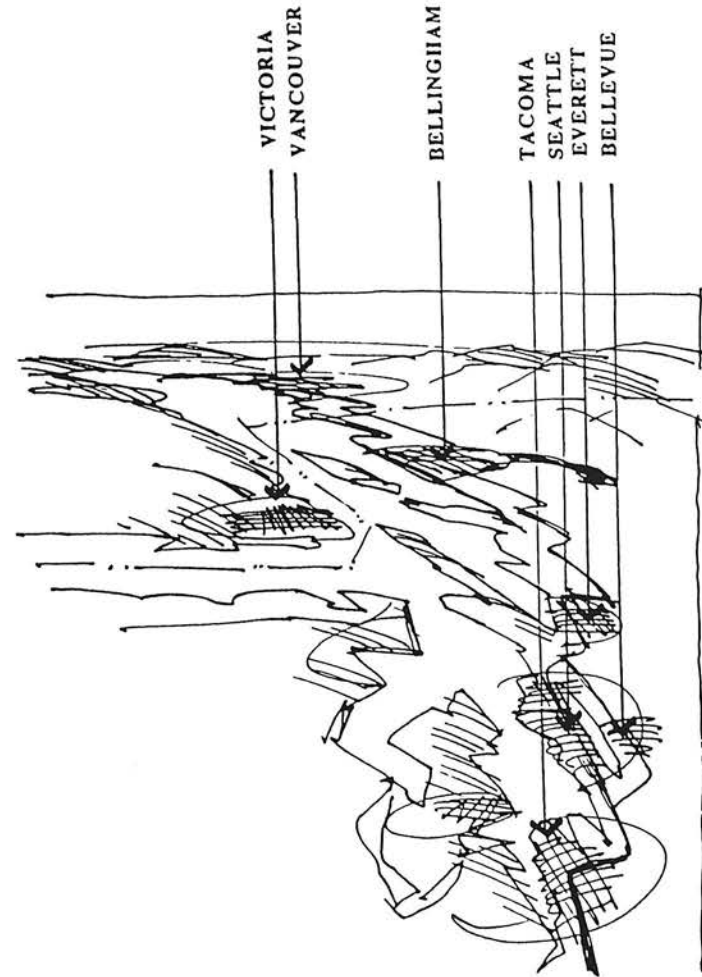
City Within The Region

Bellingham lies strategically within a rapidly growing corridor between Puget Sound and the Cascades, stretching 150 miles from Seattle to Vancouver. It is a highly desirable area in which to live, work and play in and is expected to have a continuing increase in population well into the next century. The natural setting is hard to match with an abundance of water, mountains and forests. While sometimes overshadowed by the glamorous urban centers of Vancouver and Seattle, Bellingham has recently been coming into its own as an affordable housing area with all the positive attributes of the Pacific Northwest with less of the negative elements such as traffic congestion, crime and pollution that are associated with the larger cities. Relocation of the Alaskan ferry terminal to Bellingham and increasing cruise services to Victoria and the islands is also bringing new recognition to Bellingham.

The future role of Bellingham in serving the regional demand for specialized shopping, recreation and cultural events is seen as a positive factor for the revitalization of the historic downtown.

Downtown Within The City

Although the core area of Bellingham, has recently lost its dominant position as the major retail area in the county it still retains other uses which demonstrate the need for and strength of a conventional downtown. These include the government offices and public service functions of the county and city; specialized retail shops; cultural and entertainment facilities;



office and service retail space; a transportation hub; specialized housing, and central recreational areas.

While the balance of major downtown activities has shifted, the core remains as the symbolic and functional heart of Bellingham. These forces and the long-term investment in the hub-oriented infrastructure give reason to the marshalling of time, effort and financial commitment to improving the downtown.

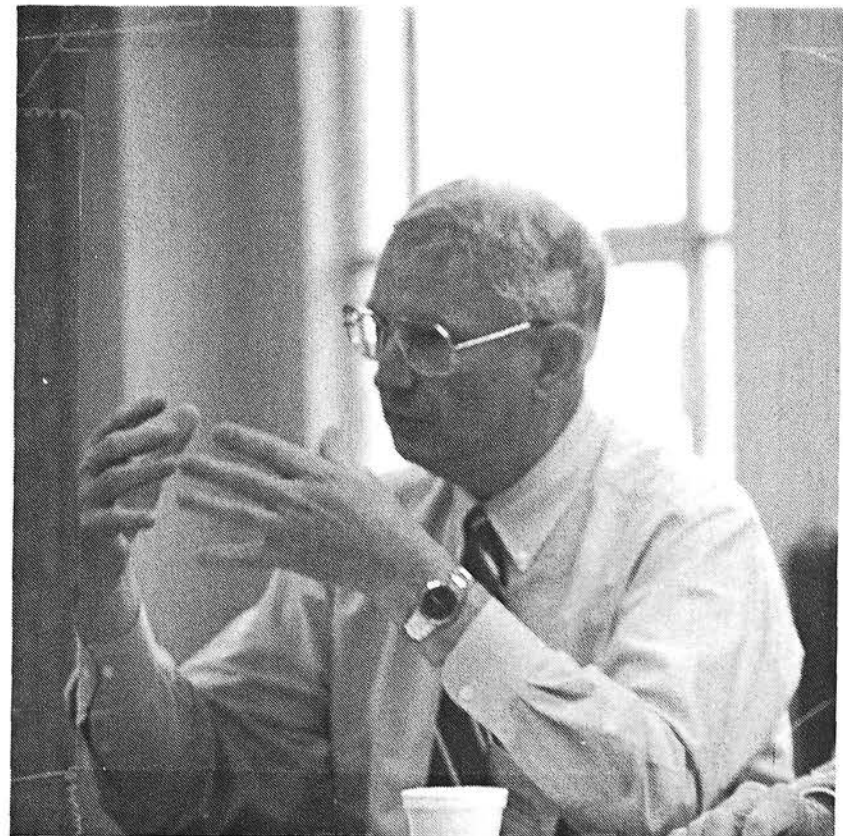
Trends Impacting the Central Business District

The R/UDAT team received demographic and economic information and testimony regarding the changing character of the Bellingham Central Business District (CBD) retail and office components. A brief summary of the meaning of this information as it impacts the R/UDAT recommendations is presented here.

Overall, the Bellingham CBD's economic condition is relatively good but shows identifiable signs of deterioration. The R/UDAT team attempted to determine whether this deterioration was significantly different from county wide trends.

A few statistics are appropriate to define the current situation. The 1990 census recorded a Whatcom County population of 127,780 persons. Bellingham's population was 52,179 persons or about 41 percent of the County total. Bellingham is by far the largest jurisdiction in the County over nine times as populous as the next largest concentration in Ferndale.

The decade of 1970-1980 was one of dramatic change for Whatcom County. The Interstate (I-5) freeway was completed in the early 1970's, linking the County more easily to the rest of



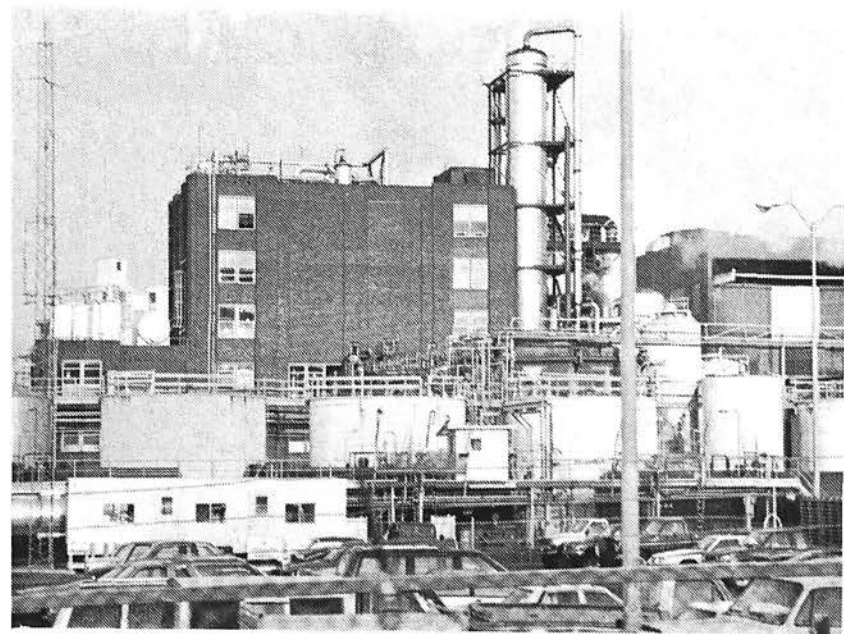
Washington, the West Coast and British Columbia; the oil refineries and an aluminum refinery were completed and operating; Western Washington University enrollment increased; and unemployed workers from Seattle were migrating north to seek a smaller town atmosphere. This combination of factors produced unprecedented growth.

Growth continued in the 1980's but at a slower though still robust pace. From 1970 to 1980 the County's population grew by 24,700 persons. From 1980 to 1990, the growth was approximately 21,100 persons. Expectations are that growth during the 1990-2000 period will be an additional 28,000 persons.

Most population growth has been the result of in-migration, which has been responsible for about two-thirds of the growth since 1960. In-migration has been most pronounced for persons under 25 and over 50 years of age.

The US-Canadian Free Trade Act of 1989, the improved position of the Canadian dollar, burdensome taxes on Canadian consumers' essentials, an influx of people and capital from the Pacific Rim, and a real and regulated land shortage on the B.C. Mainland have significantly influenced segments of the Whatcom County economy. These factors have affected real estate and retailing. In fact, Canadian shoppers are reported to account for about 50 percent of the regional mall's volume and have precipitated significant increases in new retail space near the mall.

The Whatcom County Real Estate Research Report (1992) reports that Whatcom County's inventory of office space of approximately 1.7 million square feet has current vacancy of 8.1 percent. The CBD, which comprises approximately 580,000



Georgia -Pacific

square feet (34 percent of the total inventory), shows a 14.3 percent vacancy (83,000 square feet).

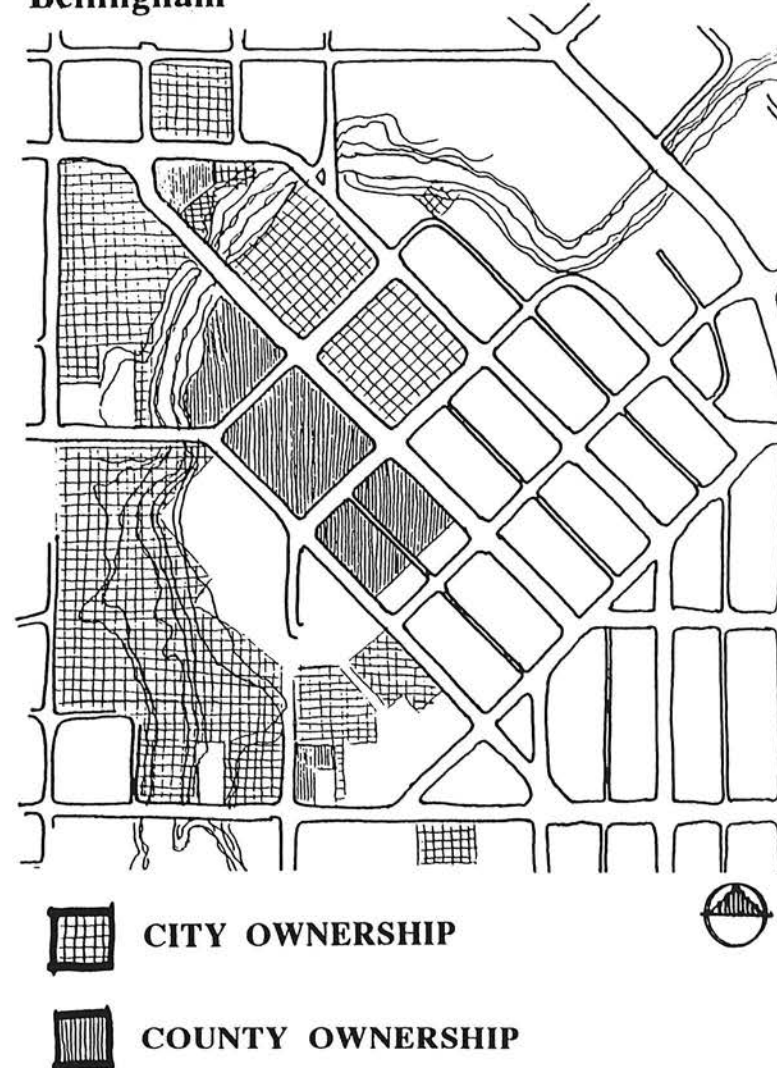
The County's retail inventory of 5.9 million square feet has a current vacancy of 4.3 percent. The CBD, which comprises 909,000 square feet (15 percent of the total inventory), shows a 16.9 percent vacancy (154,000 square feet). Overall, the combined CBD office and retail inventory of 1,489,000 square feet is currently 15.9 percent vacant (237,000 square feet).

Trends show the CBD office vacancy rates actually declined since 1988, when the regional shopping center opened, until the period 1991-92, when a dramatic increase from .8 to 14.3 percent occurred. On the other hand, retail vacancies declined from 23.9 percent in 1991 to 16.9 percent in 1992.

Knowledgeable persons who presented testimony to the R/UDAT panel have voiced concern regarding negative trends in the office and retail sectors in Bellingham's CBD. In addition to the problems created by the recession, the Canadian market has been negatively impacted by exchange rates. Notwithstanding these problems, peripheral retail and office developments have fared markedly better than the CBD.

The warning signs for concern about the economic vitality of the CBD seem to be evident. The amount of vacant space relative to other locations in the County and the flattening or decline of space rentals should be cause for concern. It should be clear that aggressive action by the community to arrest these negative trends in the CBD and to enact positive readjustments in the CBD from department store driven retail use to specialty retail, restaurants, professional office space and housing are now necessary.

