



Birchwood neighborhood village

plan concepts

2016 URBAN TRANSITIONS STUDIO
Urban Planning and Sustainable Development
Huxley College of the Environment, WWU

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Chapter 1

Introduction & Overview

Urban Transitions Studio is an ongoing collaborative partnership between Western Washington University's (WWU) urban planning program, the Bellingham's Office of Planning and Community Development, and Bellingham's Neighborhood Associations. WWU's Planning Studio participated in a coordinated service-learning curriculum partnering WWU classes with community and institutional partners in order to develop new urbanism planning concepts to help transition Bellingham into a more urban and sustainable community. Winter Quarter's Planning Studio class is the first in a series of coordinated class investigations that emphasizes community planning and design concept development. Other classes participating in the Urban Transitions Studio program include Planning Studio II, which will investigate approaches to plan implementation, and Sustainable Design Studio, exploring the application of green building methods for the development concepts. Each of the participating classes build upon the planning concepts developed in the winter quarter Planning Studio class.

The Planning Studio examines alternative solutions to community development. The course examined ways to achieve planning's social, environmental, and economic values through the master site plan process in order to foster the creation of a sustainable urban community core in the Birchwood neighborhood. The 2016 Studio Project identifies strategies for transitioning the current commercial core district of the Birchwood Neighborhood into a mixed-use neighborhood.

Birchwood Neighborhood Center

Students in the Planning Studio class evaluated infill development opportunities for a range of land use types suitable for the Birchwood commercial core district. Students considered existing public policy and land use patterns and analyzed the current intensity of land use in order to assess opportunities for future urban infill. Urban design principles and theories of sustainable development helped guide their consideration of development alternatives that emphasize the retention of the historic character while promoting a greater diversity in land use mixes and efficiencies. The study included two community workshops. The first identified priorities for the neighborhood and preferences for future development. In the second workshop, a series of 4 development concepts were presented for evaluation. The feedback and recommendations received from the community formed the design objectives as students further refined their conceptual proposals which were later presented to the community at a third public meeting.

The objectives of the study were to 1) determine the potential for infill in order to maximize land use utilization, and 2) to consider a range of complementary mixed uses that can contribute to increased property values and create a dynamic, human scale neighborhood character that concurrently promotes urban infill and redevelopment to help meet Bellingham's goals for increasing residential growth, vibrant city development, and strengthening connections between emerging neighborhood centers. The development concept presented incorporate a

mix of land uses that include a diverse live/work housing mix, commercial uses, recreation, and a supporting infrastructure to foster synergies and create a strong "sense of place." Implementation strategies and the assessment of sustainability features will be more fully examined in subsequent Spring Quarter Planning Studio II and Sustainable Design classes.

A special note of thanks is extended to our UTS Community Partners for assisting our students throughout their research: Rick Sepler, City of Bellingham (COB) Planning Director; Ryan Nelson, Planner; Chris Comeau, COB Transportation Planner; April Barker, City Council Member, and community representatives from the Birchwood Neighborhood Association. Special thanks is extended to the owners of Northwood Hall who graciously provided meeting space to host our community meetings.

Respectfully submitted,

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Issues & Opportunities

	ISSUES	OPPORTUNITIES
S a f e t y	Intersection of Birchwood and Northwest <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hard to cross • Unsafe • Poor cross meter timing • High N-S flow volumes of traffic • Roundabout unrealistic • Cedarwood Ave connection too close to intersection 	Dumbbell development opportunity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maplewood improvements create a destination to the Northwest. • New crosswalk infrastructure • Transit improvement along Maplewood
	Squalicum overpass bifurcates the area, and forms a bottleneck at Birchwood and Northwest; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transit impacts • Bars pedestrian crossing • Reduces connectivity 	Provide opportunity for future infill development and growth in the commercial core; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plenty of capacity for more dense retail use • Potential for office and residential mixed uses • Improved infrastructure related to new development • Storm water • Sidewalks
	Empty parking lots popular sites of vagrancy; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Permanently parked cars • Loitering • Sleeping in private lots 	Show community is strong and active; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Volunteer resource • Eyes on street • Trail maintenance • Beautification • Neighborhood activity • Public markets • Farmers markets and food trucks • Movie screenings • Civic events
	Inadequate lighting for safe night time use	Improve lighting situations along travel routes, gathering spaces, and parking lots. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In addition, lighting was requested to illuminate bus schedules and other informative signage • Ensure lighting does not create heavy light pollution
	Excessive inappropriate behavior and loitering	Improve nighttime safety by creating pedestrian spaces which dissuade inappropriate conduct <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Soft uses of spaces during evening hours

D e s i r a b i l i t y	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public art projects and place making 	
	Lack of greenery and green space	Introduction of green buffers along roads, parks, and parklets <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Included in this vision is the preservation of wildlife within the core, leading it to be less car-oriented. • Community does not want to introduce invasives • Vegetated streetscapes • Implementation of a community garden
	Lack of approachable, local and relevant retail options <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of private seating options • Businesses aren't relevant to the community 	Coffee shops, cafes and restaurants, small independent businesses, or fountain courtyards <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Farmers market • Bring storefronts to the street • Increase private seating options which don't encourage inappropriate behavior
	Pavement dominates the physical character of Birchwood	Introduce alternative uses for large parking lots with more efficient use of space <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bioswales and rain gardens • Curb Cuts • Use new roads to cut through large lots • Shops and mixed use • Pedestrian corridors and courtyards
	Lacking seating and comfort	Create more place for residents and visitors to sit
C o n f o r t y	Low walkability/Poor pedestrian infrastructure	Add sidewalks, crosswalk, indicators, traffic calming, and car-free spaces <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emphasis should be placed on improving access to the trail and safety in front of Morrie's • Trail access should be a highlight of the pedestrian experience in Birchwood
	Insufficient funding for transit infrastructure improvements; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Neighborhood developed in 1920's • Little developer funding • Funding is a high burden from city perspective • New infrastructure expensive • Storm water system • Sidewalks 	Expanded walkability; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential to expand system • New types and tech • On street parking Golf Course has opportunity to serve as viewshed; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing draw • Contingent on Neighborhood clientele

I d e n t i t y	Lack of community identifiers and signage	Add a "Welcome to Birchwood" sign over the bridge in a style that represents the old coal mining history of the neighborhood <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Signs guiding pedestrians to certain attractions, including the trail, ballpark, small businesses etc.
	Lacks desirable pedestrian destinations/attractions for both community and visitors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most travel south for business/services • Hinders walkability • Few pedestrian destinations • Encourages motor vehicle use 	Connections to parks and services; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sidewalk and staircase down bluff • Improves neighborhood access • Increased public usage decreases vagrancy • Potential connection to cornwall possible • Greater connectivity to core • Recreation opportunity • Multi-modal transport



Design Goals

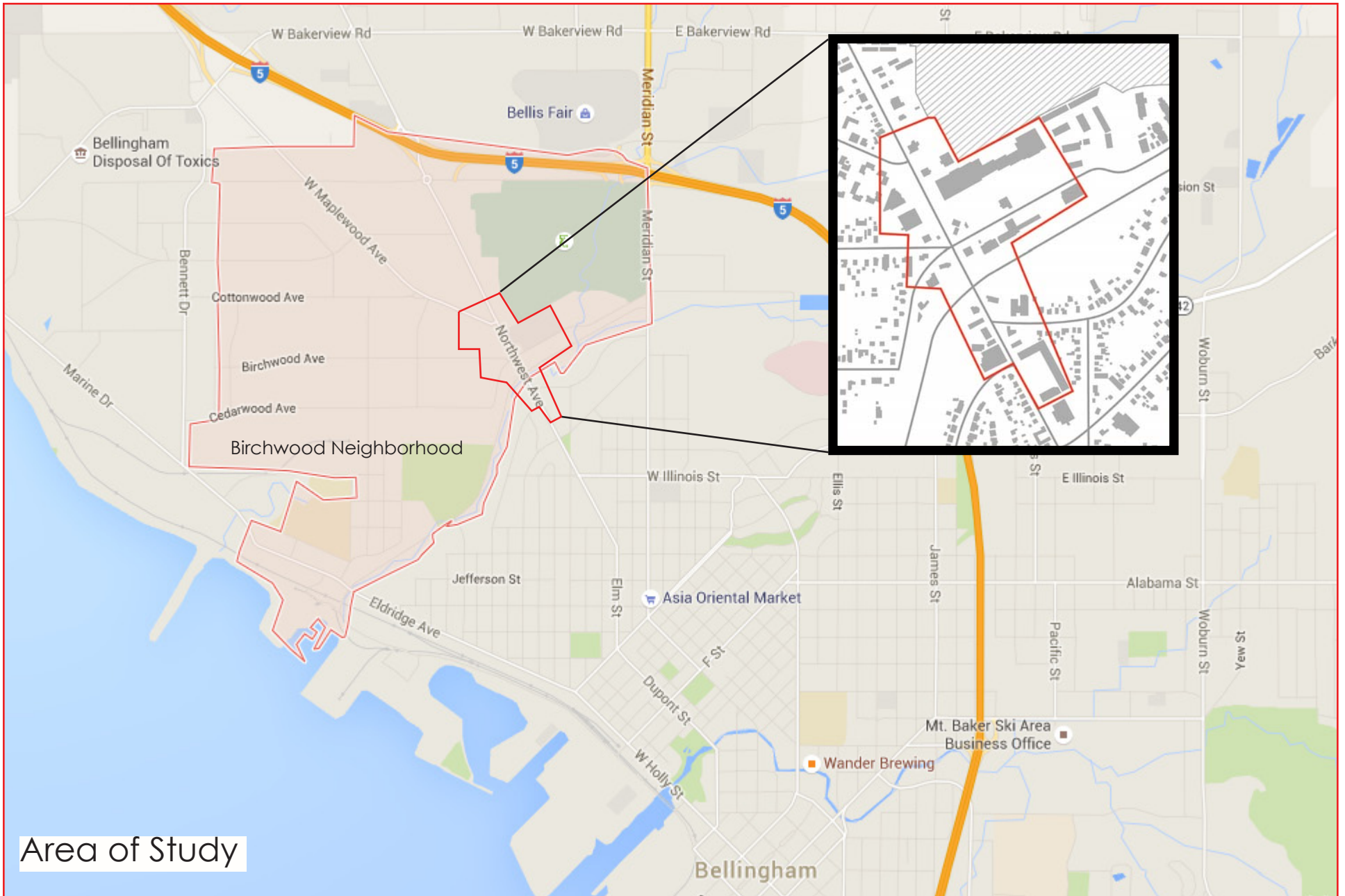
Priorities	Goals	Objectives
Dynamic retail destination	Desirable small business retail destinations that provide valuable social gathering spaces for the public	<p>Create a public gathering space such as a plaza or field green.</p> <p>Attract quality restaurants cafes, coffee shops and small business retail.</p> <p>Encourage or require building design which fosters a strong sense of place.</p> <p>Partner with building owners to develop a strategy to fill vacant businesses.</p> <p>Incorporate residential and mixed-use into the retail</p>
Green space	An inviting urban core with natural elements and spaces for outdoor enjoyment.	<p>Improve the aesthetics of the street spaces through community art and landscaping.</p> <p>Link art to the history of the community.</p> <p>Enhance the accessibility to Squalicum Creek Trail</p> <p>Add amenities to the Squalicum Creek Trail trail such as park benches and way finding signs.</p> <p>Repurpose underutilized blacktop space with bio swales</p>
Urban design elements	A balanced and aesthetically appealing urban space with a distinct sense of place and identity.	<p>Design elements inspired by historical significance.</p> <p>Educational signage that reflects history</p> <p>Create public art sculptures, murals, water features, and/or interactive art structures</p> <p>Allow/encourage shops to utilize public space for seating</p>
Walkability and connectivity	A safe, convenient and attractive pedestrian and biker experience	<p>Widen sidewalks and</p> <p>Create pedestrian paths through large parking lots.</p> <p>Make intersections safer.</p> <p>Implement traffic calming improvements.</p> <p>Resurface pavement where needed</p> <p>Enhance areas with underutilized parking.</p> <p>Create pedestrian only corridor.</p> <p>Develop bike infrastructure throughout the community.</p> <p>Secure bike parking near transit</p>



Design Goals

Priorities	Goals	Objectives
Safety and community	A strong, engaged and resilient community which creates a vibrant and lively urban space	Partner with local businesses to put on events such as craft fairs, art walks, or music festivals. Establish a farmers market. Brighter lighting along streets and in parking lots. Encourage services for support vulnerable populations Provide after-hours shuttle services Greater law enforcement presence.
Promote the economic health of the area	Create a vibrant and sustainable economy that promotes economic growth with livability.	Continue to effectively manage parks, trails and public spaces incentivising economic activity. Expand infrastructure to accommodate 20 year growth projections. Protect and expand affordable housing. Expand poverty reduction measures.
Mixed Land Use	Combine zones in important urban centers to maximize utility, safety, and quality of live within a community.	Provide eyes on the street expanding hours of activity throughout the day and evening. Increase diversity of housing options. Plan for diverse household forms.
Smart Growth	Reduce sprawl and create efficient (in transit and commerce), healthy, and ecologically sustainable development within cities.	Promote Transit Oriented Developments wherever possible. Promote bike and pedestrian transit. Avoid destruction of habitat. Discourage development near water supply.





Area of Study

Chapter 2

Community Visioning

This chapter reviews the information that was gathered during the first community meeting on Tuesday, 1/19/2016. During the first hour of the meeting a Visual Preference Survey (VPS) was conducted. All attendees were asked to participate in the VPS in order to achieve a better idea of community preferences. As the VPS concluded, attendees were directed towards the three other panels: Ideation and Community Mapping, Capacity Analysis, and Transect Analysis or 'Sense of Place'. The aim of each panel will be discussed in further depth in the following reports.

Visual Preference Survey

This report analyzes the results of a visual preference survey administered for the Birchwood neighborhood of Bellingham's Urban Village Master Plan. This analysis provides an enhanced vision for the community by allowing stakeholders to respond to images, and uses those images to inform the visions that are to be pursued in the Birchwood Neighborhood Commercial Core Master Plan. Without images, other forms of participation are less clear in establishing a vision or character for the commercial area. The images used in this survey can subsequently be used to update ordinances and codes in pursuit of the previously established vision.

Public participation is essential in the planning process. The greater public participation that is exhibited by a community serves as testimony to their concern for its preservation and future development. It also ensures that their voices

are heard. It makes the planner's job more tangible, by gaining insight from those who live in the community and provides the information necessary to create a well-rounded plan. One that the community may more fully support. After all, the changes are for the community's benefit.

Our objectives as WWU student planners is to align Bellingham's land use goals and policies with planning's social, environmental, and economic values, along with the particular visions and preferences of the Birchwood community, through the master site planning process. This alignment of community visions seeks to promote sustainable urban village development for the Birchwood community that is respectful of the interests of the local community as well as the larger public interest.

Methodology

Visual preference surveys (VPS) were developed to give members of a community the ability to express their opinions on potential developments by rating images according to their favor. VPS' typically feature over a hundred images which encompass a wide variety of physical design features and uses in order to get the most comprehensive feedback possible. This information is then analyzed and synthesized into feasibly implementable design characteristic which encapsulate the image of the community.

To gather results for the survey, we first created a survey sheet for participants to fill out. A scale of -5 to 5 as a rating system was chosen to provide a scale for participants to indicate their preference. The scale was displayed on the survey sheets as bubbles for the participants to fill in. The visual preference survey had six sections, with each sections containing 15 slides. These sections were

created to divide the images into categories of residential, mixed-use, commercial, streetscape, street amenities and character. Space for comments for each section as well as additional comments was provided at the bottom of the survey.

After collecting the surveys, we compiled the results into a spreadsheet and calculated the average as well as the median ratings of each image. The average was used to determine the overall score of the image and the median was used to identify possible outliers that would manipulate the score of the image. Collected comments were recorded into a separate word file and used as a guide to understanding the scores of the images from the survey. The scored images were ranked and compared into the final analysis.

Limitations

Some of the limitations faced during the survey process included limited diversity among attendees. The attendance at the event did not encompass as diverse a group of people in way of income and ethnicity to correspond with the researched demographic of the neighborhood. Moreover, the size of the survey pool may not have been large enough to accurately represent the community.

The image selection process had margin for error. Due to the limited amount of images included in the survey, the potential options might not have been as objectively comprehensive as they could have been. It is evident that the range of images was a contributing factor to the scope of perspective represented in the survey. That being said, images that included sprawl-based planning were intentionally added to the survey in order to provide contrast.



In reviewing the feedback, it is difficult to tell exactly what the group liked or disliked about many of the visuals, which is indicative of a large number of neutral rated images. This is apparent with the large number of neutral rated images in the survey.

The time restraint for showing the photos could have also had an influence on the participants opinions. An individual's first impression of a specific visual may have been different if given the time to consider the images more thoroughly.

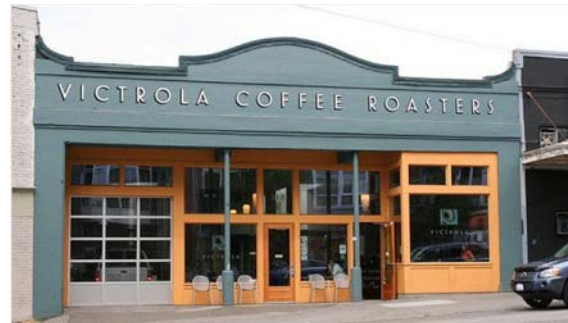
The sequencing of the images could have also had a bearing on ratings. For example, a really hideous photo followed by a mediocre scene may make the mediocre scene more favorable than if the viewer had viewed the images in a reverse order.

Results

It was clear from the data that was collected that one of the main focuses was on maintaining residential lot size and to not encroach on single family housing. Along with this separation of uses, the community was adamant through the survey results that the buildings were not too modern in architecture and had a connection to the past. It was also clear through the scoring process that the community did not favor buildings that were more than three to four stories.

The community was very receptive to streetscapes and amenities that encourage pedestrian use and engagement between one another. Examples of this were larger sidewalks with plenty of greenery, as well as storefronts spilling out onto the sidewalk in the form of outdoor seating. These visual preferences, both architectural as well as landscape gives the concept teams an idea on what the community is looking for.

Commercial



High: 3.27



Low: -2.18

Residential



High: 2.14



Low: -1.60

Mixed Use



High: 2.77



Low: -1.63

Ideation and Community Mapping

Aiding the Birchwood Neighborhood Community in identifying desirable commercial urban core character and design features to influence a new sense of place and foster a feeling of safety at all hours of the day.

Method

The planning study hosted a community mapping ideation phase of the workshop during the first community meeting on January 19, 2016 to gather input from involved community members on aspects of their urban core that they feel enhance the sense of place as well as to identify features that negatively portray their ideal community. To do so, aerial maps of the neighborhood were pinned to the wall and the planning study facilitators conducted three 20-minute idea gathering sessions documenting the community's suggestions by writing them in bullet-points on a large sheet of paper while placing sticky notes on the map in places where suggestions were geographically relevant and specific. The majority of participants in this study are assumed to be residents, business owners, and neighborhood property owners. Leading this phase in the workshop was helpful in identifying the participants top concerns and priorities and to unveil the perceptions of neighborhood members regarding community character and amenity features.

Streetscape



High: 2.68



Low: -2.43

Street Amenities



High: 2.97 (A proposed bike rack recieved 4.03)



Low: 0.69

Character



High: 3.27



Low: -0.50



Community Recommendations Prioritized by how frequently community members mentioned these topics

- Define sense of place through development
- More Green spaces and better trailhead access
- Community center/ Inviting gathering spaces that enhance safety
- Adequate lighting to enhance safety
- Resurface pavement/ reevaluate Albertsons parking lot
- Development of bike infrastructure and pedestrian only pathways
- Local business encouragement and preservation
- Preservation of history and “small town feel”
- Artwork and interactive street amenities for children and adults

Limitations/Considerations

During the meeting several limitations were encountered. Most notably, the limited demographic of participants in attendance elicits the potential for certain community members to be underrepresented. The planning study intends to reach out to the broader community to ensure more inclusive community representation in subsequent meetings. Furthermore, the complex relationship between property ownership and development rights could pose limitations to the feasibility of the proposal and is therefore an important consideration throughout the planning process.

Conclusion

Participants of the Birchwood community meeting expressed primary concern regarding the overall safety and quality of pedestrian infrastructure in the area. On multiple occasions, participants



mentioned needing more lighting incorporated into streetscape designs in addition to more infrastructure that promotes walkability. In addition, many participants suggested the need for a community gathering/meeting place within the commercial urban core. Furthermore, the community showed strong desire for more

greenery throughout the urban core, describing it as a “concrete jungle.” Incorporating these themes into the design process will enhance the overall sense of place and influence thoughtful future development in the birchwood neighborhood.



Capacity Analysis

The Capacity Analysis team took an in depth look at the capacity for infill within the Birchwood Neighborhood commercial core. At a community meeting, a figure ground map was present which showed the parcels and buildings of the commercial core. Other figure grounds of similar Bellingham neighborhoods such as Fairhaven, the Fountain District, and the crossroads of James and Alabama were shown at the same scale for comparison, showing that the figure grounds of the other neighborhoods exhibited up to 100% lot coverage compared to Birchwood's 40% lot coverage maximum. The goal of this exercise was to visually reflect the low density of the neighborhood and compare it to other more dense neighborhoods that the community members would be familiar with. A GIS map developed by a team member was shown which displayed the building/parcel ratio with a gradation of color. This visual further backed up that the density analysis showing all the parcels within the Birchwood core had less than 40% of the lot covered by buildings.

Methods

The community was asked a series of questions about their views on the commercial core. The questions that were asked were:

- 1) What amenities/ businesses do you use the most in your neighborhood?
- 2)When using these amenities/ businesses is it a positive experience? If yes, how? If no, how could the amenity/ business be changed for the better?
- 3)What amenities/ businesses do you wish your neighborhood had?

Community members gave their input via hand-raising, and all comments were recorded.

Community members were then asked to identify whether ten selected sites were "hard" or "soft" sites. A "hard" site being a location, business or amenity that they wished to see stay the same or offered positive contributions to the community, and a "soft" site being one that had opportunity to evolve or change. The sites shown were selected by the Capacity Analysis team after a walking tour of the commercial core. At the end of the presentation the community was asked to place sticky dots on a map of the Birchwood commercial core and closely surrounding area to identify other hard and soft sites. This activity invited participants to point out any spaces the presentation did not cover as either notably hard or soft. Community members were also encouraged to record any additional comments on note cards provided.

From the analysis of the comments received during the presentation, several conclusions can be made. First, the community generally had negative feelings toward the commercial core area. Second, there are several sites within the neighborhood area that community members are more positive about. Third, that the community is open to the idea of changing the identified "soft" sites to create a more cohesive, inviting commercial core. Specifically, while it is known that there seems to be a generally negative sentiment towards the neighborhood center from residents, the team wished to discover which parts of this were seen as negative. The team then investigated what parts of the neighborhood residents considered hard (important, valuable, necessary, and desirable) or soft, sites that were negative, undesirable, and should be targeted for change and improvements.

Summary

Additionally, participants were asked to provide additional suggestions, information, and opinions

on comment cards for us to analyze their perception of other sites we didn't specifically ask about. After synthesizing the comments received, the comments were broken into seven categories: Comments that addressed issues related to the access and safety, the Park Manor Shopping Center, design and aesthetics, parks and greenery, undesirable behaviors, businesses, and finally community.

Access and Safety

Across the board, residents' comments relating to the access and safety within the core indicated a severe lacking of both. People identified the need for more sidewalks and crosswalks. One site in particular was Morrie's Drive-In, which has street improvements planned to occur in 2016-17, including sidewalk infrastructure and access to the Bay to Baker trail. Another location that was mentioned several times was improving access to the Park Manor shopping center parking lot, mainly for pedestrians who currently feel unsafe with the traffic levels and lack of pedestrian oriented access. West Maplewood has been mentioned as a route many pedestrians, cyclists, and drivers take to the core and it feels unsafe. This is another site slated for major improvements in the next two years, including bike lanes, sidewalks, parking, and traffic improvements. Other than this, there was a general desire among residents for improved pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure in Birchwood, as well as improved roads.