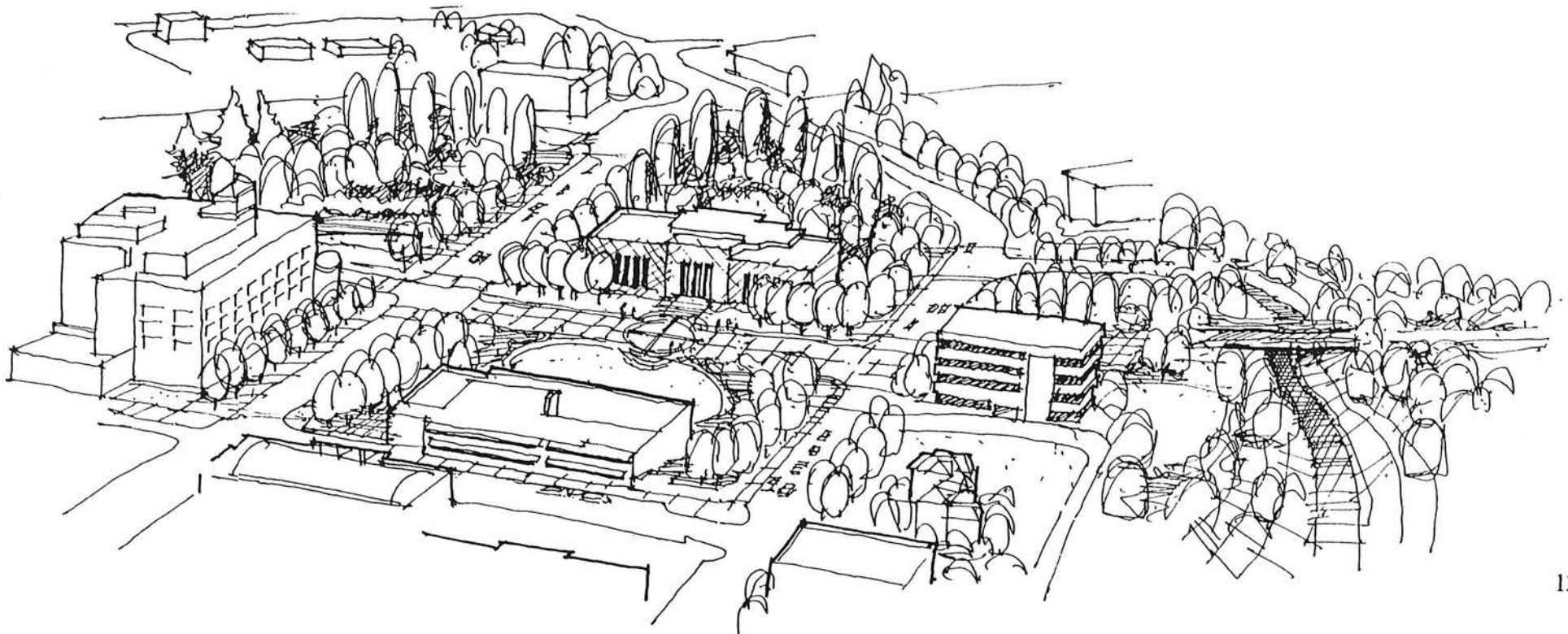
Bellingham



The Civic Center Within The Downtown

The public functions of the City Hall, expanded County building, police station, library and the nearby State offices form an important physical and economic part of downtown Bellingham. They normally belong in the conventional center of a city and should be encouraged to function and grow to their full capacity as a stable and important element of the larger central city. The central clustering of these public uses best serves the public by being accessible from all parts of the larger community by both auto and alternative transportation. This clustering in a central location also helps to facilitate desired interchange between various government entities on issues such as comprehensive planning and social services.

The R/UDAT team has approached this effort with the concentration of government facilities in the downtown as a positive given assumption.



History Of The Bellingham Civic Center

Four bay-front communities came together in 1903 to form the City of Bellingham. The legacy of their early development patterns and of public development activities since then can be seen in Bellingham's present day Civic Center area.

When two of the four towns consolidated in 1890, they built a bridge to connect what is now West Holly with Holly Street. That viaduct forms part of the southwest boundary of the present Civic Center area. In 1892, the 21,000 square foot New Whatcom City Hall was built to serve the consolidated area. Sited on a steep bluff overlooking the original shoreline, this five story brick and sandstone landmark served as Bellingham's City Hall from the city's incorporation until 1939. Converted to the Whatcom Museum in 1940, it has undergone significant restoration in recent years and today continues as a symbol of civic pride and a gathering place for many of the community's cultural and civic events.

Like many waterfront communities, Bellingham did not always take care of its natural resources, filling in the tide flats below the museum and establishing a city dump along the shores of Whatcom Creek. This creek flows through the northern third of the Civic Center area and today is seen as a major amenity for both public and private development. Whatcom Creek and the associated Whatcom Falls were initially the site of Bellingham's earliest development, with mills that used the falls for power. In the 1970's, the City closed its sewage treatment plant in this area. In an innovative public redevelopment project, the former sewage treatment tanks were converted to fish hatchery tanks,

and the Maritime Heritage Center and Park was developed along the banks of the creek just below the falls. This area is still subject to tidal influences due to its connection with the Bay, and residents and visitors go there to see salmon leaping in the falls.

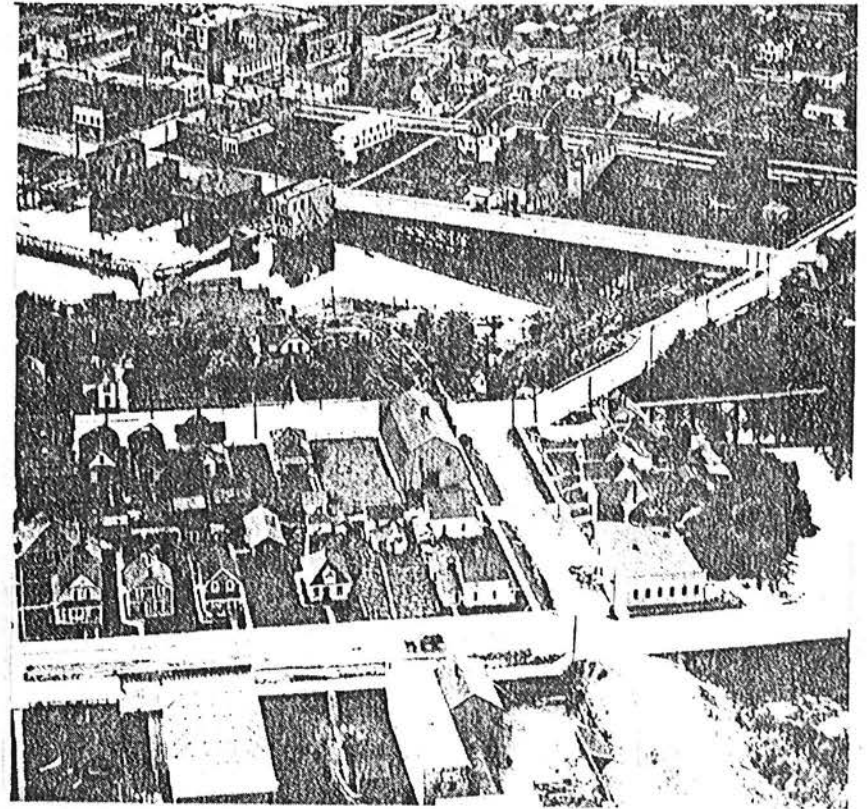
The present City Hall, built along the southeast bank of Whatcom Creek over former fill area, is a fine example of Civic Art Deco architecture. It was built of local sandstone in 1939 using a combination of Public Works Administration and local funds. The City Hall underwent significant interior renovation in 1977 to address problems caused by settling over the old land fill, to reseal the sandstone, and to provide for better use of the available space within the 65,000 square foot building. Most recently, the city has developed plans for a new public safety building north of Whatcom Creek along "C" Street to house the Police Department, which has outgrown its space in City Hall.

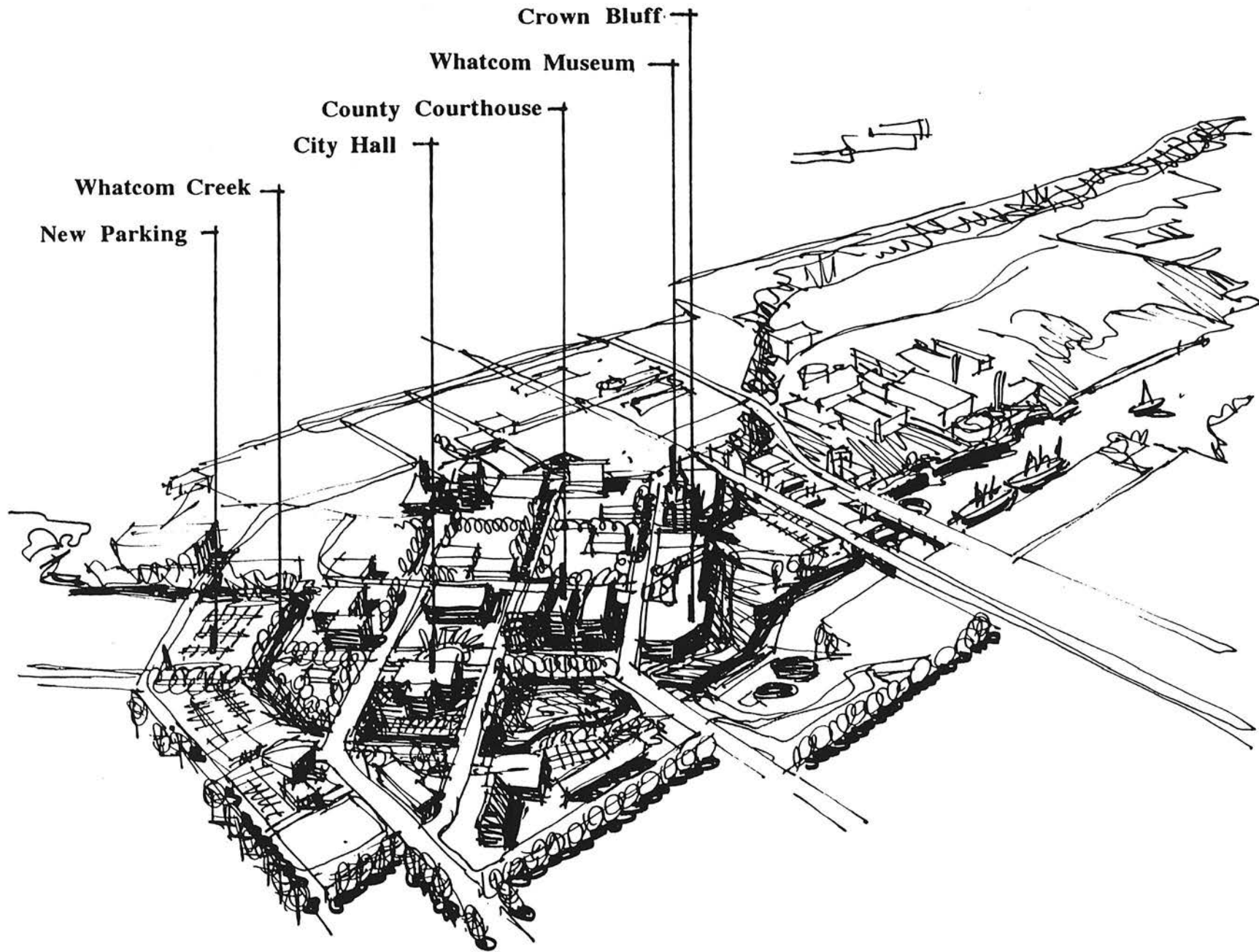
Two other major buildings in the civic center, the Whatcom County Courthouse and the Bellingham Library, were completed in 1951. The library is separated from City Hall by Lottie Street and a sloping lawn which is used for sculpture displays and informal musical performances. An earlier Carnegie library building dating from 1908 was located at Magnolia and Commercial. It was demolished in 1954. Bellingham's present library was updated and expanded between 1983 and 1985. The County Courthouse was completed in 1951 at a cost of \$1 million, while a fifth floor was added in 1960. A jail wing was added just west of the courthouse in 1984 at a cost of \$11 million. The County's siting of the Courthouse in the Civic Center area resulted in part from incentives offered by the City to build within the government center complex.

A major expansion of the County Courthouse was initiated in 1991, which will double the facility's area and will renovate other existing spaces. This addition offers significant opportunities for improved pedestrian circulation and relationship within the Civic Center area.

In the Civic Center's southeast corner lies the Mt. Baker Theatre, a national historic landmark built in 1927 with Spanish/Moorish architectural details, including an 80 foot dome over the main auditorium. It was acquired by the City of Bellingham in 1984 to preserve the building's historic integrity, preventing division of the proscenium house into a multi-screen movie house. It continues to undergo restoration and is used as a performing arts center.

In 1992, Bellingham will begin construction of the Bellingham Art Center. This 20,000 square foot structure will provide studio space for local artists to work and gallery space to display art. Located only a few blocks west of the Mt. Baker Theatre and immediately west of the Whatcom Museum, the Art Center will strengthen the cultural center role of the Civic Center area.





Civic Center

ACTIONS

Civic Center

Introduction

The Civic Center area and the need for a coherent vision and master plan to guide its future development are the primary focus of this R/UDAT study. The approval and actions recommended below seek to provide this vision and master plan. It shall be stressed, however, that the real significance of successful Civic Center development lies in its potential to support the vitality and viability of the downtown area as a whole over time. This good can be achieved while meeting all of the functional needs of the governmental entities who occupy the Civic Center.

Role and Importance of the Civic Center

Downtown Bellingham is the location of the majority of City and County governmental functions. State and Federal offices are also present in the downtown. The greatest concentration of these activities exists in the Civic Center, with City Hall, the City Library and the County Courthouse and Jail forming the nucleus. These activities are important not only in serving the needs of the public, but also in creating activity in downtown and supporting downtown businesses and cultural facilities. Growth in office space to accommodate governmental need currently represents the single largest force in the downtown marketplace. No other source of activity is adding as much square footage of construction or creating as much additional activity in the downtown.



"Bellingham has an artist behind every tree."

Problems and Opportunities

The pressure for more adequate facilities to accommodate governmental needs and the public served by these governmental offices and services has created problems. The government activities accommodated in the Civic Center are expanding north across Whatcom Creek, threatening adjacent residential areas. Parking and the accessibility of government functions to employees and the public have become problematic. Future expansion options to serve the needs of the City Library and other City, County and State functions are unclear. Solutions proposed to some of these issues threaten to turn portions of Whatcom Creek into a lifeless corridor flanked by parking and other incompatible uses. The Civic Center as a whole threatens to become increasingly dispersed and inefficient. Suggested solutions are also often prohibitively expensive or involve further dispersion of governmental activities outside of the Civic Center or even outside of the downtown entirely.