Park Manor Shopping Center

The Park Manor shopping center represents the commercial anchor for the Birchwood neighborhood. The overall sentiment of residents is that they don't feel safe in this area or the parking lot. Several comments highlighted desire



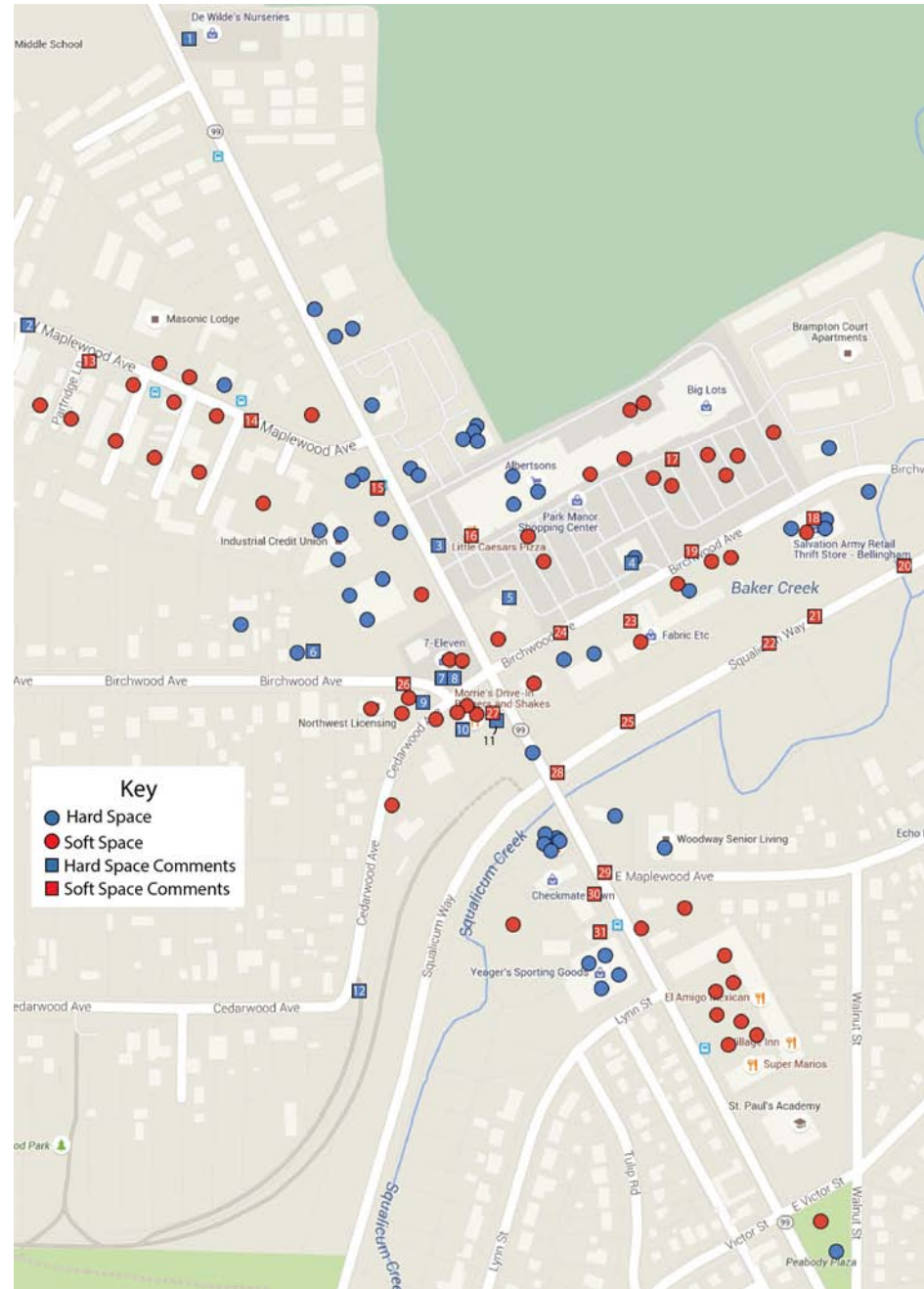
for increased lighting in this area. More focus on pedestrians and less on cars in this area would be a great safety improvement. Also the presence of more restaurants, less parking spaces, and more things that would bring activity at night would go a long ways towards increasing the safety of this area.

Aesthetic Concerns

As for the design and aesthetics of the Birchwood area, there was a general consensus among residents that the area as a whole was in need of a major facelift. Residents would like to see more trees and landscape architecture, outdoor seating at restaurants, more restaurants, and reduced vacancies. The feeling of residents is that if the area was more visually appealing, there would be fewer vacancies. Issues of aesthetics and visual character can be addressed through design guidelines which can create a distinct sense of place. These have been well applied in other Bellingham neighborhoods such as Barkley and Fairhaven. One potential theme pointed out by several residents was to embrace the area's coal mining history and use this as a theme for the design of the neighborhood. Another frequently mentioned idea was the use of Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design, the area should utilize good design and aesthetic quality to discourage inappropriate behavior.

Parks and Greenery

Parks and greenery were another big topic for the people of Birchwood. Residents feel that there is a severe lacking of park facilities in the neighborhood. Residents would like more open space and trees, and a few mentioned the idea of establishing a park in the Albertson's parking lot. Another comment already addressed is the need



for access to the Bay to Baker trail. Residents also indicated the idea of putting out large planters on the street, and hanging plants and neighborhood banners on street lights on the main streets.

Undesirable Behaviors

Safety is a major concern expressed by many community members. Residents and visitors alike don't feel very safe in the area as a destination. Redesigning and reinvesting in the area would go a long way towards discouraging unsafe and illegal behaviors in the area. Another safety aspect that was voiced were concerns regarding the high level of vehicular traffic and poorly maintained roads. The many residents who like to walk and cycle in the core currently feel very unsafe with the high traffic volumes, speed, and lack of pedestrian crosswalks in the area. In a recent discussion with a Bellingham public works official, the team learned that there are several improvement plans already in place for this area to address problems within the next couple years showing that progress is being made in this respect.

Diversity in Business Concerns

People in the area would like to see a greater diversity of businesses in the neighborhood core, specifically small and local businesses. There has been a large outcry unanimously for a community gathering place, such as a coffee shop or a cafe. People would like more restaurants in the area, and there is a feeling that this increased activity coupled with a facelift for the area would lead to decreased vacancies and overall success for all businesses. Having a large, upscale anchor for the area is something some residents would like to see. Other potential amenities residents would like are a location of the food co-op, a bakery, and wifi.

Community Facilities Concerns

The final category created from participants' comments was the community section. The people of Birchwood have a strong desire for more amenities related to the youth of the community, specifically parks. Another theme seen here was a desire for a community gathering space, one where residents could grab a drink or a bite to eat early in the morning and later in the evening. Other ideas presented to create a strong sense of community are a community bulletin board, a summer farmer's market, and public art.

Transect Analysis

Transect analysis is focusing on the sense of place of the Birchwood neighborhood and more specifically focusing on the feeling that you get when moving through the neighborhood. This analysis is also used to find what the Birchwood neighborhood in terms of visibility and amenities.

Methods

During the community meeting, an introductory activity that was used to identify where residents considered the boundaries and the commercial core of the Birchwood Neighborhood to be. The participants were divided into 3 different groups and spent 20 minutes with each of the groups (Transect Analysis, Infill, and Mapping). Transect analysis spent their 20 minutes engaging in the participants in a two part activity and through a survey. The activity was divided into two parts and was designed to identify the center and boundaries of the community according to the participants. The first part of the activity was inviting participants to discuss where the north, east, south, and west boundaries where. The



community was asked to identify where they perceived the boundaries to be using pink sticky notes. In the next part of this activity, participants were asked to indicate where the center of the neighborhood to be using blue sticky notes.

Results

There were general trends among all three groups, one of which was an overall strong agreement in regards to the east/west boundaries. Participants agreed that the western and eastern boundaries generally followed along Birchwood Avenue, with the western edge being about 450 east of the Northwest and Birchwood intersection. This western edge follows parallel to Northwest Avenue. The eastern boundary expands about 1050 feet from the main intersection. Many people



included the Salvation Army and Brampton Wood Apartments to define the eastern boundary. Regarding the north/south boundaries, participants tended to disagree where the boundaries were. Many felt that the northern boundary ended at the Pacific Northwest Credit Union. However, people also felt that Shuksan Middle School should also be included, as many students walk to school. A few people additionally believed that the Fred Meyer shopping area on Bakerview should be included in the Birchwood neighborhood. Regarding the southern boundary, diverse opinions were voiced. About one in three of the participants believed the southern edge of Birchwood was the bridge that goes over Squalicum Way. The remainder of participants voiced a preference to include the shopping plaza just south of the bridge (across from Yeager's) and St' Paul's Academy. The study's initial assumption was to define the boundary of the commercial core as the commercially zoned properties. This activity expressed participants disagreed with this boundary and as a result, we need to widen the scope of inclusion.

During the second activity, everybody was in consensus that the center of the neighborhood was the commercial area at the intersection of Birchwood Ave and Northwest Avenue. Although this was the center, people felt that there was really "nothing to do."

Overall, this activity was helpful in showing where the boundaries of Birchwood should be defined, location of the commercial center, and connectivity to other commercial centers such as the Bakerview Fred Meyer shopping area and Yeagers. The disagreements on the north/south boundaries exemplified that the connections to other neighborhoods, such as Cordata and Downtown, should be strengthened.



Chapter 3

Conceptual Design Ideas

This chapter highlights four conceptual site planning concepts, each of which incorporate design ideas based on community feedback from the first Birchwood community workshop. The planning concepts are presented in bubble diagram format to provide a rough visualization of key land use ideas.



Urban Design Team 1

The second community meeting had the goal of receiving input and feedback based on the proposed community concept plans created with the input from the first community meeting. The concept plan was presented before the entire group of participants followed by a period for the community members to comment on the individual plans. The feedback received for the conceptual plan was generally positive and the plan was well received. Community members suggested several small changes to the concept plan, which have been taken into consideration, with the goal of better representing the community's vision for the commercial core district. Several categories of comments emerged, relating to: transportation, parking, pedestrian, economy, safety, community, and design.

Transportation

Comments related to transportation mainly concerned on reducing congestion and increasing pedestrian and cycling infrastructure. There were also comments addressing concerns with the Northwest Birchwood intersection, rejuvenating the bridge, and overall increasing the flow of traffic throughout the area. Comments were also received that reflected the neighborhood's desire wish for the bus stops to be pull-in, rather than remaining in the street and increasing congestion.

Parking

Commenters requested that the conceptual plan better address current and future parking needs, and to relocate parking to the "back" of lots and businesses. Some attendees who live in the apartments next to the shopping center wished to reduce the monotonous stretch of parking leading from the bus stop to their homes.

Pedestrian

Regarding pedestrian issues, participants noted the danger of the Northwest Birchwood intersection and across the bridge. Other suggestion included increased trail access by the current Salvation Army building and adding new crosswalks between developments. Feedback on the pedestrian section of the commercial core was positive.

Economy

Comments addressing economic issues had a large range of variability. Some want to keep the affordability of current and new business low, so that local businesses will be able to continue to afford their core. One commenter noted the importance of having non-chain businesses, while still promoting locations for business that increase social capital, such as coffee shops. Other comments concerned the use of flex space between parking lot and pedestrian areas in the conceptual plan, for use by food trucks or the Bookmobile, for example. One commenter suggested eliminating the gas station.

Safety

Comments about safety emphasized pedestrian safety through better lighting both on the streets and under the bridge. The plan's concept to increase mixed-use buildings and thus increase eyes on the street was well received by attendees.



Birchwood Neighborhood Commercial Core

Map Key

-  Neighborhood Mixed Use
-  Neighborhood Commercial
-  Mixed Use / Office
-  Recreation & Open Space
-  Area of Interest

Public Greenspace Extension



Comfortable flow between nature and structures.



Encourages and diversifies pedestrian use within the core.

Creates a safe buffer between pedestrians and vehicles.

Pedestrian Path Rejuvenation



Increase trail access from core for better community use.



Increased use helps to discourage inappropriate behavior.

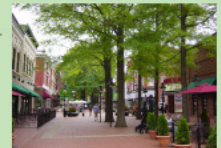
Safe pedestrian travel throughout the core.

Human-sized Mixed Use

More "eyes on the street".

Decreased setback, creating a more pedestrian friendly commercial area.

Residential/Office space potential.

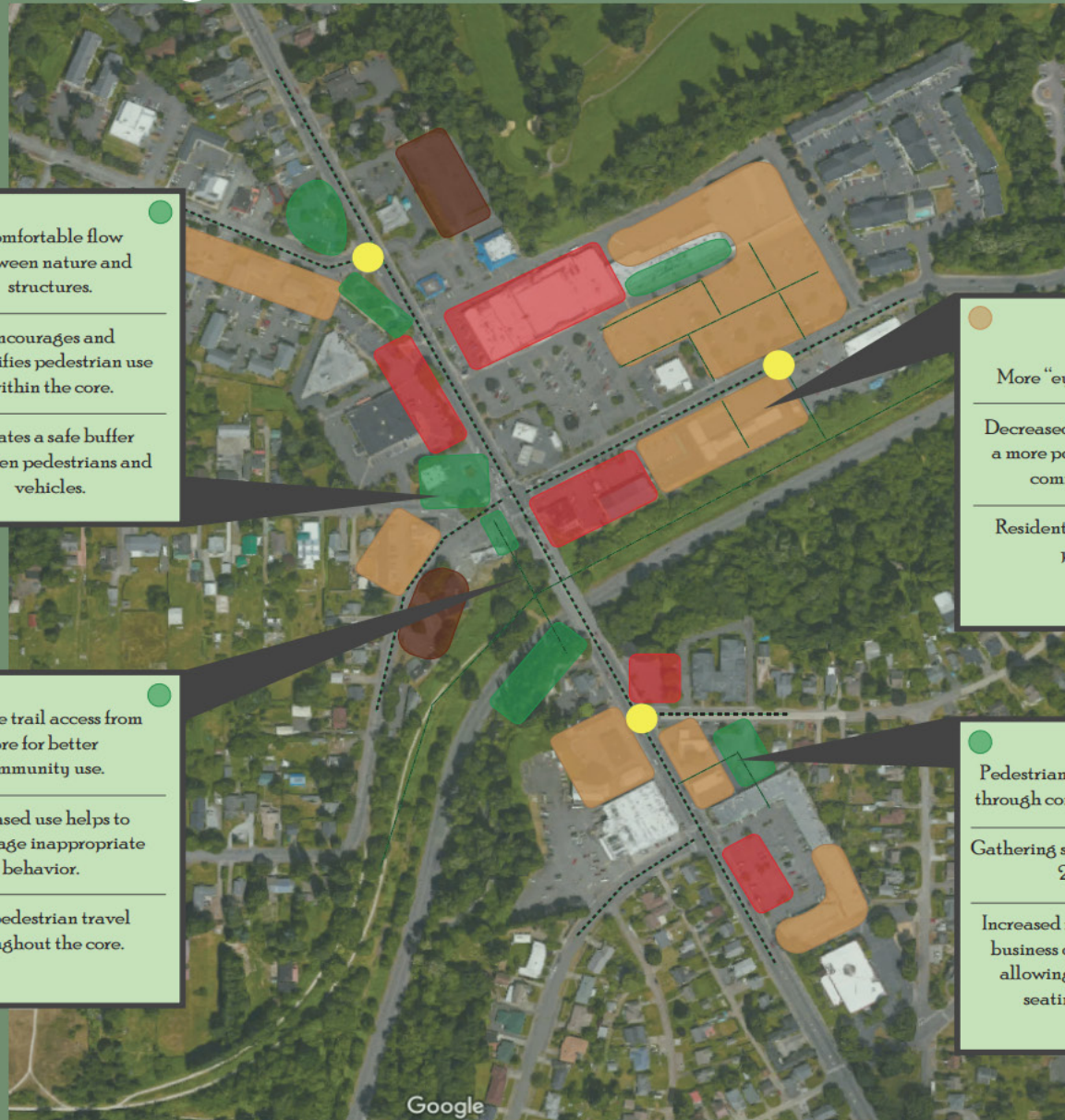


Connecting Plaza

Pedestrian connectivity through commercial areas.

Gathering spaces available 24/7.

Increased restaurant and business opportunities, allowing for outdoor seating spaces.



Google

Community

Comments relating to the community vision for the commercial core were varied. There was an emphasis on youth and children's activities and spaces, such as skate parks or interactive art. One commenter wanted to see a cohesive community. Another commenter asked for a farmer's market or other single day type use events.

Design

Comments addressing design goals had a large range of variability. Some comments addressed views, such as preserving the northern view of Mt. Baker or creating a "look-out" spot for viewing the surrounding landscape and golf course. Other comments asked to see an increase in landscaping, such as the planting of trees and shrubs along the sidewalks. Increased lighting on the streets was also emphasized. Commenters supported the use of art, bold concept designs, and street furniture that would be useable but not condone inappropriate uses. Design comments about building types was also included, such as two story buildings with patios looking out on the golf course, and also to better utilize the space behind the current Rite Aid building.

Urban Design Team 2

The main areas of concern that arose during the initial community survey were further identified by participants at the second meeting. These include community identity, desirability, connectivity, and safety. Major concerns addressed parking, as well as land use in the greater vicinity of Albertson's, particularly north of Albertson's.

Community Identity

Regarding parking, participants inquired additional spaces considering the increased demand associated with the introduction of expanded commercial and mixed uses. Community character and identity concerns the addition of signage, flags, and interactive art spaces, which were among some of the ideas discussed.

Giving identity to the bridge by improving its appearance could also improve the community's sense of place. A consensus was reached regarding the need to increase activities for children; ideas included more play areas and/or interactive art. There were also suggestions for adding a skate park under the bridge. This could serve the dual purpose of increasing safety by providing surveillance with the presence of more people, as well as providing adolescents with a recreational area.

Desirability

Elements of design that were deemed very desirable included the beautification of Albertson's building, and the improvement of sidewalks in Albertson's commercial area. Other helpful feedback included a specific mention the view of Mt. Baker that is visible when traveling along Birchwood Ave, as well as a concern that building

heights of three stories or greater may potentially interrupt this view. Suggestions like these assist us in guiding the plan for the best outcome of the community.

Amenities

Participants were supportive of the proposal to provide more public areas, and were quick to suggest parks and other uses for younger generations within the design. Participants seemed to be supportive of the overall plan. The majority of the questions were directed at understanding particular elements of the design proposal.

There seemed to be concern for the removal of the gas station. This makes sense as a community member brought it to our attention that there used to be three gas stations along Northwest Ave, however we have confidence in the adaptability of the citizens. The removal of the gas station can improve the core for a higher and better use, rather than increasing private auto dependency, improving the area for all.

Safety

Participants' positive and inquisitive feedback provided encouragement for the planning team. Citizens were getting creative and suggesting alternatives for parking placement in the Albertson's lot. As far as safety is concerned, problem areas mentioned were the back of Albertson's, as well as being wary of not re-creating a Maritime park situation with increased vagrancy.



Safety

- Increased lighting
- Day and night time pedestrian opportunities
- Incorporation of outdoor and indoor community movement for greater sense of safety



Connectivity

- Pedestrian greenway
- Transition from commercial to mixed to residential
- Parking behind Albertsons
- Increased sidewalk connectivity



Birchwood Neighborhood Commercial Core



Desirability

- Green and usable space
- Mixed use to support various jobs to reduce commute
- Street frontage
- Emphasize street businesses access



Identity

- Preserve currently enjoyed community spaces
- Community center (which could accommodate a variety of services)
- Outdoor public gathering space



Urban Design Team 3

Participant's comments regarding the concept plans presented at the community meeting generally focused on suggested design elements, a greater need for green space, improved transportation and transit, an improved sense of place, safety concerns, and business development. The following list of suggestions were taken into consideration in revising the team's urban design plan.

Design Elements

- Lights with flower baskets/flags on bridge to provide a unique sense of place
- Barkley as possible urban design standard or model
- Coal mine monument at Morrie's Drive-In to identify the neighborhood with its history

Green Space/ Parks

- Safe green space, change in culture to promote the use of green space by kids and families
- More local parks within the neighborhood core
- Another established park in the neighborhood other than the trail
- Take into account the Critical Area Buffers around Squilicum Creek

Transportation

- Intersection problem Northwest, Birchwood, Cedarwood; Feels like a 5 or 6 way intersection
- Bike lockers near the bus stops
- Transit around neighborhood, not just through it
- Where is all of the parking?
- Bus pullouts are awesome

Sense of Place

- Interactive sculptures and places to play for kids
- Identify low-hanging fruit for community to tackle themselves
 - Kapow
 - Community grass root events
- Keep view of Mt. Baker looking east down Birchwood

Safety Issues/Concerns

- Police station or presence
- Space and seating that doesn't encourage homelessness or sleeping
- Discourage people living in their cars in the parking lot

- Lack of lighting/cleanliness behind Big Lots
- Burglaries in neighborhood are a problem, not violent crimes
- Camping on the trail is a problem; need more lights and foot traffic
- Dog-park behind the Rite Aid doesn't feel safe to use

Development

- Morrie's Drive-in can be replaced with new uses
- Add additional mixed-use where laundromat is
- Concerns about building heights being too tall
- Neighborhood residents rely on services outside of the neighborhood core



BIRCHWOOD COMMUNITY

A historic and diverse community widely known for its vibrant neighborhood core, distinct character, safe and healthy community, and recreational gateway.

Business & Housing Opportunity

Development that maximizes utility, safety, and quality of life within the community.



Encourage entrepreneurship within the neighborhood by providing live-work opportunities.

Act as a transition space between commercial and residential areas while promoting economic vitality within the community.

Enhance transit and bike infrastructure and improve safety on the street for pedestrians.

Green Community Space

Natural elements and spaces for outdoor enjoyment and community interaction.



Green spaces that provide places of natural relief within the core and include features such as trees, flowers, and grass.

These spaces can be catered to fit any size and incorporate points of interest and local artwork.

A space that can be the heart and hub of the community.



Shopping Plaza

A dynamic and vibrant space that provides small scale retail and dining opportunities as well as a housing options.



A plaza in this area could function as a space of rest, recreation, commerce and social interaction. Farmers markets, festivals, and art walks could all take place here.



Creating and opening up these streets for pedestrian only use could enhance walkability and connectivity within the core. This type of path would prioritize people over cars and provide a protected walking space.



This type of development expands the diversity of housing options in the core and creates eyes on the street and lengthens the hours of activity throughout the day and evening within the core.

Commercial

An enhanced and well integrated commercial corridor.



Commercial buildings that have the ability to bring communities together as well as add visual appeal to a space.



Buildings that use a variety of materials reflecting the natural landscape and paying homage to historical traditions within an area.

Commercial businesses that utilize public space for outdoor seating, bringing life to the streetscape.

Fahima Cassaway, Patrick Kennedy, Kelli Wells, Connor Breen, & Sara Ullman

Urban Design Team 4

Summary

Community members who offered their advice seemed in general to favor the ideas pertaining to mixed use, infrastructure, and emphasizing the aspects which bring character out of the neighborhood and into the spotlight. Many of the compliments to ideas were towards possible gathering spaces and place making ideas to bring the community together, such as the plaza which could facilitate a multitude of activities including outdoor theaters and farmers markets. Residents were particularly partial to art installations and making use of potential trail improvements.

Amenities

In general, community members thought that some needs which had yet to be addressed included loiter-proof seating, disability infrastructure, and preservation of existing green space. Participants also verbalized a focus on increasing lighting and the overall safety of the neighborhood so that their children could enjoy all that it has to offer. Comments were made pertaining to the inclusion of bike infrastructure in the plan, and the incorporation of underutilized space behind and between buildings.

Assumptions

As a whole, the majority of the comments could hardly be called “cons” and most were those of approval of ideas proposed by student planners on the poster demonstrations. The results of the meeting show that residents want planners to focus on making the community safe, equitable, environmentally friendly, and accessible. Many concerns were associated with maintaining the identity of Birchwood through the preservation

and maintenance of greenery, positive public behavior, and overall feelings of walkability and safety.



BIRCHWOOD NEIGHBORHOOD COMMERCIAL CORE

GREEN SPACE OPPORTUNITIES

THE COMMUNITY EXPRESSED INTEREST IN INCREASING GREEN SPACE. BEHIND THE WESTERN UNION ARE SOME AVAILABLE SPACES TO ACCOMMODATE THIS REQUEST, PERHAPS BY THE INSTALLATION OF A DOG PARK, ALONG NEIGHBORHOOD STREETS COULD BE PLANTERS AND BANNERS THAT MIGHT ADD TO THE CHARACTER OF THIS GROWING COMMUNITY, THIS PARK COULD POTENTIALLY ENHANCE THE GREENWAY CONNECTIVITY OF THE BAY-TO-BAKER TRAIL BY OFFERING A PORTAL TO THE RESIDENTIAL COMMUNITY.