The R/UDAT team believes solutions are available that allow the Civic Center to meet governmental needs without continual expansion in all directions and without removing employees and activity from downtown. Indeed, we believe it is appropriate for the community to establish as its goal that it wishes to accommodate the functions of City, County and State government effectively in a thoughtfully planned Civic Center so as to maximize the concentration of public employees and services in this area and their accessibility to the public. Downtown needs these people and their activity to support its vitality. This goal can be achieved without sacrificing convenience to the public general and public employees. In fact, we believe an appropriately planned and developed Civic Center can substantially improve the current circumstances confronting both.

Civic Center Plan

In order to achieve the benefits of the type of Civic Center described above, there must be a plan, and it must be implemented successfully over time. For downtown Bellingham to benefit from a vital Civic Center that maximizes the concentration of governmental functions and activity in the Civic Center, the community must :

- create a strong, coherent civic presence in the Civic Center.
- establish boundaries within which governmental activities will be accommodated, and stick to them.
- focus activity within and around the central space lying between City Hall, the City Library and the County Courthouse.
- describe building locations, massing, density, height, use and support requirements.
- satisfy immediate space requirements and provide efficient and definite opportunities for future expansion.
- address the access parking and circulation issues of both the general public and public employees.
- protect adjacent residential areas from further encroachment.
- provide meaningful connections to Whatcom Creek, enhancing rather than undermining opportunities for public use and enjoyment.

- provide meaningful pedestrian, bicycle and public transit connections to the Central Business District and Cultural District.

Components of the Plan

Several important factors were cited in the R/UDAT problem statement regarding the Civic Center and its relationship to the larger Bellingham Downtown. Certain of these factors grew in importance as the team conducted its investigations. Those which were deemed of particular significance are listed below:

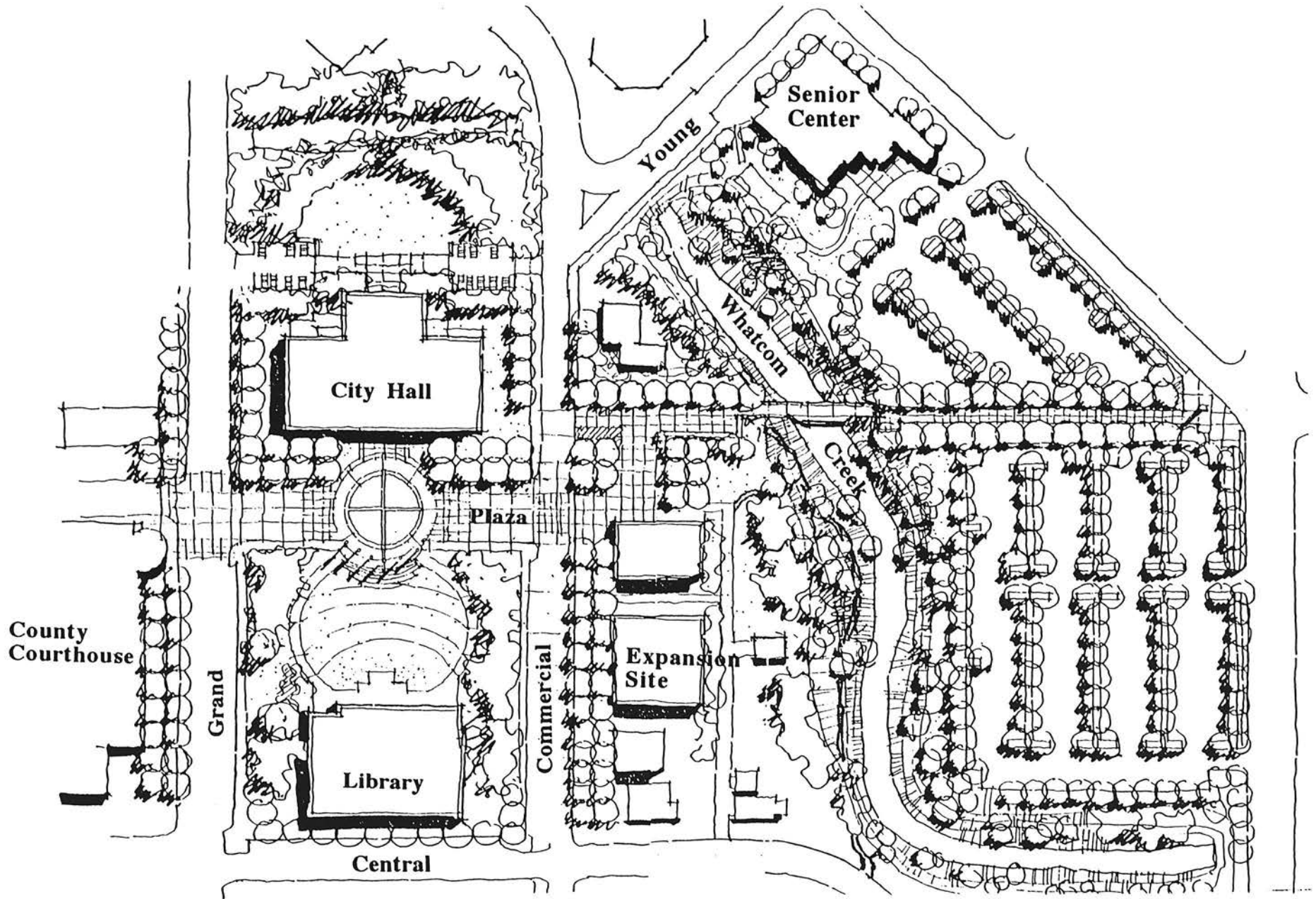
- There is no current comprehensive development plan for the Civic Center which recognizes the impact of future growth.
- Inadequate parking and disorienting street patterns create confusion and safety problems.
- The Civic Center is not pedestrian friendly and lacks clearly defined walking corridors.
- Expansion of the County Courthouse and Whatcom Museum and the development of a new Public Safety Building are having a significant impact on the Civic Center area.

These factors are evident, however, many prior studies which have focused on the Civic Center and downtown environs seem to have overlooked a major planning opportunity which could be exploited for the benefit of the larger central city. That concept is the concentration of governmental administrative space in the Civic Center south of Whatcom Creek. There appears to be sufficient governmental ownership of undeveloped and under-developed property in the area; much of which is now or is

planned for use as parking. In addition, some opportunities appear to exist for using land currently dedicated to streets. The concept would be to foster the planning and implementation of a campus-like, pedestrian friendly area as the center of government services in the County's largest City. Furthermore, by dispersing parking to periphery locations and driving the development of buildings south from the Whatcom Creek towards the Central Business District could reinforce development to areas in transition and be synergistic with readjustment of the Central Business District and emergency of the historic/cultural district to the west.

It is clear to the R/UDAT team that the provision of building and support space for government functions is currently the fastest growing segment of central city land use. In addition, it is clear that lost opportunities could occur if the City were not alert to, and planning for, retention of government space in the Civic Center which may not locate there without an aggressive plan and program to fortify the Civic Center.

The R/UDAT team was struck with the opportunity to relocate existing County employees to the Civic Center. County officials have indicated that total County employment is about 700, of which 300 employees are currently located in the Civic Center. Interviews with County representatives indicated that it would be feasible to bring approximately 170 current employees housed elsewhere into centralized space in the Civic Center. This potential opportunity to generate benefits to the larger central city by relocating half again as many County employees to the Civic Center as are currently there should be of significant importance to the City. The potential for use of commercial services and residential re-use opportunities should be an important element of planning the readjustment of the Central City.



**Civic Center Plan
and Employee Parking**

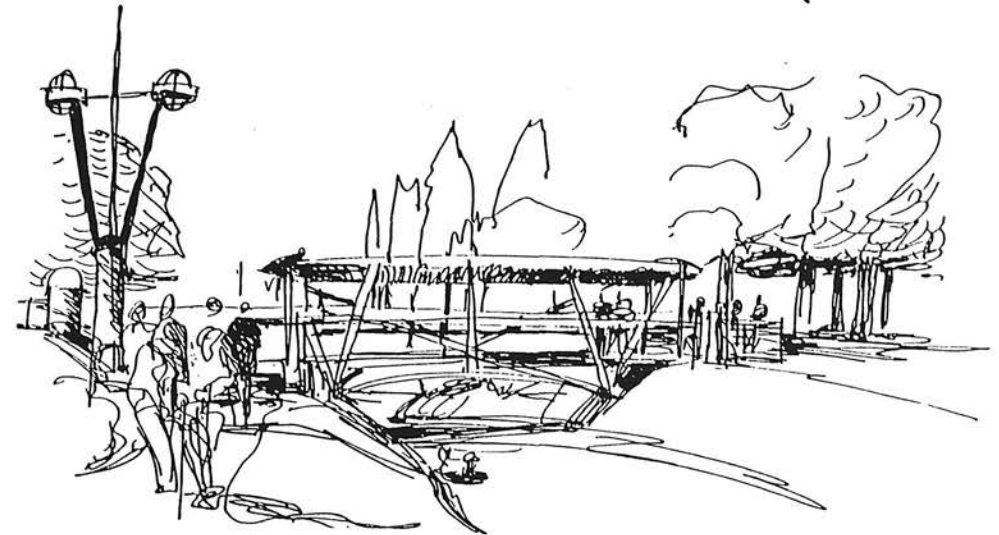
A major constraint to achieving the Civic Center objective is parking. The City recently commissioned a Downtown Parking Feasibility Study (December 1991). This study concluded that unmet parking space demand generated by public buildings existing or under construction in the Civic Center Complex will total some 600 to 650 spaces. The study contained a detailed inventory of all parking spaces in the Civic Center area. Based upon a demand-supply assessment, the study then concluded that 550 spaces of County related net additional demand could be accommodated in a new parking structure. Based upon the study investigations, it was also concluded that an additional 550 spaces may be required for private development within the Civic Center area. In summation, the study recommended that a \$9.1 million, 305,000 square foot, 1,016 space, 6-level parking structure should be developed on County-owned land on the block bounded by Central Avenue, Prospect Street, Flora Street and Grand Avenue.

The R/UDAT team suggests that an alternative solution to the Civic Center parking problem should be seriously considered. This approach would feature the acquisition and development of a large surface lot east of Whatcom Creek on Cornwall Avenue north of Central Ave. This parcel, which is immediately south of the Senior Citizen's facility, is currently underutilized and could probably be acquired for a reasonable cost. The peripheral surface parking lot for government employees concept would require a pedestrian bridge crossing of Whatcom Creek generally in the vicinity of Lottie Street. It has been estimated that the distance between the peripheral parking lot and the center of the government buildings would be within a reasonable walking distances of two to three city blocks. The proposed surface parking lot could contain as many as 350 cars and could be developed at a cost far less than structured parking on government owned land. In addition, covered walkways could

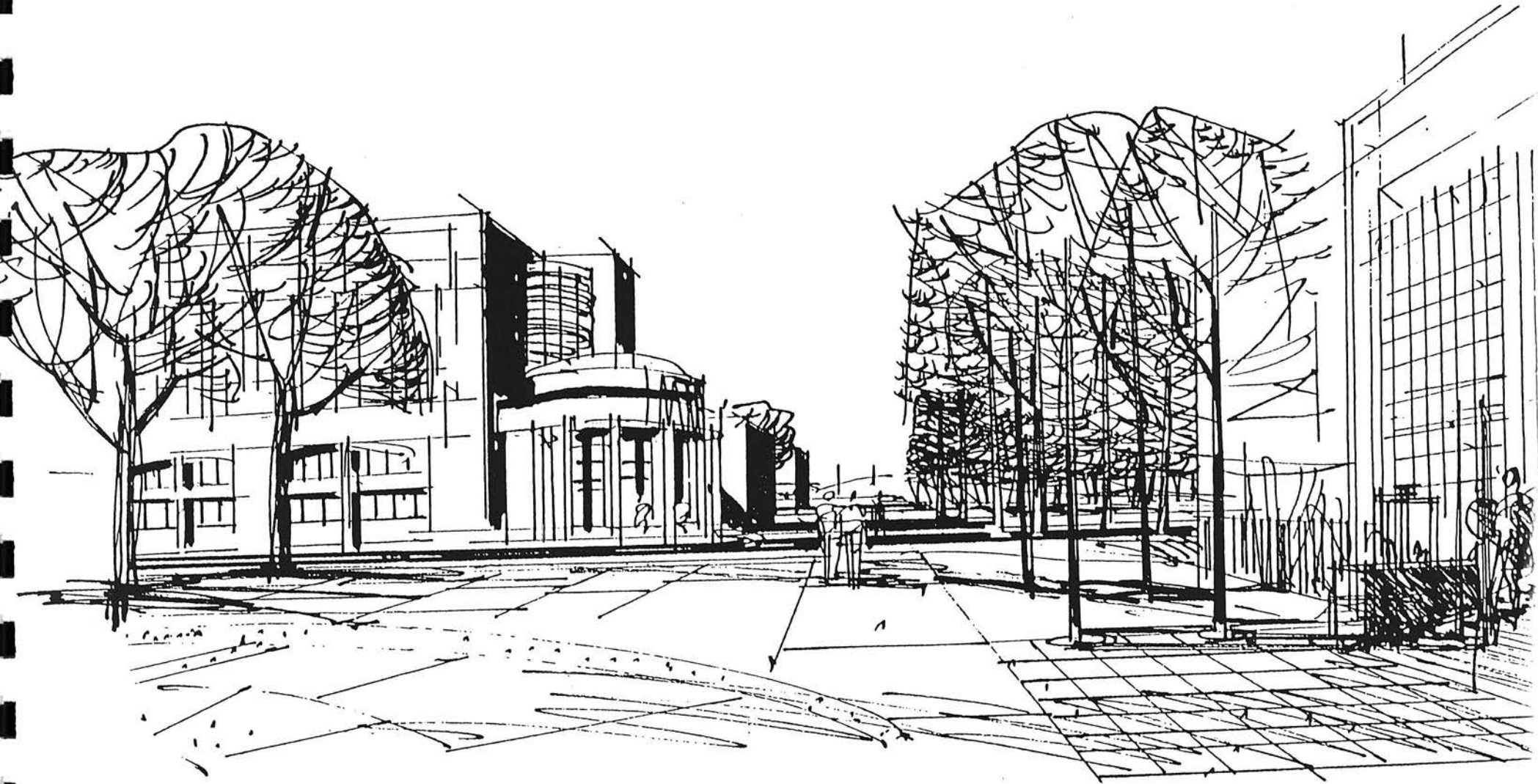




be provided to protect the parkers during inclement weather. Detailed planning for this concept could also include landscaping and lighting features in order to make the parking program as pedestrian friendly as possible.