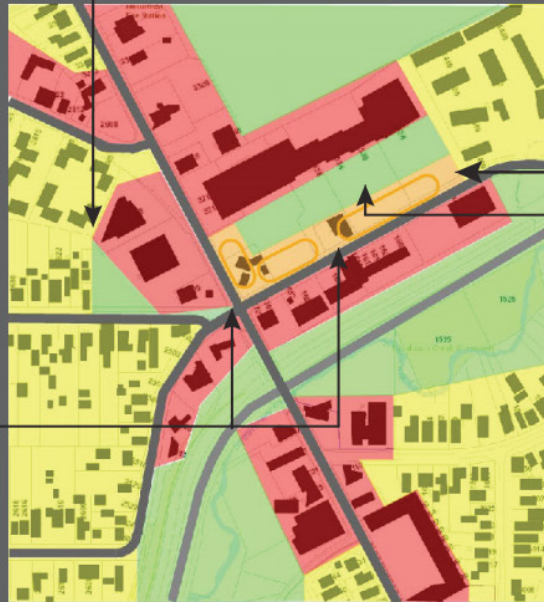
PLANTERS : DOG PARK : BANNERS : TRAIL CONNECTIONS



MIXED USE

INCREASING THE DIVERSITY OF USE IN THE COMMERCIAL DISTRICT OF BIRCHWOOD COULD DRASTICALLY IMPROVE THE SAFETY, GROWTH, AND OVERALL WELL BEING OF THE AREA. INCREASING EYES ON THE STREET CAN DIRECTLY ADDRESS SAFETY CONCERNS EXPRESSED BY THE COMMUNITY. MIXING THE USE OF COMMERCIAL STRUCTURES ON NORTHWEST AND BIRCHWOOD IN THE FORM OF LIVE-AT-WORK BUILDINGS OR VERTICAL APARTMENT COMPLEXES ABOVE BUSINESSES CAN REALLY MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN REGARDS TO SAFETY AND AESTHETICS.

INCREASING EYES ON THE STREET : MAIN STREET USA FEEL



PEDESTRIAN IMPROVEMENTS

INCREASED LIGHTING IS A NEED TO BE ADDRESSED IN THE BIRCHWOOD NEIGHBORHOOD, AS WELL AS BETTER ACCOMMODATIONS FOR PEDESTRIANS AND OVERALL OUTDOOR SPACE. SOME SOLUTIONS INCLUDE MORE AND BETTER CROSS-WALK FEATURES THAT TRANSFORM THE PEDESTRIAN EXPERIENCE BY PROVIDING LIGHTED TRAFFIC CROSSING. STREET FURNITURE PRESENTS ANOTHER OPPORTUNITY TO IMPROVE THE AESTHETICS AND CHARACTER OF BIRCHWOOD

LIGHTING : POCKET PARKS : CROSSWALKS



"BIRCHWOOD TOWN SQUARE"

CONVERSION OF THE COPIOUS SECTIONS OF EMPTY PARKING LOT HAS BEEN A FREQUENTLY EXPRESSED CONCERN AMONG THE CITIZENS OF BIRCHWOOD. HERE, ELEMENTS SUCH AS POROUS PAVEMENT, A PLAZA, AND A 'PEDESTRIAN MALL' COULD REINVENT THE SPACE TO RESEMBLE A CENTER RATHER THAN A VOID. ADDING DISSECTING STREETS AND BRINGING BUSINESS TO THE STREET FRONTS AROUND THE PLAZA CAN EMPHASIZE A SENSE OF PLACE, BENEFITTING BOTH THE SHOPPER AND THE BUSINESS.

PEDESTRIAN PLAZA : BRINGING STOREFRONTS TO THE FOREFRONT



LEGEND

- COMMERCIAL
- MIXED USE
- ROADS
- OPEN SPACE
- RESIDENTIAL



Chapter 4

Final Design Concepts

In the following chapter, each of the 4 planning concepts are more fully defined and presented. The refined concepts reflect input received during the second community workshop.



Neighborhood Core Design Alternative 1

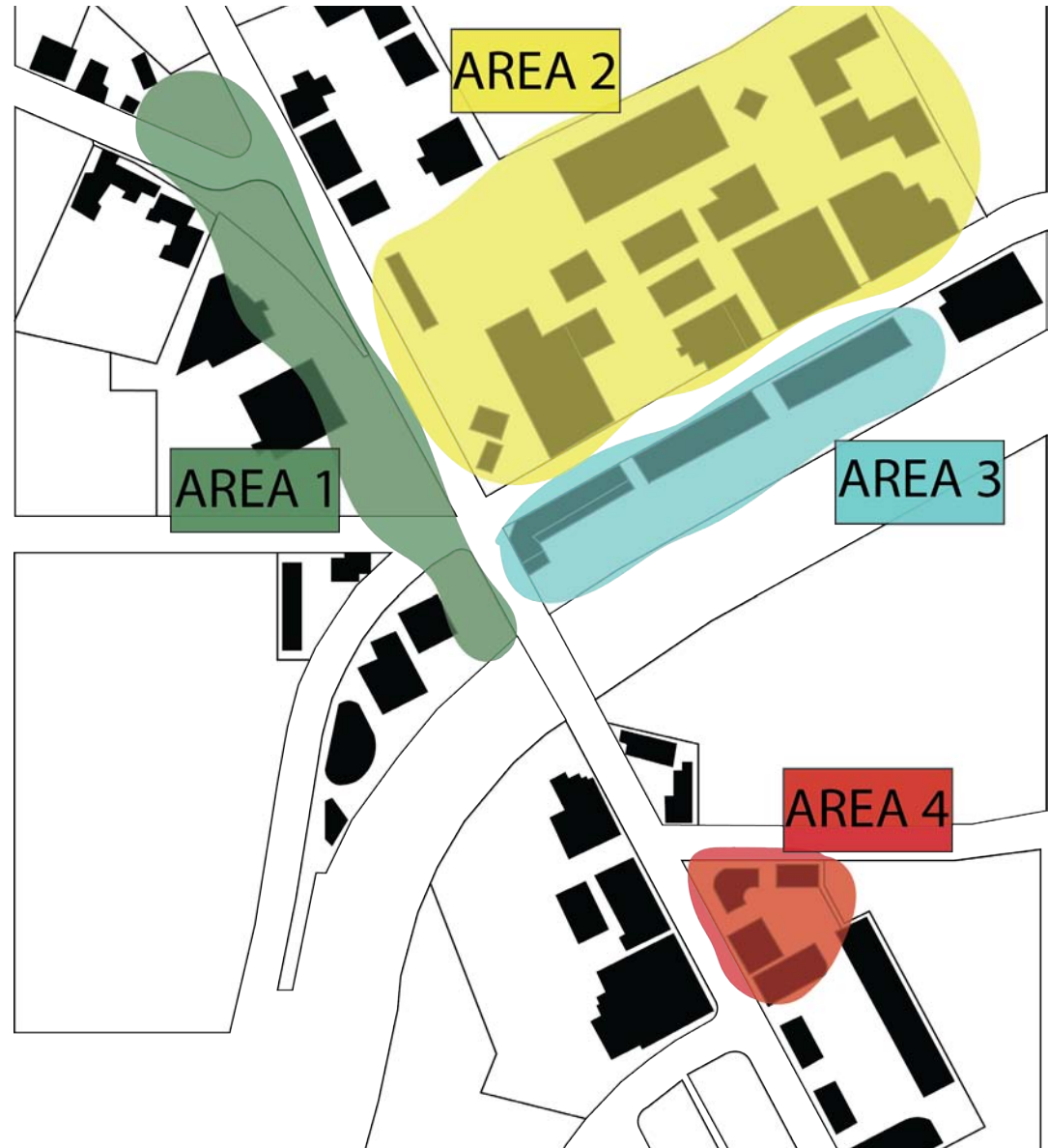
Design Team 1

Student Planners: Brian Eckert, Jendy Edgerton, Sadie Naglich, Sam Potts

The final plan proposed by Group 1 has several key themes relating to the following:









1. Inclusion and improvement of open space and greenspace
2. Improved safety and lighting
3. Creating a walkable neighborhood core
4. Integrating residential/office space through mixed use
5. Improving accessibility throughout the core including the Bay to Baker trail

This proposal focuses on four main nodes identified as Greenspace (1), Parking Lot Redevelopment (2), High-Intensity Mixed Use (3), and Connecting Plaza (4). While each node may not address each of the key themes, as an overall part of the plan they will attribute to the goal of creating a more unified and user-friendly neighborhood core.



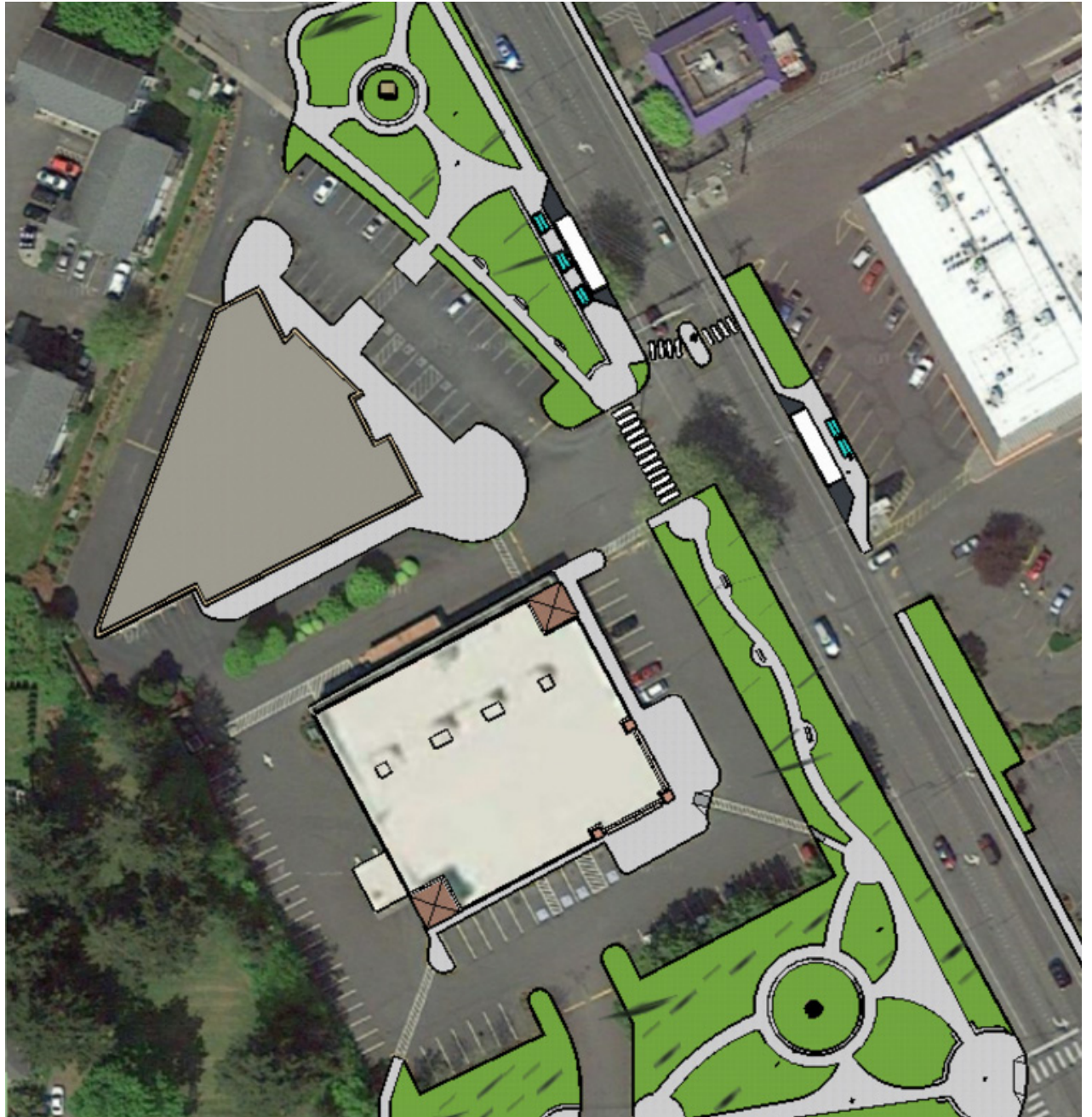


Master Plan Key

-  Mixed Use
-  Commercial
-  Office/
Residential
-  Civic
-  Residential
-  Openspace/
Greenspace
-  Unaffected
-  Trail

Greenspace

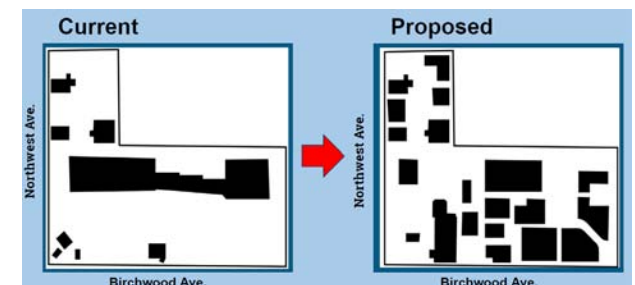
The Greenspace node is found along the West side of Northwest Ave reaching from W Maplewood Ave south towards Birchwood Ave. The greenspace that is created aims to connect the previously described areas by walkable pedestrian and bike-friendly pathways. It also connects the Birchwood Neighborhood Core to the Bay to Baker trail at what is currently Morrie's.