The surface peripheral parking option for government employees would significantly aid in allowing land adjacent to the existing and future government buildings in the Civic Center to be used more efficiently.





Cultural District

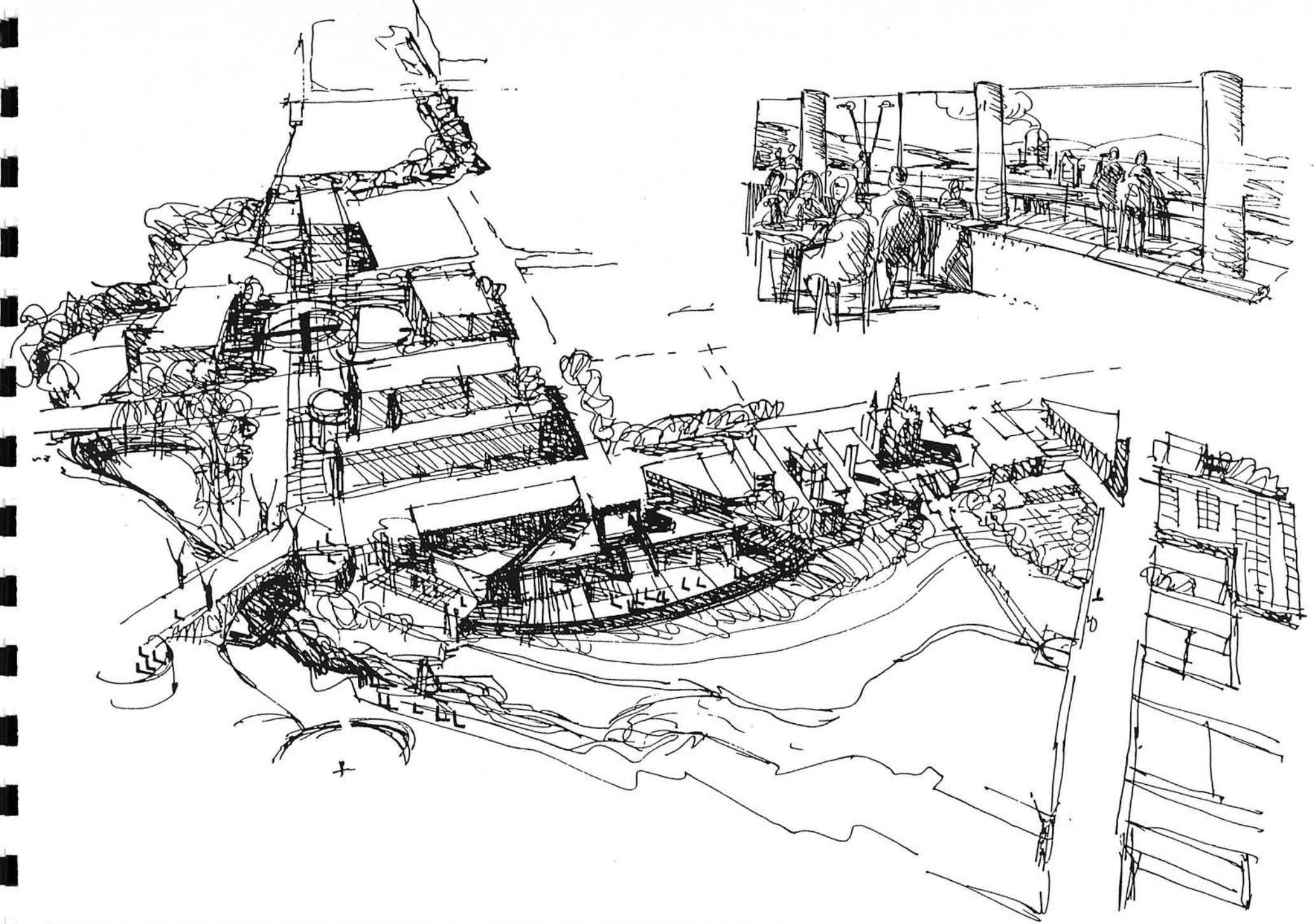
The cultural district extends from the Bluff to Cornwall Avenue and extends from Central Avenue to West Champion Street. The district is anchored inland by the Mt. Baker Theater and on the bayside by the "Cultural Crown" along the top of the bluff.

The area bounded by Dupont Street, Prospect Street, West Champion and the edge of the bluff contain a concentration of the community's cultural institutions. This area should be encouraged to redevelop and expand the concentration of cultural facilities while respecting the prominence of the old City Hall building. The proposed new arts center should be developed within this area if at all possible. A Native American arts and culture center should also be developed within this special cultural space.

Further art supply, gallery and theater development should be encouraged inland of Prospect Street.

Although the primary area for entertainment should be within the "Downtown", theater and other forms of special entertainment may develop within this transition area.

A strong pedestrian environment needs to be encouraged to provide interesting connections between facilities. Connections with the Maritime Park below the bluffs should be provided at each end of the area. Public art should be highlighted to the maximum extent possible within this cultural district.



The "Cultural Crown"

Central Business District

The Central Business District is defined for the R/UDAT study by the area immediately adjacent to and within West and East Champion streets, State Street, and East Maple Street. The area is in close proximity to the over 10,000 Western Washington University students. The area has been the focus of several studies and redevelopment efforts over the past several decades. The most recent analysis, prepared in 1989, entitled Downtown Development Strategies, fairly well defines the constraints and opportunities for the Central Business District. With a few exceptions the study outlines many of the observations and recommendations of the R/UDAT team. The main missing ingredient, as with many of the planning studies which we reviewed for the community, is action.

Land Use

Over the years, the studies of the Central Business District have emphasized the retail aspects of Central Business District development. In reality, the primary redevelopment activity has, however, been office commercial and related support retail commercial development. This shift in development emphasis should be accompanied by reconsideration of several aspects of the 1989 plan recommendations. First is the need to reevaluate long term (all day) versus short term (hourly) parking needs and the incorporation of aggressive alternative transportation planning. (See transportation section.) The second is to eliminate the concept of mid-block linkages. Not only are these costly and politically difficult to achieve, but the negative impact on the existing blockfaces could be extremely detrimental.



Retail

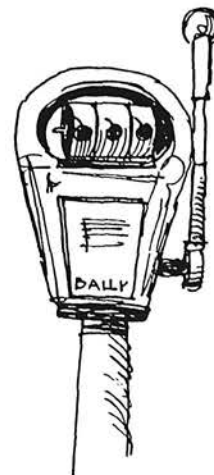
A few retail segments have continued to show growth. These are in the areas of home furnishings, household goods and the related antique goods. These markets have established themselves in the core area and need to be encouraged to grow. The antique sales in particular have established a corridor along East and West Holly Street between Railroad Avenue and Whatcom Creek. Special design and marketing considerations might help to strengthen this as an antique promenade.

Entertainment

Further development of the Central Business District as the community cultural and entertainment district should be encouraged by the City. Zoning regulations for the community should be modified to easily permit the development uses in the core and prohibit such uses outside the core except by special review. Live performance areas for music, comedy and theater will help to activate the Central Business District in the evening hours and provide parking complimentary use to the office development.

Housing

Housing is another use which can be further developed in the Central Business District. Those housing projects which have been developed in this area have been very successful, and several have developed substantial waiting lists. The second story and above spaces in the buildings in the southern end of the area are particularly well suited for student housing. The close proximity to the university and the lack of available student



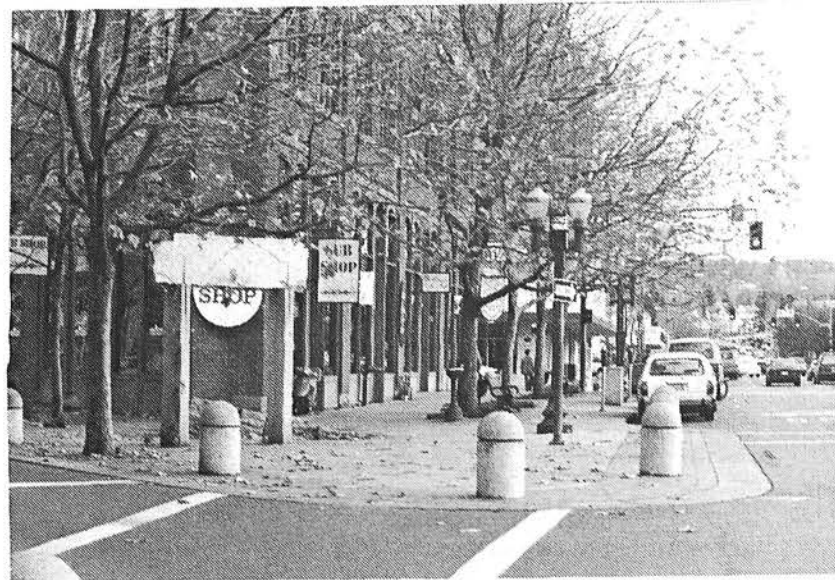
housing should help to provide a stimulus for these conversions. The City needs to take a proactive approach to such housing conversion by assisting area property owners with conversions. This may require a special "SWAT" team be assigned by the Mayor to "bring in" a specific number of housing units each month. Using old structures for housing can be challenging, but the application of the special provisions of section 13 of the Uniform Building Code and provisions for historic structures and special zoning and tax incentives can provide a stimulus to this type of development. In addition this same area and possibly the old town are should be considered for mixed use artist studio/loft space. Several cities have adopted special zoning regulations which permit this kind of living and working relationships in older industrial type areas. These could provide Bellingham with a model for zoning and building regulation.

Design Review

The streetscape improvements and lighting fixtures which have already been installed provide a unifying element to the Central Business District area. Further enhancement and development of these successful programs should be encouraged. Design guidelines should be developed for future development in the area and a system of business community and city joint review should be established.

District Edges

The edges of the Central Business District area should be strengthened. In particular the "seam" between the civic and cultural district and the Central Business District area along West Champion need particular attention. This is the point at which



the street grid changes direction. In order to provide loci for this directional change small parks and plaza areas should be developed at the intersections of Grand and Commercial streets. This will not only help to provide orientation but also entry points into the Central Business District area.

Access and Parking

Bellingham is fortunate to have an adequate, well maintained arterial street system. In general, the primary access roads such as E. Holly, N. State, and Cornwall Avenue are wide, direct streets and have the capacity to handle the existing peak hour traffic serving the Central Business District.

The Whatcom Transportation Authority has an excellent bus system with 22 routes converging on the Central Business District Transit Terminal. The currently adopted six year public transportation plan for the Authority will provide improved service supporting the Central Business District by providing:

- increased frequency of service
- evening service
- two Central Business District circulator bus routes
- express Central Business District service from outlying areas
- improvements to the Central Business District terminal

The balance between private automobiles and alternative transportation is beginning to shift toward increased non-auto transportation. Bellingham is well prepared to accommodate to



the modal shift with the experienced Transportation Authority, existing and proposed pedestrian/bikeway trails to the CBD, and suggestions for light rail systems to serve the region.

The R/UDAT team fully supports alternative transportation for the CBD but feels that a pragmatic approach is needed in the short-range which accepts the difficulties in marketing the downtown for office and retail space without adequate parking being available.

It would be a distinct disadvantage to the Central Business District to apply disincentives to the use of the private auto in the Central Business District only. When state wide policies to encourage alternative transportation are applied, the Central Business District will be ahead of the game by the existing and planned non-auto transportation systems.

In order to provide the best possible access to the downtown, the R/UDAT team recommends:

- full support for the current six year Public Transportation Plan
- the Whatcom Transportation Authority be a full partner in the planning and promoting of parking and access improvements in the city
- bike trails and pedestrian paths be fully supported by the city and county.
- the proposed new Central Business District circulator transit loops should be planned and implemented as soon as possible. The Team recommends that attractive user-friendly trolley buses be employed for this system; to be offered free



of charge, which will diminish the use of the auto for circulation in the Central Business District.

- new signage to direct both drivers and pedestrians to and around the downtown (i.e. clearer "Central Business District" exit information on I-5, conventional street signs within the Central Business District, and more directional signs within the CBD).

Parking is commonly pointed to as the problem in a declining Central Business District. While adequate, properly located, affordable parking is a necessary element for a successful downtown, its role as the maker or breaker is exaggerated. The 1992 Central Business District Parking Feasibility Study analyzes the existing parking and recommends new and improved parking facilities. This is a thorough documentation of the CBD parking situation and potential additions. The R/UDAT team suggests that rather than march ahead with an expensive program of parking facility constructions, that each opportunity to locate a significant office or retail tenant utilize potential near-by parking improvements as described in the parking study to be "fine-tuned" as part of the incentive package for the new Central Business District enterprise.

A Central Business District transportation management program should be created with participation from all parties that have any responsibility for planning, financing or operating transportation facilities in the city. This group could effectively address the on-street meters questions as well as broader policy issues of balanced transportation and major garage locations and priorities.

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Whatcom Creekway Corridor

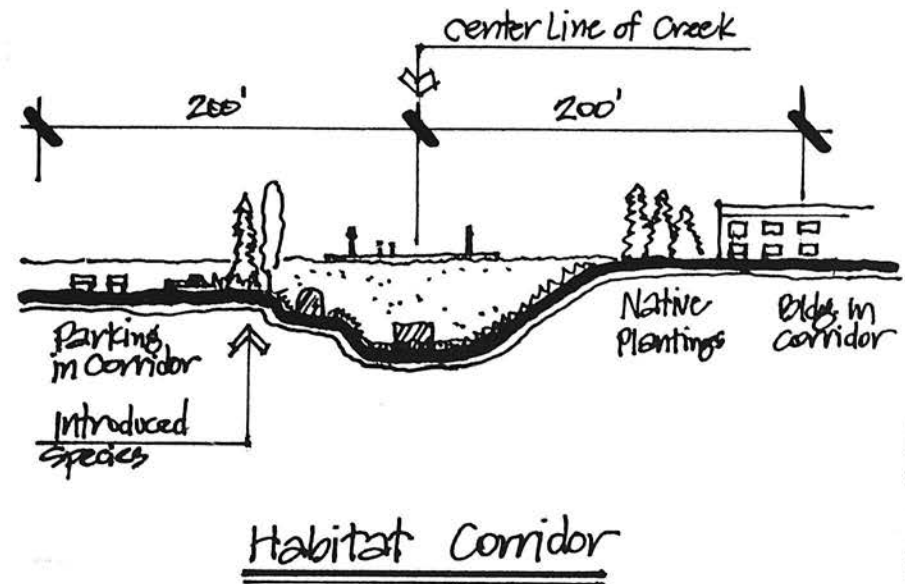
Whatcom Creek originates at Lake Whatcom just to the east of the downtown area, flows through the Civic Center area and empties into Bellingham Bay. The creek environment provides important habitat to large numbers of plant and animal life which include amphibians, fishes, mammals, birds as well as submergent and emergent plant materials.