Parking Lot Redevelopment

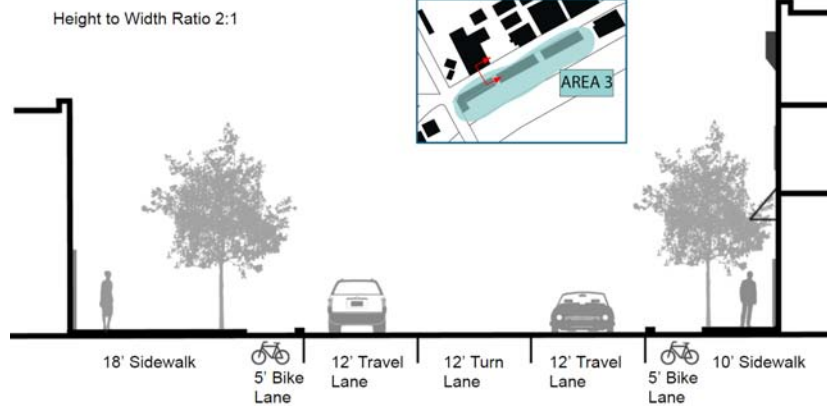
The main parking lot on the North East corner of the Birchwood and Northwest intersection, after which will be referred to as Parking Lot Redevelopment, has vast potential to transition into a major community center and host a wide variety of uses. Design concept 1 gets rid of the current line of stores including the Albertsons building and Big Lots. In its place will be a new market hugging Birchwood Ave with the parking pushed towards the previous Albertsons location. The entire Eastern half of the parking lot will be devoted to smaller, segmented, mixed-use buildings with commercial on the bottom level and either office or residential on the top. This area is designed to be entirely pedestrian and bike oriented, with only parking on the very sides or in the new market half. Within this pedestrian section will be a major plaza to host activities and act as a social gathering space for all ages. Part of the plaza will have flex-space that could potentially incorporate temporary uses such as food trucks or a bookmobile. Hugged between the pedestrian area and the new grocery store hwill be a larger flex space with movable sides and overhangs to cater to a seasonal farmers market or rentable civic space on the off time. Bikeways and crosswalks are present to connect the Parking Lot Redevelopment to the High-Intensity Mixed Use zone and the Bay to Baker trail.





High-Intensity Mixed Use

Birchwood Ave hosts the zone known as High-Intensity Mixed Use along its South side. The conceptual plan calls for three, three-story buildings fronting the street. The corner building proposes commercial space on the ground floor and office space on the second and third floor. The two buildings to the east are proposed to have commercial on the bottom, and residential on the top two floors. Each residential unit will have a balcony facing over the Bay to Baker trail and Squalicum Creek to the South. There will be adequate parking in the rear of the lots for residential parking. A 10 ft. sidewalk, with space for commercial overflow and seating as well as a tree or shrub buffer, runs along Birchwood Ave. Birchwood Ave will have three travel lanes, one of which is a turn lane, which are 12 ft. wide. Each side will have a 5 ft. buffered bike lane. The height-to-width ratio of the street section to the building heights will be approximately 1:2, a comfortable human scale.





Connecting Plaza

The Connecting Plaza can be found in the area South of the bridge crossing Squaticum Way, at the intersection of Northwest Ave and E Maplewood Ave. This area can help to provide the Birchwood neighborhood with a gathering space that is accessible to all members of the community. Several amenities near this node have been shown to be desired such as Yaeger's and Hops N Headz. The plaza itself is inset six feet into the ground, separating the plaza from traffic and enclosing the plaza to make use of the space more efficiently. Mixed use is incorporated throughout this area, increasing retail, residential, and office space options. By incorporating more mixed use the area may find itself more vibrant and safe due to the phenomenon known as "eyes on the street". The area is intended to be lit well so as to encourage use at all hours of the day.



Impact Analysis

The following table depicts the impact, in conjunction with the associated map to the right, that this proposal would have on the Birchwood Neighborhood Community Core. The figure to the right divides the proposal into four areas, each of which includes one of the nodes that was mentioned previously.

The proposed land use plan would increase the intensity of use throughout the core. Commercial would see a 49,000 sq. ft. increase in use. There would be a proposed 186 additional residential units, largely in the red and purple areas. Office

space would increase by approximately 138,000 sq. ft. This space would be focused in the red and green areas of Birchwood. Civic space would be limited due to the already present civic opportunities in the school system nearby. Open space sees a large increase in space; This is in large part due to the Greenspace, Parking Lot Redevelopment, and Connecting Plaza areas. Though there is a large amount of building and open space that is included in this proposal, parking spaces are able to be increased. Current parking lots may be expanded or used more efficiently to increase parking by approximately 300 spaces.



Area	Commercial (Stores)		Residential (1,000 sq. ft. Units)	Office (sq. ft.)	Civic (sq. ft.)	Openspace (sq. ft.)	Parking Spaces
	Small (1,500 sq. ft.)	Medium (2,500 sq. ft.)					
PROPOSED	163,500		60	94,053	3,276	297,000	563
	109	65					
PROPOSED	75,000		25	10,915	0	99,900	220
	50	30					
PROPOSED	36,000		41	31,000	0	0	126
	24	14					
PROPOSED	75,000		60	1,624	0	40,082	572
	50	30					
Total	349,500		186	137,592	3,276	436,982	1,481
	233	140					
Current	310,000 sq. ft.		0 sq. ft.	0 sq. ft.	0 sq. ft.	17,200 sq. ft.	1,189 spaces

Neighborhood Core Design Alternative 2

Design Team 2

Student Planners:

Kyle Wunderlin, Adam Martonik, Breyden Jager, Mary Ryan

The design concept from team 2 focuses on the revitalization of the Birchwood Neighborhood Commercial Core by focusing attention on four main design goals. These include an emphasis identity, desirability, safety, and connectivity. Identity seeks to preserve currently enjoyed spaces, while promoting a new community aesthetic which is reflective of a strong sense of place and community citizenship. Desirability is comprised by a focus on usable and attractive space by promoting mixed use development with street frontage and pedestrian-only areas. Improving safety in the Birchwood Core calls for increased attention to lighting, eyes on the street, indoor and outdoor community connectivity, and day and night time uses of public space. Connectivity seeks to promote access from the Commercial Core to the Bay to Baker trail. This connection will be strengthened by extending the trail head to the gateway corner of Birchwood Ave, adding stairways that allow access from the Northwest Ave overpass, and promoting movement through the pedestrian core.



Proposed Open Space

This design concept prioritizes the redevelopment of three key spaces. These include the the Birchwood Avenue mixed use core, Northwest Avenue mixed use area which is south of the overpass, and the pedestrian corridor.

Map Key

- Neighborhood Mixed Use
- Neighborhood Commercial
- Recreation & Open Space
- Area of Interest
- Civic Space



Birchwood Avenue Mixed Use

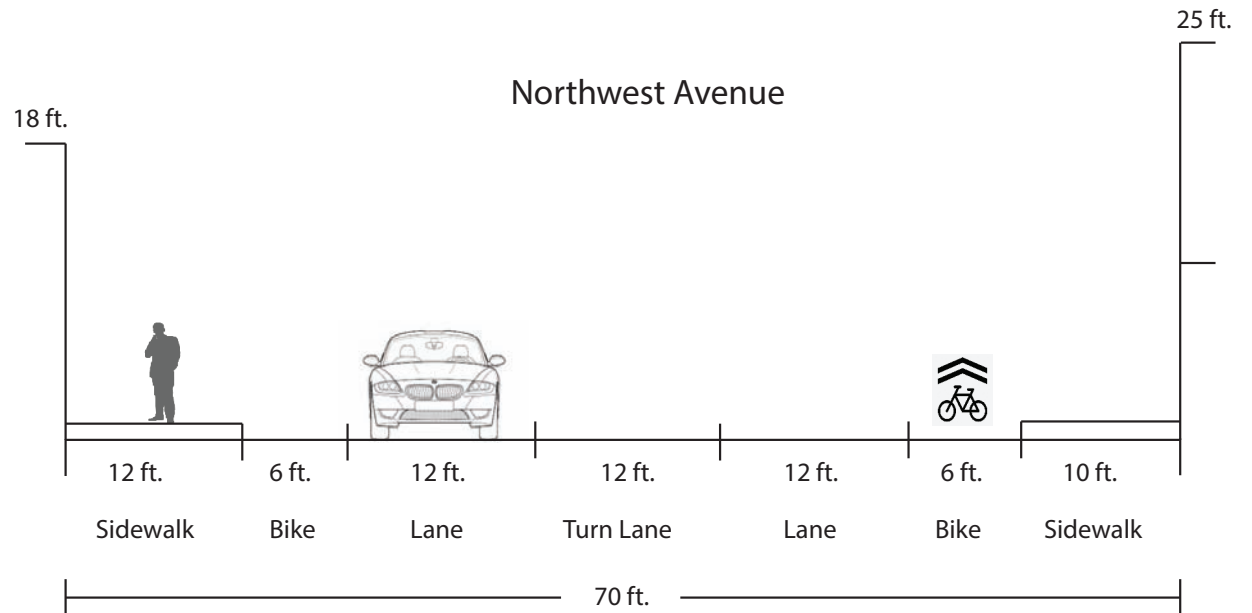
The Birchwood Avenue core focuses on mixed use infill and traffic calming in order to mitigate the undesirable effects of large setbacks, empty paved space, and poor pedestrian safety. The design concept calls for street fronted office and mixed use buildings on each side of Birchwood Avenue, with large pedestrian cuts that facilitate movement between this site and the pedestrian corridor. Along the south side of Birchwood Avenue runs a live-work development that overlooks Squilicum Parkway, and allows residents to own apartment residences, with small shops and galleries on the ground floor. Working near where you live increases a community's sense of identity and involvement. This area would incorporate both on street parking and underground parking for residents and visitors alike.



Northwest Avenue Mixed Use

The Northwest Avenue mixed use center provides new amenities and services, while retaining many of the same building footprints and designs. This area was identified as a potential area of redevelopment because of the dilapidated buildings which currently occupy the space, as well as the large setbacks and parking lot, which create an undesirable aesthetic for pedestrian use. In accordance with our design goals, the redevelopment of this site incorporates mixed use with retail options on the first floor, and office space on the second and third floors of the main buildings. In the center of this site, a new commercial building was added in order to break

up the parking lot and draw pedestrians and vehicle traffic from the street, into the vibrant new development. Tree buffers have been added to increase safety, and shield pedestrians from the busy Northwest Avenue. Building cuts have been made in the North and South buildings in order to foster connectivity between other new uses that are planned for the Birchwood Community. Pedestrian green space with a raised crosswalk have been proposed around the new, central commercial building, as well as rooftop seating areas which provide destination based attractions.





Pedestrian Corridor

The final area of concentration highlighted in this design concept focuses on the development of a pedestrian corridor which makes use of the space that is currently Albertson's parking lot. This space was currently identified by the community as both detracting from the visual identity of Birchwood, and promoting inappropriate behavior. The creation of this pedestrian corridor would be coupled with the complete redevelopment of the Albertson's and Big Lots buildings where the new Birchwood Plaza would provide a new grocery store and attractive options for retail, dining, and socializing. Beginning with a new, covered civic space, much akin to Bellingham's Depot Market downtown, the pedestrian corridor would serve as an extension of the Bay to Baker trail, and a destination spot which reinforces Birchwood's identity as a recreational gateway. Rooftop seating areas, large pedestrian spaces, and tree buffers help to create the sense of a pedestrian only, internal development. Transformative 24-hour uses would help keep eyes on the street during evening hours in the form of a possible venue for a night market or outdoor film screening. The pedestrian corridor would serve as the heart of the Birchwood Neighborhood Commercial Core.



Land Use	Current Units	Proposed Units
Retail	>50 businesses	330
Residential	0 sq ft	379
Civic	1	4
Public Space	1 park	10 parks and plazas
Parking	1,189 spaces	1,620 spaces



Neighborhood Core Design Alternative 3

Design Team 3

Student Planners: Sara Ulman, Kaeli Wells, Connor Reeves, Sabrina Gassaway, Patrick Kennedy

The basis of this design plan stems from community feedback received from two prior neighborhood meetings. Feedback from these proceedings concerned increasing safety, green space, and civic amenities. To meet these standards, strategies used around other Bellingham urban villages like Fairhaven and Barkley were proposed. To promote safety, mixed-use developments, 24 hour use, were

incorporated to deter unsightly behavior. Mixed-use development would also add the opportunity to provide more amenities to the commercial core while also increasing density. There are four main areas that we defined in our concept plan, the shopping center, gateway, outpost park, and the Bay to Baker trail.





	Live-work
	Commercial
	Housing
	Mixed Use
	Civic
	Park and Public Space

300ft. 