Unfortunately, in the recent past the development in the Civic Center has not maximized the potential of Whatcom Creek. Buildings do not orient to the creek, parking lots separate buildings from the riparian areas and culverts under roadways interrupt the continuous flow of the creek banks and migratory mammals.

An appreciation of the creek as a natural amenity is growing rapidly in Bellingham. The R/UDAT plan encourages this positive relationship with Whatcom Creek and lists recommendations to further enhance its health and viability.

The Parks Department at the City of Bellingham has adopted a trails system concept that includes bike and pedestrian pathways on both sides of the creekway from Lake Whatcom to Bellingham Bay. The R/UDAT plan encourages trail development along the creek when user demand occurs and where reasonable building conditions allow. Trails shall avoid the steepest slopes and the most established habitats if possible. Until the demand is expressed, every effort should be made to maintain and preserve the natural habitat surrounding the creek.

The R/UDAT plan further recommends to adopt a 400 foot creek corridor (200 feet on each side to the creek's center line) as a "creek native planting easement." In this easement, native species will be required on all creek revegetation efforts and in planting proposals around future buildings, roadways or parking lots. A combination of broadleaf, conifer and deciduous species of trees, shrubs and ground covers is encouraged.



Civic Center

The R/UDAT plan recommends widening the creek's habitat at several points in the downtown. North of the County jail, the plan suggests removal of the two existing buildings and the parking lot; and, north of City Hall, the parking lot is recommended for removal. This area will be reclaimed as green, open space with a smooth bowl-like contour. The existing poplars and Douglas Firs are introduced species but should remain due to their mature size and intrinsic value. Once an introduced species declines in health and vigor, a native species shall be used as a replacement.

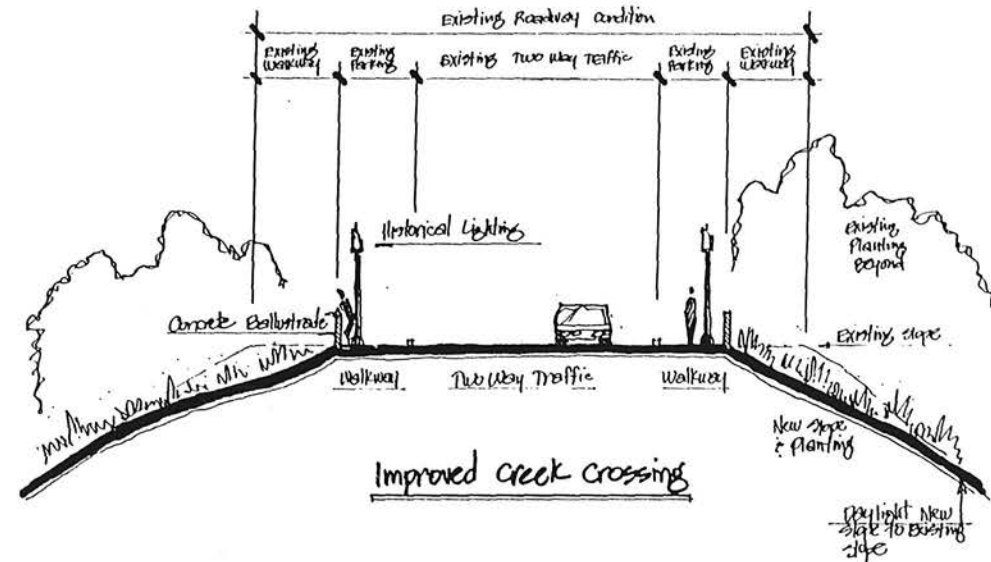
The creek habitat east of City Hall and the Library will expand from the creekway to the east side of Commercial Street. Building expansion will eventually occur in this area but this construction should not interrupt the goal for extending native plant habitat into the Civic Center.

Trail Planning

In all cases, pedestrian trails should attempt to gain access to the water's edge. These trails should conform to all conditions of the Americans with Disabilities Act. If the pathways are designed to be mixed use with bicycles, additional design criteria should be used to insure proper gradients, pathway widths and safety.

Tunnels

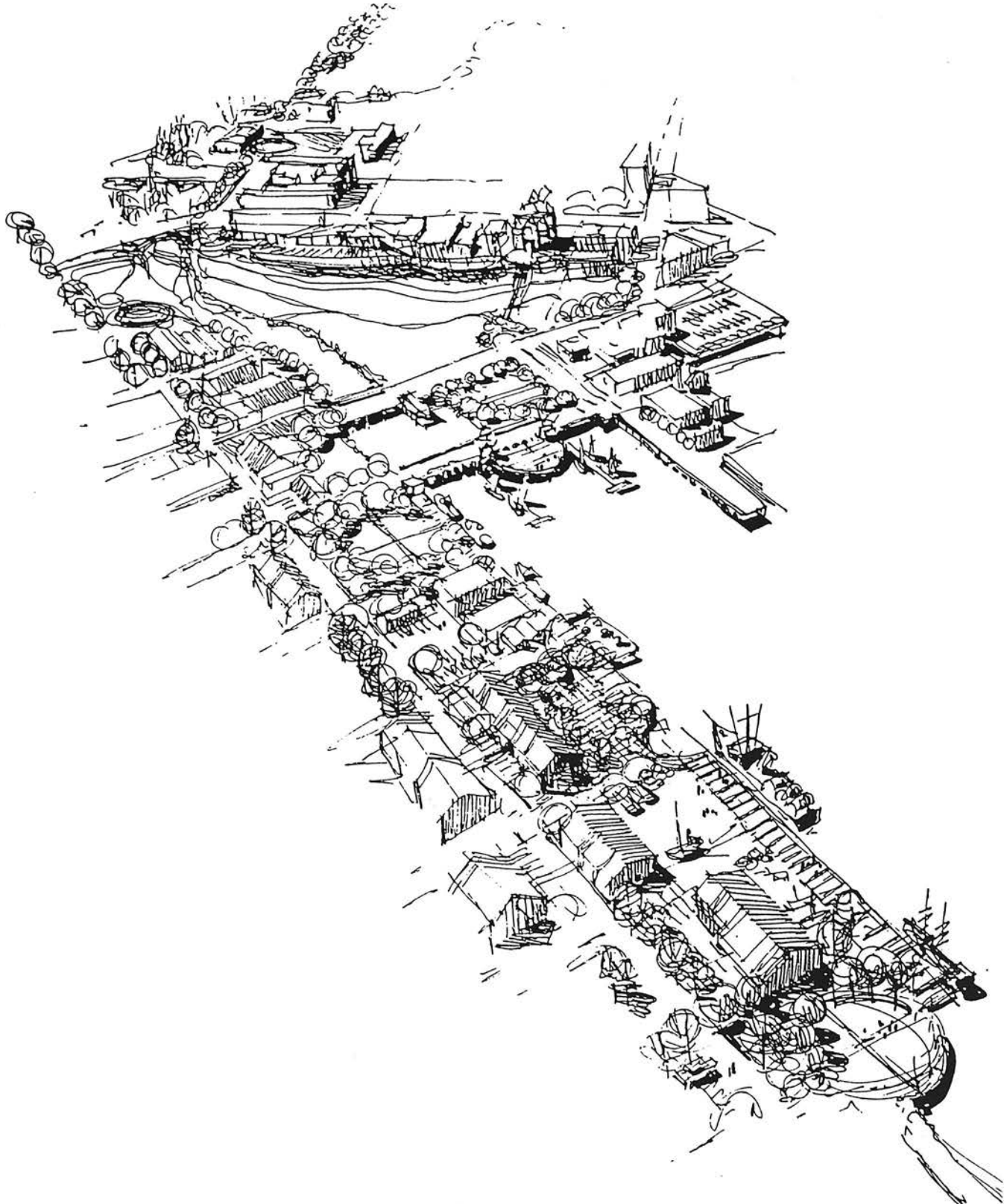
In order to maintain pedestrian continuity along the creek, pathway tunnels are recommended at the points where the creek passes under Grand Avenue and Commercial Street. These tunnels shall be designed with proper inside clearance and appropriate depth beneath the bottom of the road base. The finished elevation of the pathway in the tunnel shall be above the maximum storm surge anticipated in the creek.



Bridge Ornamentation where Roadways Cross Creek

Large culverts allow the creek to pass under Grand Avenue and Commercial Street. The streetscape above these culverts does not reflect the crossing of a waterway to the motorist and thus, diminishes the importance of the waterway. The R/UDAT plan hopes to sensitize the motorist to the creek by requiring special roadway conditions and streetscape ornamentation at the roadway crossings.

The plan recommends narrowing the width of the roadway where it spans the creek bank. Instead of a traffic lane, parallel parking and sidewalk from center line to outside edge, the plan suggests removing the parallel parking and reducing the overall width of the street by 16 feet. The narrower street (traffic lane and walkway only, center line to edge) will be finished with a concrete balustrade at the sidewalk and the historic light standards seen similar to those in the Civic Center.

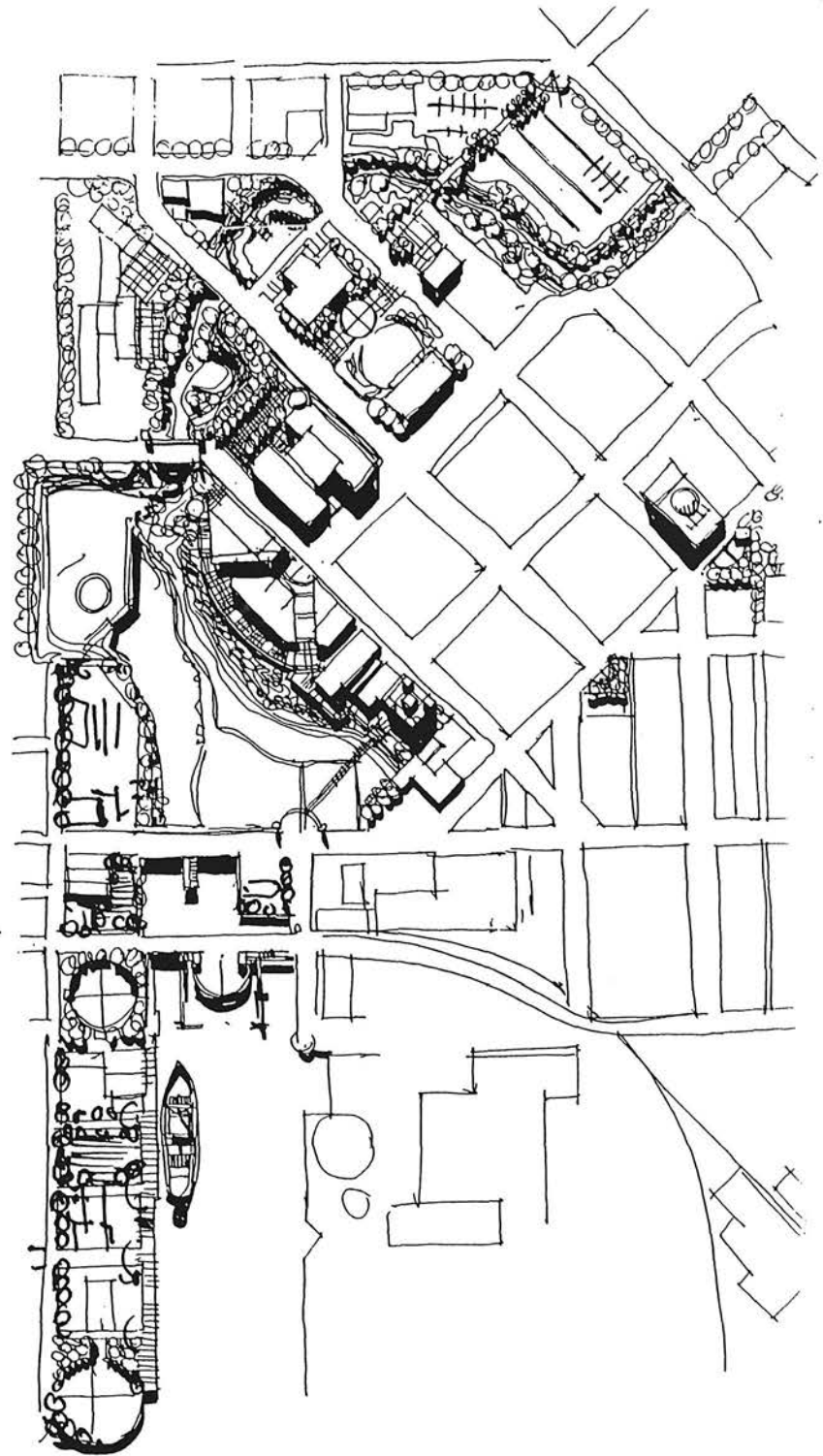


WATERFRONT

Background and Issues

The bay side of downtown Bellingham now consists of a working waterfront. Historically, Bellingham was built on piles in the bay. During this century, the city has gradually filled in a major portion of the bay and turned its downtown area away from the waterfront. This ultimately prevented public access to the water. In fact, there continues to be a void in visual access to the Bay. The R/UDAT team feels that a healthy coexistence between the working waterfront and public access opportunities will serve to add to the revitalization efforts of the downtown area. This access will enable people to have an understanding of the importance of the industry located on the waterfront, as well as direct linkages between the downtown area and the waterfront which will serve to enhance the tourist trade in Bellingham.

The Port District's priorities should be expanded to include actions that will serve to increase the viability of Downtown Bellingham. Planning for non-water related and non-water dependent uses should be done within the context of the Port District's mandate from the State of Washington, which states that the Port District should foster economic development in Whatcom County as a whole. These priorities should include assisting the City of Bellingham, the largest city in the County, in its efforts to increase tourism in the downtown and waterfront area. The Port District will be able to do this by assisting the City in gaining public access, physical and visual, to the working waterfront. The Port District should also be of assistance to the City by acting as its development agent in assembling parcels to be utilized in developing broad based tourist attractions in downtown Bellingham, as well as on the waterfront.