Gateway

This area is a distinct node for the community that serves as a “gateway” to the neighborhood instantly conveying a sense of place to visitors and community members of the Birchwood Core. A circular public space is created at the intersection of Birchwood Avenue and Northwest Avenue through curved setbacks at each structure facing the crossroads. Mixed-use buildings with commercial ground-level use and residences on the second floor enhance safety by creating more eyes on the street and creating more life and commerce extending hours of safety and activity. Activity allows for restaurants and cafes to spill out onto the street bringing life to the street transforming what is currently an auto-centric intersection into a dynamic, lively, human-centered space with a distinct identity. Also a community



center at the current location of the vacant building straddling what is now Cedarwood avenue and Birchwood avenue would create a central gathering point for the community and serve as a “satellite” office for the Bellingham Police.

Furthering neighborhood identity, the Birchwood arch and its sycamore tree will be preserved in parkland in the south west corner of the gateway adding further character. By holding onto, and highlighting a key feature of the neighborhood, Birchwood’s identity will not be lost in the years to come. Near Morrie’s parcel a coffee shop or dining opportunity close to the street provides outdoor seating, and will engage with adjacent park space along squalicum creek. A plaza in front of the community center as well as a small parking lot will integrate the community center with the park and increases access to the trailhead and future park amenities.



Shopping Center

This center consists of three parts: pedestrian pathways, a central public plaza, and a Local grocery store. One of the drivers of this concept is to make the core pedestrian oriented and walkable. The proposed shopping area would be placed in the heart of the commercial core, currently an underutilized parking lot. The land use will be a combination of mixed uses with retail and commercial space on the first floor and office space or residential units on the floors above, determined by market demand. Live work units will be included on the south side of Birchwood to encourage entrepreneurship within the commercial core.

The pedestrian corridors are modeled after european avenues that have existed before automobiles. Paths are wide enough to allow for efficient travel in the center and slower traffic on the sides with outdoor seating. Greenery is present both at the pedestrian level and high above on



the sides of the buildings. A response to public preferences.

The Height of buildings are considered carefully. Taking solar gain into consideration the building heights will be staggered to reduce loss of sunlight on pedestrian corridors. Buildings on the south side will be shorter than buildings on the north side of the site to take advantage of Mt Baker viewshed opportunities. As the site is within the northern hemisphere, shadows will never cast from north to south giving light to corridors year round. In the northernmost part of the shopping center the tallest structure will take advantage of the abutting golf course as a viewshed for the future residences.

Within the shopping center is a public plaza which on an average day could support local vendors and food trucks bringing activity and service. On a monthly or bi-weekly basis this plaza could support a thriving farmers market and other events such as a Birchwood Night market. On an everyday level the space provides open green space for recreation as well as seating within the sunken stone basin that could also be used as a public forum space.

Lastly, given the importance of a local grocery store to any neighborhood the shopping center proposed includes a grocery store that reflects the community and identity of Birchwood. The "Birchwood Market". The concept includes adequate parking but also includes bike and pedestrian amenities.





"A grocery store that reflects the community and identity of Birchwood."



Outpost Park

Outpost Park is a centrally located, community oriented, cornerstone space furthering a distinct sense of place within the Birchwood neighborhood. This area offers shopping, dining, and living opportunities all within a walkable distance of the commercial core. Drawing inspiration from an existing Mt. Baker mural two additional murals are proposed to add culture to otherwise blank facades. Outpost Park features an easily accessible public park, historically inspired design elements, and additional green spaces all within a sheltered enclosure of pleasant and pedestrian scale structures. The shape of the such buildings creating a pedestrian-only space.



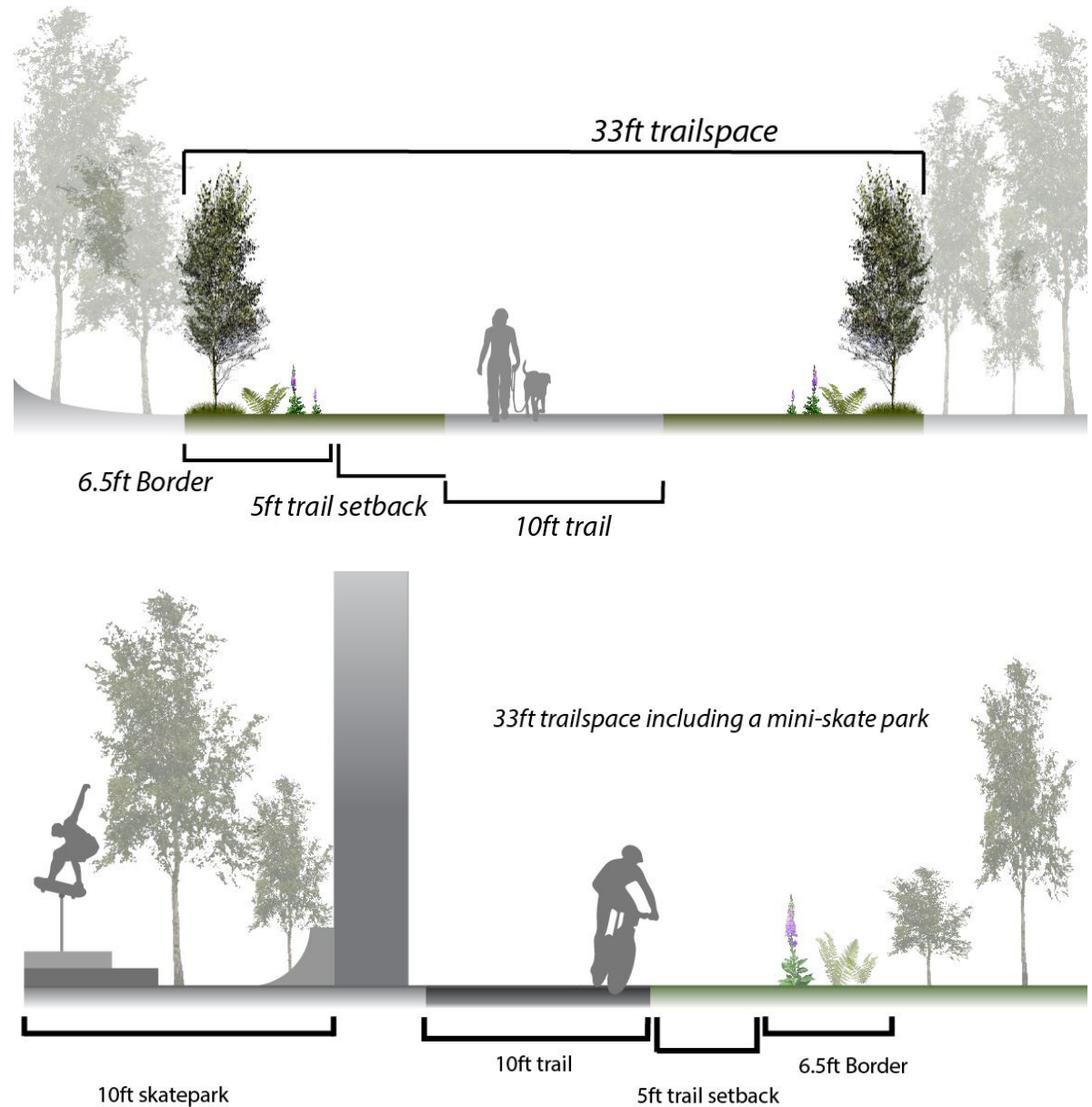


Bay to Baker

Tying Birchwood into a city wide system of parks does one of several things. First it links pedestrian, bike, and skate traffic to the greater city alleviating non-automotive connectivity issues. Secondly it provides recreational and social space critical for community, cognitive, and physical wellbeing.

A fresh and revitalized trail space with asphalted paths and grade-level acres in the east end of Birchwood's central business district allows those who cannot use the stair access by Morries a convenient entry point to the Bay to Baker system. Additionally, similar convenience to those wishing to cycle or skate achieved. A park and trail system is only truly public when it serves every citizen. Second to access the Birchwood segment of trails also features new native and naturalized woodland planting schemes reducing invasive species expansion and creating an aesthetic that fortifies the area's sense of place.

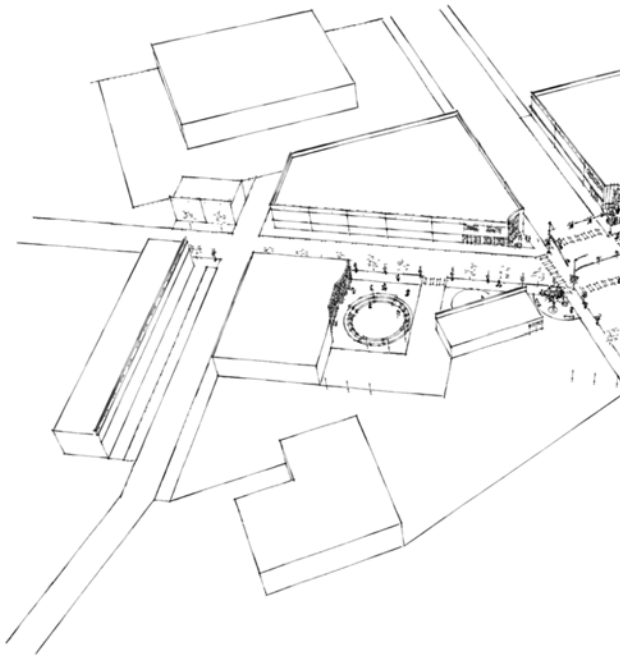
Third, a miniature skate part is proposed to utilize the space beneath the northwest overpass. Such spaces are important areas of cultural and social development for Youth and offer yet another destination to draw community together. Public art displays are also an anticipated use of this space. Displays that observe the coal-mining heritage of this neighborhood, along with the culture and perspective of Birchwoods modern and diverse community, once again solidify a sense of place and culture. In short, trail expansion is not purely to connect Birchwood to greater Bellingham, but to connect the city as a whole to Birchwood as well.



Transportation Changes

Cedarwood Ave

To make room for the gateway's design a diversion of Cedarwood AVE from its original location to intersect with Birchwood AVE at what is now the current entrance to the Laundromat strip mall parking area. This design decision was made in response to comments at the second neighborhood meeting regarding intersection safety. Currently the space is being used as a shortcut between Birchwood AVE and Cedarwood AVE. By changing the road path the Northwest AVE and Birchwood intersection is simplified and made safer. With additional traffic calming measures the effects of increased through traffic would be mitigated for business owners within the existing strip mall.

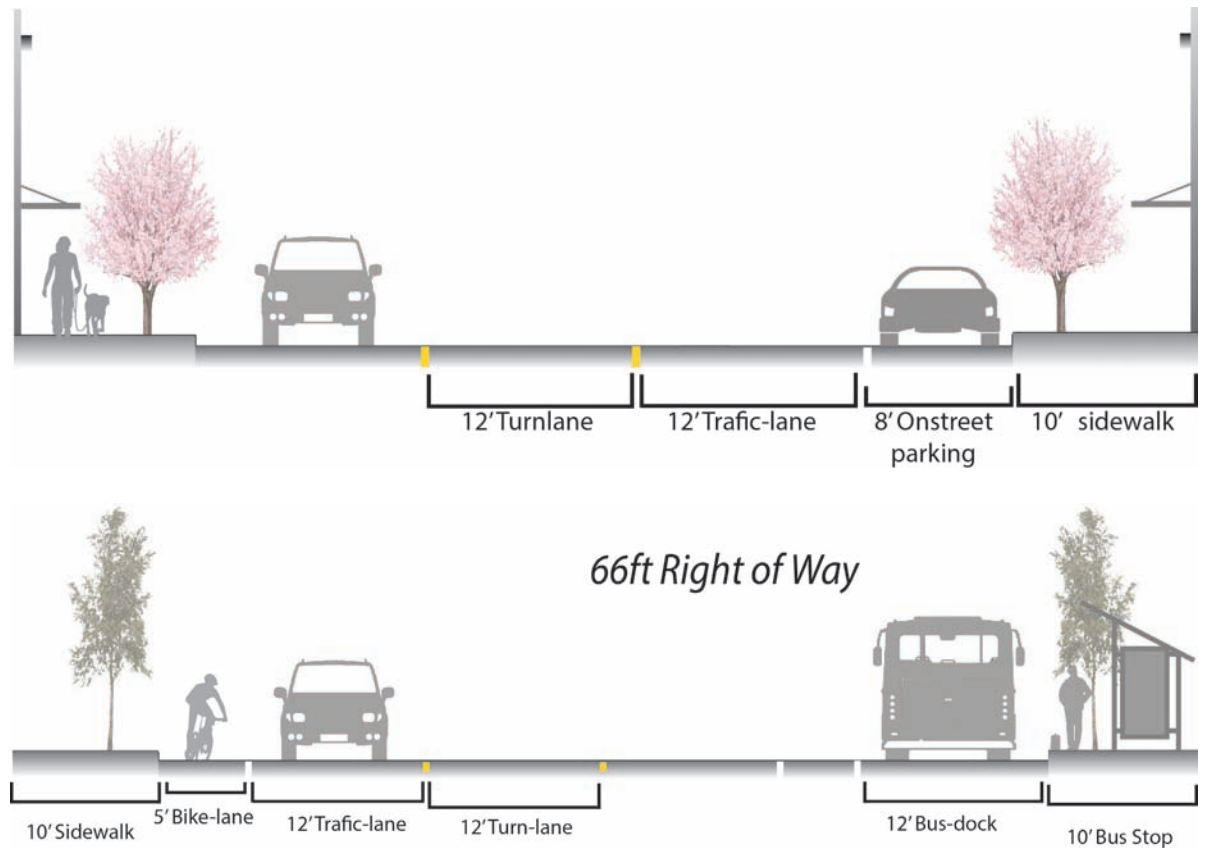


Birchwood Ave

Pedestrian centric development with pedestrian corridors and raised crosswalks across Birchwood Avenue will be constructed to accommodate the needs of people living and working within the shopping center area. Sidewalks will be extended to 10ft on either side and on street parking will be provided on the south side of Birchwood Ave. All while preserving a turn lane encouraging automotive safety upon a busy street.