The Port's plan should be developed with continuous input from the City of Bellingham. The waterfront planning process should address several major issues; the first of which is the development of Port owned parcels. The major goal of the plan should be that all non-water dependent and non-water related uses proposed for Port property be able to provide a greater positive impact on downtown Bellingham than the same use if it were located in the downtown area. If this goal cannot be met, the Port should work aggressively with the City to insure that the use be located in the downtown area. The Port should concentrate on attracting uses that cannot locate on an inland site. Second, the Port should study the entire waterfront in its planning process. It should develop land use plans for large tracts of privately owned parcels and work with the owners of said parcels in their marketing efforts. The goal again being to foster economic development in the county as a whole, and more specifically the City of Bellingham.

Third, the Port should develop a strategy to purchase land that could eventually be utilized to provide stronger links to the downtown area. These links could of course be either physical or visual in nature. The assemblage of parcels to the north of the Whatcom Creek Waterway would in the long run insure that a rational land use plan of the site could be implemented. The current configuration of many smaller parcel make it difficult to develop a public access link. Those uses that do not necessarily need to be adjacent to the channel could be relocated to other suitable Port property. In the process the Port could plan for and develop new means of physical and visual access to the working industrial waterfront.

Fourth, during this phase of the planning process, the Port and the City should also identify opportunities that will present themselves as major public and private improvements to be

undertaken on the waterfront. It will often be possible to include new locations for public access as part of these improvement projects without detracting from the primary purposes of the project and without major cost implications.

The ideal planning process for the waterfront area would consist of the development of a joint plan by both the Port District and the City of Bellingham. The document would take into consideration all of the issues and constraints faced by both entities. The result would give the City and the Port District the ability to jointly approach development entities who show an interest in new uses on the waterfront.

Action Plan

Immediate:

- Develop public space to serve as viewing areas to the Bay and the industrial waterfront. The western most block of Central Avenue should become the first viewing area that serves as a link between the downtown area and the waterfront. The viewing area is currently a public thoroughfare, and could be expeditiously converted to serve as a viewing area.
- The Port District should delay issuing its Request for Proposals for hotel development on its six acre site at Squalicum Harbor until the City's Convention Center study is completed. It appears to the R/UDAT team that these two uses, the hotel and convention center, need to be developed in conjunction with one another. A joint evaluation of the location of both components is warranted. Moreover, it is

important that a development of this nature be viewed as an opportunity to reinforce the fabric of the downtown area.

Long Range:

- The Port District and the City should jointly monitor property transactions in the waterfront area. This action will serve to identify future development trends and opportunities for obtaining options or first rights of refusal.
- The Port District should acquire the small parcels on the north side of Whatcom Creek Waterway. This will enable the Port District to assemble a large parcel that will be able to accommodate a mix of public open spaces and space for marine related industrial uses, which ideally would not be incompatible with pedestrian traffic.
- The City should review its plan for building a new bridge across Whatcom Creek Waterway on Roeder Street. The revised design should include sidewalks as well as a public viewing area in the middle of the bridge. It would also be desirable to create visitor moorage for boaters who are seeking access to the art and entertainment district.
- The City should work with private owners in attempt to develop more public access to the waterfront. These discussions should be based on the assumption that the operations of the private owners should not be adversely affected.

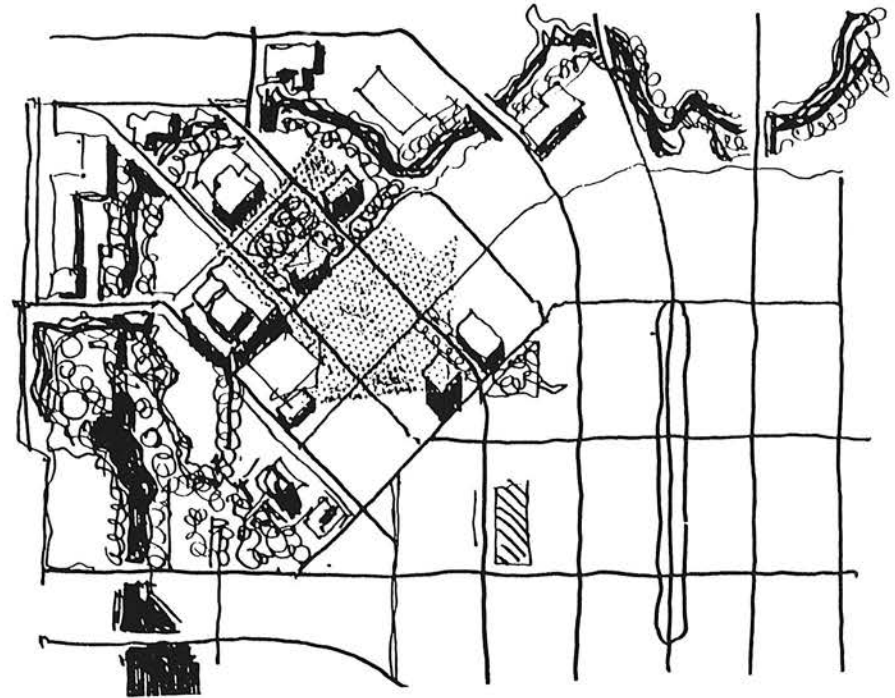


IMPLEMENTATION

In any community, successful implementation of proposals such as these being made by the R/UDAT team require the support and involvement of many people. Meaningful progress in making any downtown area a better, more vital place takes vision, energy, perseverance, leadership, broad participation and money. Most communities perceive themselves as having too much disagreement on basic objectives and too little vision, leadership and money. The truth is, building a strong community with an active downtown that meets the community's needs and expectations is hard work. Success is rarely a function of money alone, and far more often is a function of people's abilities to work together creatively towards a common vision that the majority of the community shares and supports.

Bellingham has many strengths, and a few weaknesses, in these respects. The community as a whole is interested and involved. People care about the community and the downtown specifically. Significant energy has been expended by public and private organizations and individuals to support and improve the downtown in the face of a variety of forces which have the potential to rob the downtown of its vitality. Still, there is a lingering sense that a unifying vision and common direction have not yet emerged. Furthermore, there is uncertainty about the ability to work cooperatively to carry out any vision successfully over time. This circumstance is by no means unique to Bellingham, but it is important and deserves attention.

In simple terms, implementation of the R/UDAT recommendations will require vision, tools and partnerships. Bellingham is currently in the latter stages of an extensive community visioning process. These efforts, combined with the R/UDAT recommendations and an updated Comprehensive Plan, should provide the City and the community with a common blueprint for the future. It is essential that Bellingham articulate in a clear fashion the future it wants and the role its



Expression of Civic Center Concept

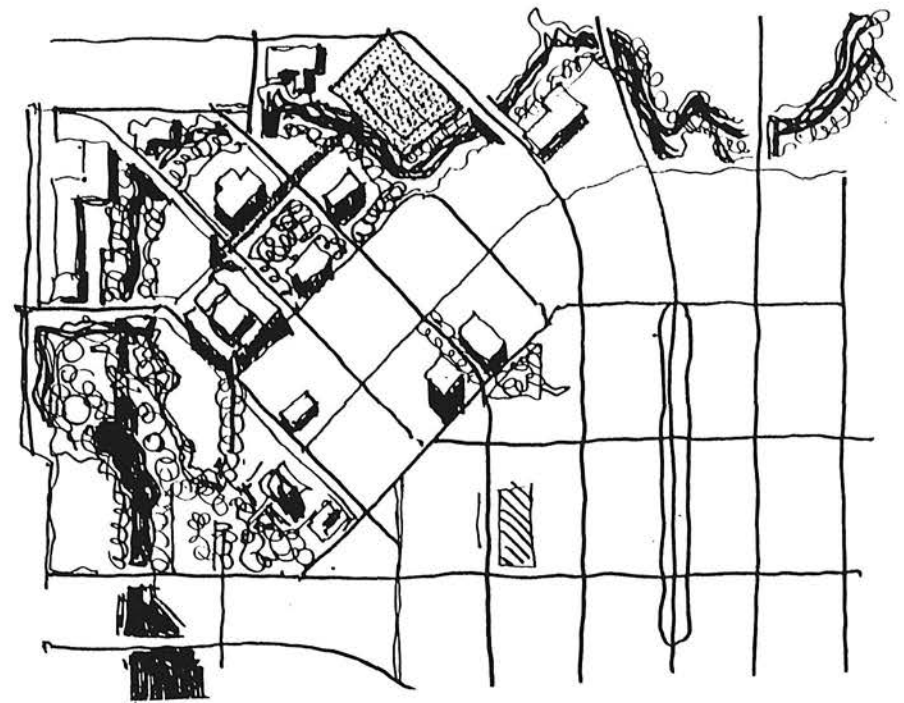
Civic Center and downtown will play in the future. If there is a lesson from the experiences of other communities, it is this - ideas matter. People cannot embrace and support what they cannot see. Bellingham appears to be on its way to accomplishing this fundamental step.

The balance of implementation relates to using tools and partnerships effectively to make your vision happen. We believe the tools and abilities exist to implement the recommendations we are making. Some are immediate actions, others must occur over a longer period of time. Success over time is likely to be as much a function of your ability to create effective partnerships between the City and County, between the City and the Port District, and between the City and downtown property and business owners, than any other factor. Highlighted below are five areas where we see opportunities to put these partnerships to work.

Civic Center

Implementation of the R/UDAT proposals for the Civic Center will require a strong partnership between the City and the County. We suggest that a joint City/County vehicle be created to carry out planning and development of the Civic Center. Through this joint powers arrangement, the City and County will undertake the following projects:

- create and adopt a Civic Center Plan specifying Civic Center boundaries, current and future uses of property, planned acquisitions, and location of parking and circulation patterns. It must clearly state a joint intention to concentrate all appropriate governmental functions (including potential State and Federal activities) within the defined Civic Center boundaries and to direct all expansion to the south towards the Central Business District.
- take the necessary steps to define northern and eastern boundaries beyond which governmental activity will not



Connection to Remote Parking

expand, and enforce these boundaries through any necessary zoning changes and the creation of physical improvements demarcating the boundary between Civic Center and adjacent residential use.

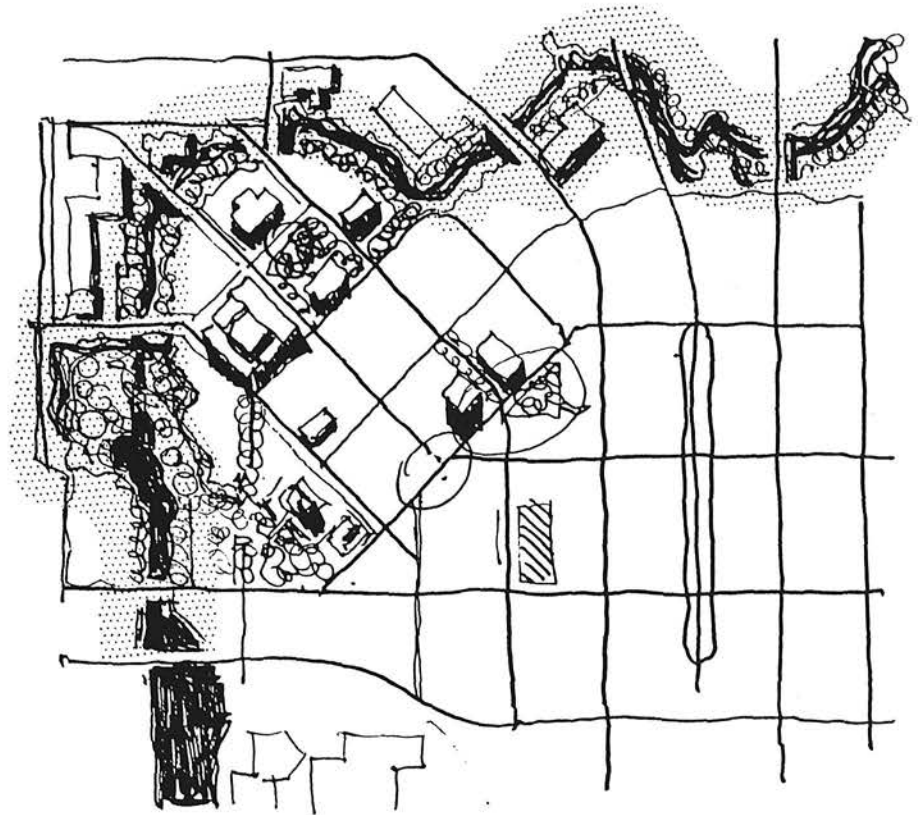
- move expeditiously to acquire the property east of City Hall and Whatcom Creek currently occupied by the bingo hall for joint parking facilities for City and County functions.
- construct a pedestrian bridge across the creek connecting this parking facility, and install appropriate landscaping as depicted in the R/UDAT concept proposal.
- create a civic plaza between the City Hall and the Public Library as the focal point and symbolic center of the Civic Center.
- develop a trail and habitat corridor along Whatcom Creek within the Civic Center, expanding public access and utilizing planting of native vegetation in the corridor and around adjacent uses to increase the functional dimensions of this corridor.
- provide the opportunity to bring additional County employees to the Civic Center location by accommodating parking needs in a more efficient fashion in joint surface facilities to the east of Whatcom Creek.
- work with the Governor and other State officials to insure state office space selection standards do not unfairly exclude workable Downtown locations.

Cultural Crown

The area west of Prospect Street between Whatcom Creek and the County Museum is of great historical and civic importance. This area offers tremendous potential to accommodate important civic and cultural uses in a dramatic setting. Uses

accommodated on these parcels above the bluff can strengthen both the Civic Center and adjacent Cultural District.

- commence planning now for the relocation of the Post Office and adjacent commercial activity to make this site available for future civic or cultural facilities such as museums, a new library or other similar community uses.
- explore similar use opportunities for the Cascade Laundry Building, including the possibility of use as an alternative site for the planned Arts Center.



Creekside Wildlife Corridor



Arts Center

The R/UDAT team enthusiastically endorses the objective of developing an Arts Center to support the work of local artists and showcase their activities. Enormous effort has already gone into this project, and work is underway to design a facility to sit immediately below the bluff in the Maritime Heritage Park. Ideally, we would like to see a re-evaluation of selected site alternatives to determine if a location could be identified that might do even more to support the stated objectives of the Arts Center, to provide greater support to downtown activity and vitality, to make even better connections with existing cultural facilities, to provide better opportunities for future expansion and to lessen the impact on Maritime Heritage Park, the bluff and views of the County Museum from the Creek and waterfront.

We recognize the difficulty inherent in considering such a review at this time. If possible, however, we would encourage a last attempt to consider whether a site in the Cultural Crown (such as the Cascade Laundry or other land along Prospect Street), the Levins Building or another building or property could accommodate the needs of this project. If alternative sites are not available, we would suggest the possibility of considering another site within the park closer to Holly Street, perhaps at the corner of Holly and Champion Streets.

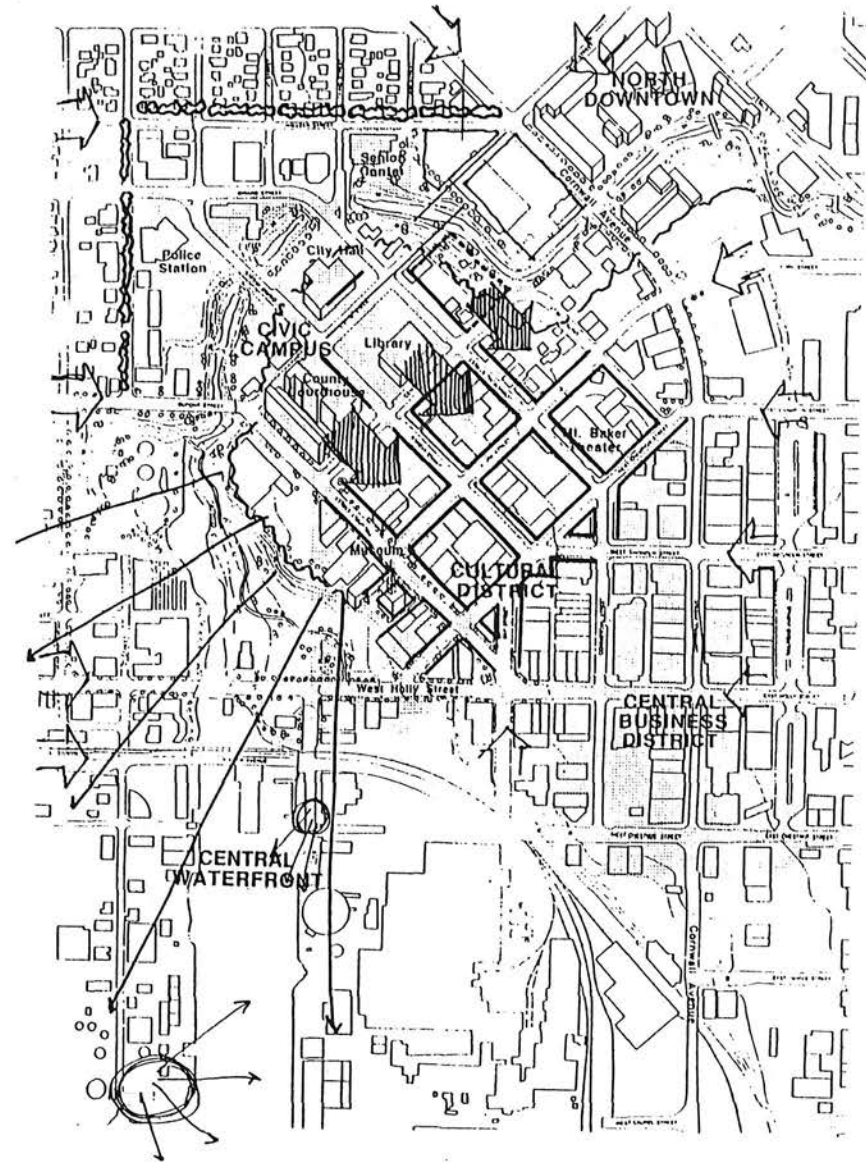
Central Business District

While not the principal focus of the R/UDAT study, support of the Central Business District's health is clearly the central theme of all of our analyses and recommendations. The Central Business District is the historic commercial heart of the community. Despite enormous competition from outlying areas of the City and other parts of the region, the Central Business District remains a viable downtown. It is, however, experiencing a variety of changes. The recommendations of the R/UDAT report seek to reinforce downtown's new role as a center for office and professional, specialty retailers, cultural and governmental activity.

At its present point, the name of the game for the Central Business District is activity. One opportunity for increasing activity and spending in the downtown is residential use. There may not yet be great market demand generally for residential units in the downtown, but units targeted for use by students and artists may represent a near term opportunity. The R/UDAT team recommends the following:

- the City should establish an aggressive but achievable goal for converting available upper level spaces in downtown buildings to housing affordable to students and artists;
- the City should designate a "SWAT" team of City staff to work with building owners to identify, plan, design, finance and market downtown units; and
- the City should develop a coordinated marketing program with Western Washington University to match students seeking housing with available units developed in the downtown.

A second area of interest is the opportunity to enhance the point of connection between the Civic Center/Cultural District and the Central Business District along Champion Street, particularly at the intersecting points with Grand and Commercial.



Defining the District

A boundary for the Civic Center District must be established. This boundary will demarcate the area within which government buildings and facilities will be focused in Bellingham's central area. The reason for establishing a clearly identified geographic area is to provide clarity and direction for planning and implementation of the City's objectives for the Civic Center District. Establishing a geographically based Civic Center District will serve as a statement of policy directing specific actions in an area of special importance to the City.

Specific Plan Preparation

No specific plan currently exists for the Civic Center District. Once the district is defined, a specific plan must be prepared with the objective of determining future governmental space needs and developing a land use, parking, circulation and public space requirements for the Civic Center District. The plan will be focused on assuring that land area is available for government space requirements for the next twenty years. The plan will also serve in identifying areas where Civic Center support activities might occur.

The purpose of the plan will be to aid in assuring that the Civic Center District is capable of meeting its objectives. As such, the plan will include building locations, massing, density, parking requirements and public space proposals. The specific plan will include design guidelines and other development criteria.

Implementation Strategies

The implementation program will recommend organizational and financing mechanisms most appropriate for specific plan implementation.

Specifically, we recommend the following projects be undertaken in the near term to enhance the street environment and take advantage of unique opportunities that exist at this point where the two street grids intersect:

- develop landscaped plans on the spaces created where Grand Avenue and Commercial Street intersect Champion, including street trees, paving, seating and public art;
- commission an appropriate work of public art for the Grand Avenue plaza celebrating Native American culture and history in Whatcom County; and
- use tree planting and other street improvements to reinforce retail activity and provide continuity along Champion Street.

A third issue which continues to be the topic of significant public discussion is parking within the Central Business District.

Many people consider the most important problem with the central business district to be parking. This is not unique to Bellingham; cities throughout the nation have been severely impacted by the emergence of outlying malls and an automobile dependent society.

With the important and necessary intention of saving the downtown, cities have widened streets, covered open areas with off-street parking, built ever larger parking structures, and often demolished buildings for the express purpose of providing parking. We have re-shaped our cities to fit our new lifestyles.

The problem emerges when the city begins no longer to resemble a city. Much of what makes a downtown unique is the density and vitality of many people crossing paths and interacting. The tight pattern of buildings and activities provides visual and functional support to this pattern; too much pavement and empty spaces destroys it.

In the modern world, parking plays a necessary and important role in the Bellingham Civic Center and central business district. However, it should not be provided excessively. It is unrealistic for everyone to have a perfect parking space within a block of their destination. Whenever possible, the city should provide a street treatment that minimizes the physical impact of the automobile and provides sufficient amenities for the pedestrian. This could include:

- accurate analyses of daily and hourly parking needs, with parking provided when possible inside blocks instead of replacing street frontage;
- providing adequate signage for the pedestrian. This includes but is not limited to street signs, which are often high in the air and only facing in the direction of traffic; and
- providing flexibility and variety in street and sidewalk amenities. Cornwall Street, with alternating angle parking, wide sidewalks, narrow and thus slow roadway, and crossing bulbs, is an excellent pedestrian street. Meanwhile Holly Street is a one way arterial with three lanes of traffic and parallel parking, and is a poor pedestrian street. Yet both measure 44 feet from curb to curb.

It is possible that at some time in the medium or distant future, fuel shortages or changes in culture may steer Americans away from the automobile. In that case, it is possible that more people will choose to live and work in denser urban settings. This is one more reason to preserve the character of the city. Central Bellingham possesses an infrastructure of buildings, utilities, and services that could adequately provide for the needs of much more than it presently does. It is a regional resource that should be cherished for what it is and has been, and preserved for what it can be.

Waterfront Access and Development

While activities and improvements in the Civic Center and CBD present more near term opportunities for action, there remains a significant issue regarding long term connection of the downtown to the waterfront. At present, downtown Bellingham captures only a portion of the benefit associated with its magnificent setting on Bellingham Bay. Beyond Maritime Heritage Park, public access to the waterfront is virtually nonexistent. This circumstance presents longer term issues and challenges for downtown Bellingham.

The present connection between the Central Business District, Civic Center, the Cultural Crown and the waterfront is incomplete. Longer term market opportunities that could benefit the downtown cannot be accessed due to the absence of any public pedestrian connection from downtown to the Bay. As a result, waterfront related opportunities for public and commercial uses of all types (housing, hotels, retail development, marinas, recreational use, etc.) are likely to continue to be accommodated in locations functionally divorced and unconnected to downtown. Existing and proposed development in the Fairhaven and Squalicum Point areas provide current examples of this phenomena. Frankly, downtown Bellingham is unlikely to be able to compete for or benefit from these activities without a more meaningful connection to the Bay. This circumstance cannot change overnight, but it can change over time. We believe it should be a fundamental part of the City's and community's vision to connect downtown to the Bay through connection to and redevelopment of portions of the fill area west of Roeder Avenue between the Whatcom Creek Channel and the "I" and "J" Channel. A long term cooperative effort between the Port Authority and the City will be essential if this objective is to be realized.

We recognize the extreme sensitivity associated with discussion of issues of public access to the Bay in downtown Bellingham. We accept and support the notion that Bellingham's port is a working port. The Georgia Pacific facility is an important

source of employment and we presume its continued operation is a given for any waterfront planning. We believe in fact that a working port can support a variety of uses, and that the presence of heavy industrial and maritime activity creates interest and does not necessarily preclude other public activity within the port adjacent to downtown. Likewise, we do not accept the notion that any level of public activity will inevitably lead to constraints on industrial or maritime activity. These uses can and should both be represented in Bellingham's waterfront.

Our recommendation is that the City and Port District engage in a joint planning effort to create a strategy for public access and redevelopment of the area between Maritime Heritage Park, the Whatcom Creek Channel and the "I" and "J" Channel. The City must enlist the Port District as its redevelopment agent for a downtown waterfront program with the following objectives:

- identify incremental improvements that can be made between Maritime Heritage Park and the waterfront to further enhance the park and provide connections across Roeder Avenue to publicly accessible points on the waterfront.
- create a long term master plan for the waterfront, including property west of Roeder between Whatcom Creek Channel and the "I" and "J" Channel, providing for an appropriate mix of maritime and non-maritime activity to be implemented over the next 20 years.
- devise a property acquisition strategy to be implemented through the Port District designed to retain current uses in place, but over time assemble public (Port District) control of key properties within the master plan area, using available Port District property to facilitate phased relocation where necessary.
- set long term targets for expanding public use opportunities, and identify market opportunities that can be seized to create new waterfront activity that can be connected to and directly

support the business, retail, cultural and civic activities that exist in the downtown.

- review the current design for replacement of the Roeder Avenue bridges to ensure that the replacement bridge structures maximize opportunities for pedestrian use, viewing, connections to the waterfront and water access from the Creek to the Bay.

The R/UDAT team urges that an intergovernmental agreement be enacted between the City and the County. It seems most appropriate that the City take the lead in the implementation program since a large measure of the benefits to be derived from the Civic Center program are anticipated to flow to the central area. In other words, the Civic Center development is to energize a renaissance within the Historic/Cultural District and the CBD. There must be cooperation between the two major players: the City and the County.

Funding for planning, land acquisition, design and development should be shared maximizing the use of both City and County financing strength. Cost sharing can be effectuated through the use of both direct appropriations and public borrowings. Overall maintenance responsibilities for the district will be the responsibility of the City. Therefore, joint financing responsibilities should be allocated with this concept in mind.

REVIEW OF DOCUMENTS

CBD/Civic Center/Creek Area Plans

Preliminary Bellingham North Downtown Plan (Makers, for city, (1992)

Theory and design features for transition area, creek, Cornwall St. Proposal for major new residential area between creek and Ohio Ave.

Downtown Parking Feasibility Study (Ralph Burke IL, for city, 1991)

Actual block by block counts and turnover statistics 4510 spaces downtown: 33% priv.lots, 30% on-street, 20% comm. lots, 7% parkade, 10% oth popular locations usually full.

Downtown Development Strategies, (1989)

Sponsored mostly by local property owners, grant from Wash. DC. Response to losses after mall. Preserve critical mass, market forces need encouragement idea for arcade in Penny's building-thru access with stores (part of linkage from CBD to parking), other midblock linkages. Upper story housing. Research/explore tourism, university, signage.. Pedestrian concepts from business community

Central Waterfront Charette for issues/directions (1989)

City, GP, port, and 4th corner development with 20 citizens and consultant. Considers waterfront from marina to GP, CBD, Civic Ctr., lettered streets, but focuses on central "target area". Volume 2 contains several specific road realignment concepts Volume 3 contains annual report of S.C.O.R.P.

Bellingham Central Waterfront Development Plan (NBBJ, for planning dept, 1986)

Was in part an outgrowth of charette. Target area Holly St. corridor SW of Prospect. Broke out many proposed projects by priority and lead agency. Good info by census tract of employment, retail, office, absorption, sales, etc. In 1985 1.2 million sf retail in CBD (in 1973, 306,000)

Bellingham Civic Center Parking Study (Jim Zervas, 1984), for city

343 spaces in CC including, about 2/3 on street. Document plans for 900 questionnaire of city/county employees. Recommends leasing land, eventual public garage at grand & central, closing a few streets by library.

Maritime Heritage Ctr. Interpr. Master Plan (from Whatcom Museum, undated early 1980's)

Enhance appreciation of marine/fisheries. lots of "connections" to parts of city. Incorporates hatchery/interpretation; presents art-center area as lightly developed "Roeder Mill" site with connections up to museum, and strong connections to citizens dock/marine industry area, marine-type crafts, fishing...

Marine Heritage Center Program Plan,

Science/theory of hatcheries and fish life proposes retail on Holly street by shrimp shack. Good base maps (both 1"=200' and 1"=800'+-) with overlays of zoning, traffic, transit, pedestrian, parking, landmarks, slopes, soils, utility lines, visual amenities

Civic Center Plan (Zervas, 1978)

Concept: Pedestrian Center, surrounded by parking and peripheral arterial New large County building, net area 95,000 sf with public safety (now total will be 160,000) Post office to

performing arts, Lottie street closed; lots of green; amphitheatre by creek; garage. Anticipates space needs to 1990. Good design, no implementation. Parking: 383 spaces, presumed 793 needed 1990.

Canadian Impact Study (for Council of Governments, 1978)
Central waterfront and CBD, not Civic Center. "Ensure CBD continues to be dominant trade center of Whatcom County." Reviews other sub-area plans, circulation, street beautification. Sees big growth in furniture, F.I.R.E., department stores.

Land Use And General Economic Documents

Visions for Bellingham 1992
Outgrowth of citizen-driven process. Emphasizes neighborhoods, infill, natural resources, and support of downtown. A series of short and long term goal statements within various planning areas.

Population, Economic, and Housing projections (Consultant, for County, part of SGMA, 1992)
Good information on City and County level. County has grown slightly faster than rest of state. Economic growth areas 1980-1990 were services, health care. Government, manufacturing, and construction all down slightly. 337 housing units in CBD 1990, 60% single person, 90% rentals. 1991

City Land Use Ordinance ("Master Plan", Pt. 1 & 2 1980, Pt. 3 amended thru 1991)
The first is a goal/policy plan which is quite progressive but without teeth; a lot of goals about circulation, encouragement, environmental protection. The second and largest is a sequence of neighborhood plans covering the entire city. It is largely a

statement of existing conditions and a desire to preserve character. The third is most like a traditional zoning ordinance with procedures, sight distances, parking standards and the like.

Population and the Economy (City planning dept, 1973)
From 1930 to 1973 Whatcom Co. was 2nd slowest growing in NW Wash. Bellingham had highest by far % born in state of any NW Wash. city. City was 98% white in 1970. Pop. in city was older than County or State. Other good info on economy sectors at city and County level. 1959-1971 agric. employment dropped from 16% to 6%; gov't and construction up. 1970: 659 housing units in downtown census tract; 2/3 1 person, 90% multi family, 30% without plumbing. Subsequent growth has been higher than projected.

Transportation Documents

Whatcom Transportation Authority Plan for 1993-1998 1992
Expects capital funding to come from local sources. Bus terminal close to capacity, more freq. service==>more land to expand terminal. Revenues: 50% sales tax, 35% motor veh. excise tax, 5% farebox, 7% federal, 3% misc. Proposals: downtown-mall route, mall-area circulator, night trunk route, minor route changes

Whatcom Transportation Authority Rider / Non Rider Survey (Marketing Co., 1992)
1.5% of pop. ever ride the bus, close to half of these do only because they have to commute: 78% single occupancy vehicle, 8.5% carpool, 1.2% bus. Avg. commute 9.1 miles, 17.3 minute commute. Rider data sketchy since only 10 riders in survey. Little possibility to significantly increase ridership. 78% support idea of HOV lanes.

An Open Space Network for Bicycling and Foot Travel (City of B'ham, 1988)

Four proposed trails come together in the CBD; this should be reflected in a major open space and unique developments. Primarily a policy plan.

Improvements for Bicycles (Dept of Public Works, Parks & Rec., 1981)

"Refinement" to 1978 report. Both shared-route and bikeway projects, many spot improvements/connector paths. Most downtown streets are deficient for bikes and pedestrians. Often with bikes this involves bad bollard placement.

Bicycle Facilities Planning (Bellingham Planning Department, 1978)

53% of all workers live 5 miles or less from work. Funky, alternative approach, good theory of needs for bikes, great graphics. 5 year plan, simple improvements; and 25 year plan, mostly new bike arterials and loops. Standards, control, signage, parking.

Whatcom Creek Bikeway FHWA grant application (City Public Works, 1976)

Request for \$313k towards \$533k project; 4.2 miles to Lake Whatcom

Waterfront Plans

Port of Bellingham market demand report for hotel (Coopers & Lybrand, 1991)

Analysis of growing need for lodging in area. New facility will get "fair share" of business in market (20% commercial, 41%

group, 39% tourist . However, analysis assumes relocation of non-compatible uses and other improvements to areawide tourist infrastructure.

Port of Bellingham Feasibility Study (Ackroyd Cost Control for Coopers/Lybrand. 1991)

Cost estimates for commercial development projects. Breaks down site work by yard, buildings by \$/s.f., no financing/cash flow info.

Squalicum Harbor Land Use Plan (early 1980's)

Recounts Port's internal planning process list of elements desired followed by extensive site planning exercise goal: internally linked/whole, maximum views (about 40% of site in parking). some cost estimating.

Environmental Plans

Whatcom County Critical Areas (Planning Department, 1992)

Extensive ordinance regulating wetlands, habitats, etc. No mapping.

Bellingham Wetland Inventory (1991)

Based on previous work, air photo, some field investigation. Extensive 1"=200' photos of Whatcom Creek valley, no wetlands downtown or near estuary.

Bellingham Bay Action Program (Consultants for U.S.E.P.A, 1989)

Scientific criteria to determine contamination. Extensive data on point sources, permitted discharges, sediment analysis. Minimal non-point source data. Counts of contaminant levels.

Shoreline Master Program (Update 1988)

Classifies Whatcom Creek as urban going back to the interstate. List of policies for when various types of development should/should not happen. Regulations reflecting policies.

Open Space Parks and Recreation (technical appendix #5 to Master Plan, 1988)

Encouraged Heritage Park, Citizen's Dock, and Chestnut Street Park project. Goals/policies/strategies for choosing, accessing, meeting needs...Recommends plaza/mini park at Holly/Prospect intersection

Whatcom Creek Flood Mgmt Improvements (EIS, 1984)

Excavating for flood control. Filters/screens to protect hatchery. Data on flow, sediment, temp., plantlife, etc. Many comments, most concerned about impacts re: fish, sediments, access.

Bellingham Coastal Zone Management Study (1977)

Regulated area comes up bluff to the museum. Contaminants in Bay. Mercury is major problem.

Marine Shorelines Study of Public Access and Recreation Sites in Whatcom County (1976)

Characterizes 134 miles of shoreline by type and condition. Existing and potential recreation sites. Mouth of Whatcom Creek as a possible project linking with planned greenway, minimal amenities envisioned.

Whatcom Creek Redevelopment Plan (Consultant for City, 1973)

Led to many ideas in 1980 plan, including turning sewer plant into hatchery. New buildings along Holly, amphitheatre below

post office. Continuity of paths and plantings. Extensive street trees. Good pop./emp. data for 60's and early 70's (County pop. 1950, 65,000; 1973, 76,000) Threat at time to downtown (306,000 sf retail) from new Bellingham Mall (101,000 sf) (Bellis Fair Mall is 900,000 sf+) Contains proposal for special review district in creek area, few details. Good history of building of city, major events and buildings (brief).

Whatcom Creek Greenway Plan. (1971)

Studio report from Huxley College students much of the lower creek area was left to the city by Henry Roeder (orig. mill) in 1901 to be a park.

R/UDAT TEAM

Thomas Laging, AIA, Chair

Mr. Laging is a Professor of Urban Design and Architecture at the University of Nebraska at Lincoln. As a consulting architect, he has been involved with numerous projects, including housing and medical and recreational facilities. Mr. Laging's area of special expertise is community participation and urban design. He has led major efforts for the cities of Phoenix, Arizona; Detroit, Michigan; Boise, Idaho; and Farmington, New Mexico. He has chaired the Mayor's Urban Design Committee, the Redevelopment Advisory Committee in Lincoln, Nebraska and has provided advice for Lincoln's strategic planning effort. The Nebraska State Capital Environs study he directed in 1976 won national recognition, including awards from the A.I.A., Progressive Architecture, and the National Endowment for the Arts. He has practiced internationally as well. He helped plan the new IMO State University in Nigeria and participated in urban planning for Lima, Peru. Mr. Laging received the Senior Fullbright Lecture Fellowship in Urban Design at the University of Simon Bolivar, Caracas, Venezuela, and has been an exchange professor of architectural design at the Universidad de Guadalajara, Guadalajara, Mexico. He is a member of the Urban Design Committee of the American Institute of Architects. He holds a Masters Degree from Harvard University.

Rich Beatty

Mr. Beatty is an urban planner from Newburyport, Massachusetts, with over 30 years of experience in both the public and private sector. He was the chief planner for downtown Boston during the massive renewal of the late 60's and early 70's and has since been a transportation planner for the state and a downtown revitalization specialist in numerous communities. His recent experience includes environmental planning for the Merrimack River Watershed; planning and project managing the conversion of an historic center city fire station into a state-of-the-art performance center, art gallery and restaurant; and private housing/recreation development planning. This is Mr. Beatty's seventh R/UDAT with previous involvement in Boise, Idaho; Baton Rouge, Louisiana; Baytown, Texas; Rockford, Illinois; Spartanburg, South Carolina; and Lynn, Massachusetts.

Robert A. Findlay, AIA

Professor of Architecture Robert A. Findlay, AIA, has taught architectural and urban design at Iowa State University for twenty years. He is chairperson of the College of Design Liaison Committee and of the Interdepartmental Graduate program in Housing. In recent years he coordinated the graduate programs in architecture and was a Faculty Senator. With Professor Jerry Knox of the Community and Regional Planning department, Findlay has established Iowa Community Design, an outreach initiative of the College of Design which serves the planning and design needs of many Iowa communities. Professor Findlay holds university awards and for teaching and international program development, as well as state, regional and national awards for his architectural and collaborative urban design work. He writes and lectures extensively, primarily in two research areas: the privatization of public urban space and regional communities of household-centered neighborhoods.

Thomas A. Gougeon

Thomas A. Gougeon is the CEO of the Stapleton Redevelopment Foundation, a private non-profit corporation created to finance and undertake redevelopment of the 4700 acre Stapleton International Airport site upon closure of the airport in 1993. From 1990 to 1991, Mr. Gougeon served as Director of the Denver Mayor's Office of Economic Development, where he was responsible for directing the city's economic development agency, including marketing, business recruitment and retention, and small business development. From 1983 to 1990, as Assistant to the Mayor of Denver, he was responsible for planning and development of the new international airport and oversaw a variety of planning, development and finance activities, including development of the Downtown Plan, convention center and urban renewal projects. Mr. Gougeon holds a BA in Economics for the University of Denver and a Masters in City and Regional Planning from Harvard University. He has previously participated in R/UDAT in Austin, Texas and Salt Lake City, Utah.

Alice E. Gray

Ms Gray is the Massachusetts Port Authority Project Manager for the East Boston Piers Project. In this capacity, Ms Gray coordinates the development of a 13 acre waterfront park and a lobster terminal for a significant portion of the Boston lobster fleet. The 6.5 acre, \$13.5 million first phase of the park is currently under construction. Plans for the second phase of the waterfront park and the lobster terminal are being developed. The entire development is being planned in conjunction with the lobstermen who will use the lobster terminal and the residents of the East Boston community. Ms. Gray was previously employed as a Regional Coordinator in the Governor's Office of Economic Development and as a Development Analyst and neighborhood planner at the Boston Redevelopment Authority. Her BA, MA and MBA degrees are from Boston University, and she has previously participated in R/UDAT's in Carlsbad, New Mexico; Brainerd, Minnesota; and Olympia, Washington.

Frank Gray

Mr. Gray, an internationally recognized expert in the field of urban and redevelopment planning and management, has been instrumental in developing and implementing systems for community management throughout the United States and Europe. He has prepared fiscal and physical urban management and redevelopment strategies for communities in the States of California, Colorado, Nebraska, and Utah and has served as Planning, Community Development, and Redevelopment Director for both Petaluma, California and Boulder, Colorado. Mr. Gray was the founder and Executive Director of the City of Boulder Downtown Management Commission, which serves as manager for downtown Boulder, including parking, mall management, and promotion. As Deputy Director for the City and County of Denver, he had primary responsibility for the planning and economic development aspects of Denver's 2.5 billion dollar New Airport Development Project. Subsequently, Mr. Gray was the Director of Planning and Development for the City and County of Denver, responsible for planning, zoning, housing and community development programs. Currently, Mr. Gray is the Director for the Department of Economic Development, City of Lakewood, Colorado.

Brian W. Powell, ASLA

Mr. Powell is a landscape architect and owner of Brian Powell & Associates (landscape architects and planners) in the San Francisco Bay Area. As principal designer, Mr. Powell has developed numerous master plans for public projects in the north Bay Area counties. Over the past eight years Mr. Powell has developed an expertise in recreational waterfronts, community center planning, linkages to downtown areas and neighborhood park design. Public interaction and workshops have been an integral part of the BP&A's approach to the design process for the civic work. Projects of note include the First Street Downtown Renovation in Napa, Point Riverfront Park in Napa and the Youth Center of Novato. Mr. Powell is a member of the American Society of Landscape Architects and currently serves as the president of the California Council of the ASLA.

Lawrence E. Williams

Mr. Williams, has over 28 years of experience in real estate economic, financial and management consulting to business and government. He has planned numerous residential, commercial and industrial property developments in California, the nation and overseas, including retail centers, hotels, office and industrial buildings, marinas, recreation commercial projects, multi-modal transportation terminals, arena-exhibition and other specialized projects. Recognized nationally and internationally as an economic and financial planner and a property management consultant on public-private redevelopment programs, Mr. Williams' major projects include the Embarcadero in San Diego; Seaport Village, Intercontinental Hotel and cruise ship terminal; Dana Point harbor, Orange County; the Shoreline Project in Long Beach, including the marina village and hotel; Marina del Rey; Pier 39 in San Francisco; the Queen Mary and Spruce Goose in Long Beach; the New Orleans Convention Center expansion; and private and government developments in Hawaii, the Gulf Coast states, the East Coast and Great Lakes area, and overseas. Mr. Williams' feasibility and strategic financing plans include Austin, Texas city hall; Santa Clara County civic center; Sacramento administrative center; San Diego city hall; the U.S. Navy San Diego Broadway Complex; Port of Portland Oregon Terminal One redevelopment; the Aloha Tower redevelopment in Honolulu; and the Tampa Port cruise terminal in Tampa, Florida.

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Cicchitti's East Coast Pizzeria
il fiasco Restaurant
The Leopold
The Marina Restaurant
Hayden's Market

Accomodations

The Leopold

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Blackburn Office Equipment

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Lynn Dunlap
Pat Eley

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