Northwest Ave

Transit diversity is a theme along Northwest. A five foot bike lane is provided to accommodate cyclist on either side of the thoroughfare along with 10ft sidewalks for pedestrians. Most importantly, through a combination of existing right of way usage and a modest sacrifice of landscaping, a bus cutout will allow transit to load and unload without blocking a lane of traffic. Transit riders will feel less of a rush when boarding or disembarking, and drivers will feel at ease too. This cut-out will also create a pedestrian path over what is currently a muddy social trail that bisects the landscape setback of the existing adjacent parcel.



Land Use Breakdown

With all of the infill that is provided, the third concept plan is able to add many amenities to the neighborhood core. For commercial uses, the neighborhood core currently has 310,000 sq. ft. of commercial use. The third concept plan would add more than 150,000 square feet, bringing the total amount of stores to 317 small stores or 190 medium sized stores. The plan also adds 387 new residential units. The residential units can also be used as office space based on market demand, nearly 400,000 sq. ft. if wanted. The plan also includes a community center, something that is not currently in the neighborhood. Additionally,

the open space is increased from 17,200 sq. ft. to nearly 100,000 sq. ft. However, all of these new land uses do not come at a price.

One reduction in our plan is parking spaces. Currently, there are around 1200 parking spaces and the plan would reduce this number to 875. Despite the increasing activity in the neighborhood core, the reduction in parking is valuable. The main bus stop is on the Green Line, which is one of the most used bus lines in the city. In addition, this design concept is pedestrian and transit oriented. This is a community full of avid walkers and the third concept plan is designed to highlight this fact.

Area	Commercial (Stores)		Residential (1,000 sq. ft. Units)	Office (sq. ft.)	Civic (sq. ft.)	Openspace (sq. ft.)	Parking Spaces
	Small (1,500 sq. ft.)	Medium (2,500 sq. ft.)					
1	280,951		265	0	0	43,672	415
	187	112					
2	85,726		51	0	14,921	30,371	90
	57	34					
3	71,047		29	0	0	9,323	222
	47	28					
4	39,995		42	0	0	15,126	148
	26	16					
Total	477,719		387	0	14,921	98,492	875
	317	190					
Current	310,000 sq. ft.		0 sq. ft.	0 sq. ft.	0 sq. ft.	17,200 sq. ft.	1,189 spaces



Neighborhood Core Design Alternative 4

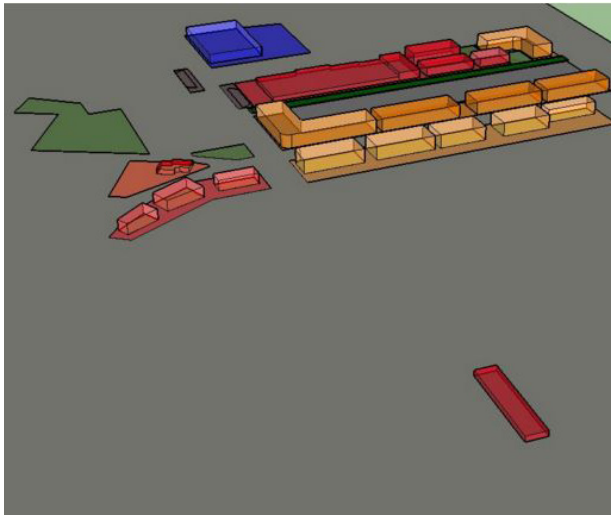
Design Team 4

Student Planners: Noah Braley, Caitlin Hepworth, Chris Johnson, and Deven Khanna

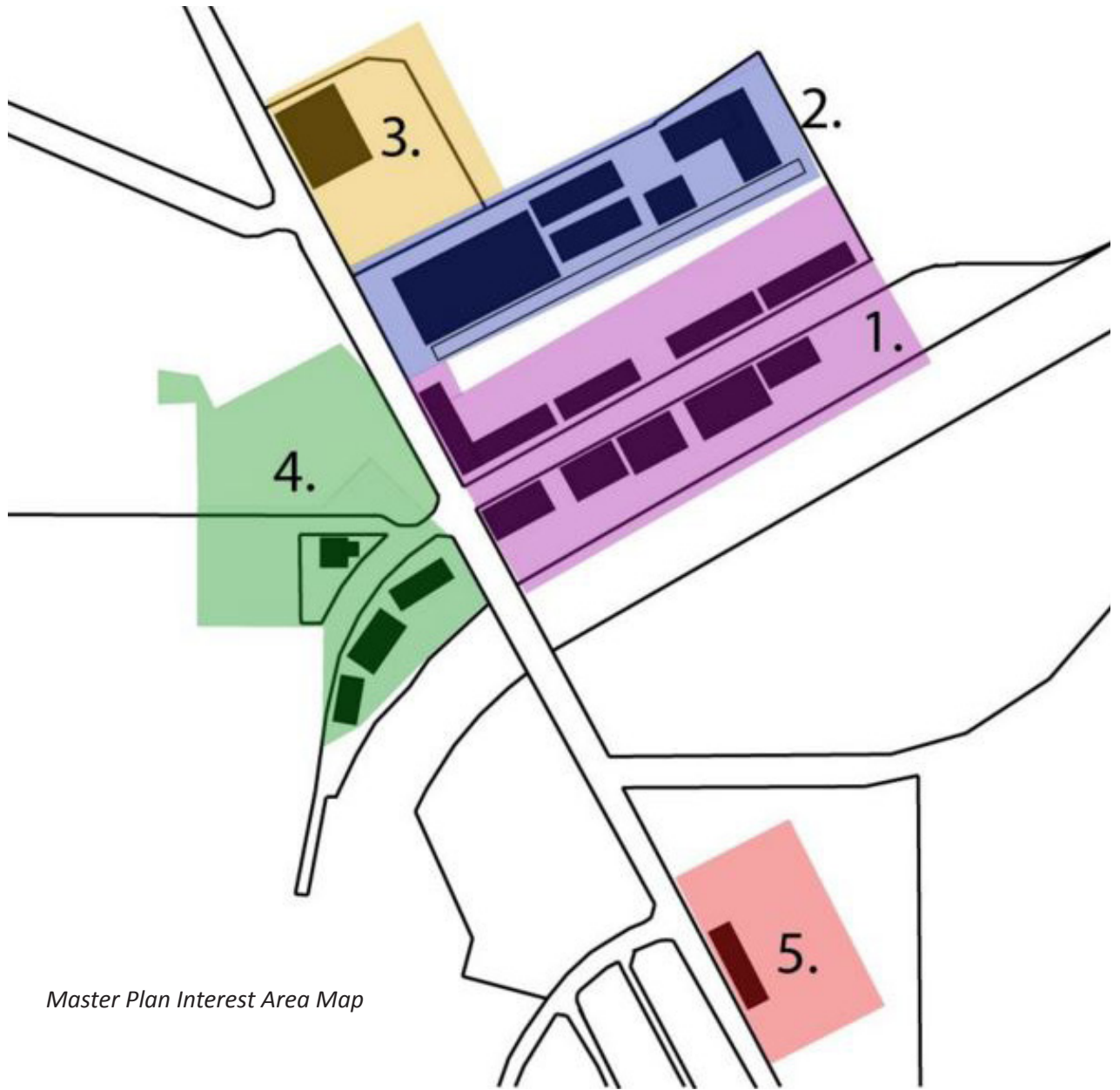
The design concept from group 4, focusing on the area identified as the Birchwood Neighborhood Commercial Core, split the area into five different sites of focus: the Birchwood Ave. strip, the Birchwood town center and pedestrian mall, the Birchwood community center, the intersection of Birchwood and Cedarwood avenues, and the plaza at the southern end of the Birchwood core. These areas have been chosen as key locations prime for and in need of revitalization but also as locations to tie the entire neighborhood of Birchwood together, connecting the pieces of the core with each other, the residential portion of the neighborhood, and further to the city of Bellingham as a whole. The overarching goal of this design concept was to create a distinct destination, with a character that draws visitors and residents alike.



Master Plan Bubble Diagram



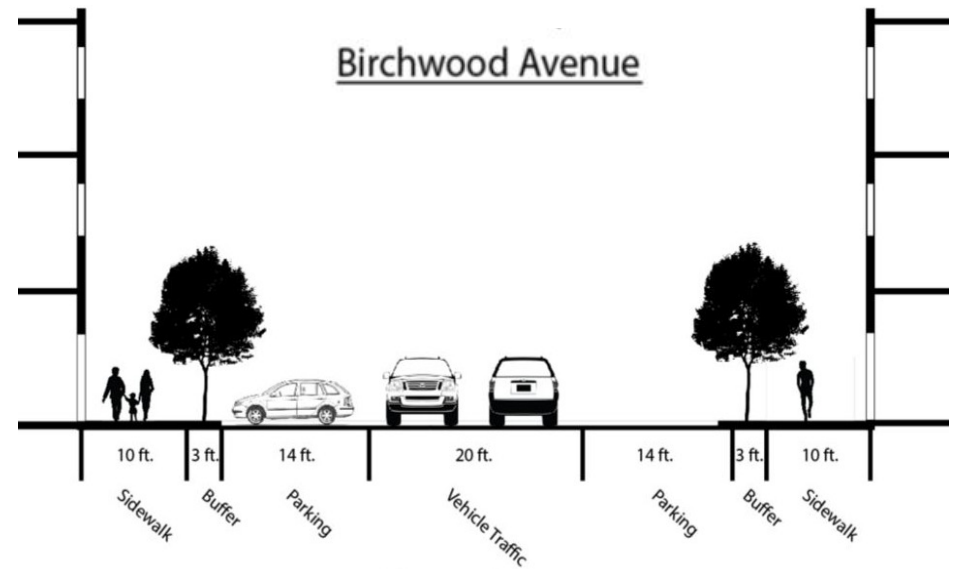
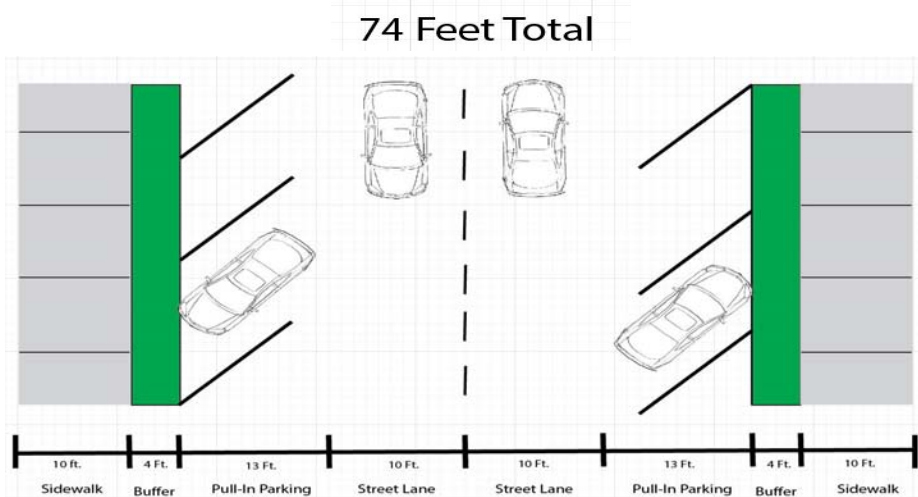
Master Plan Figure Ground

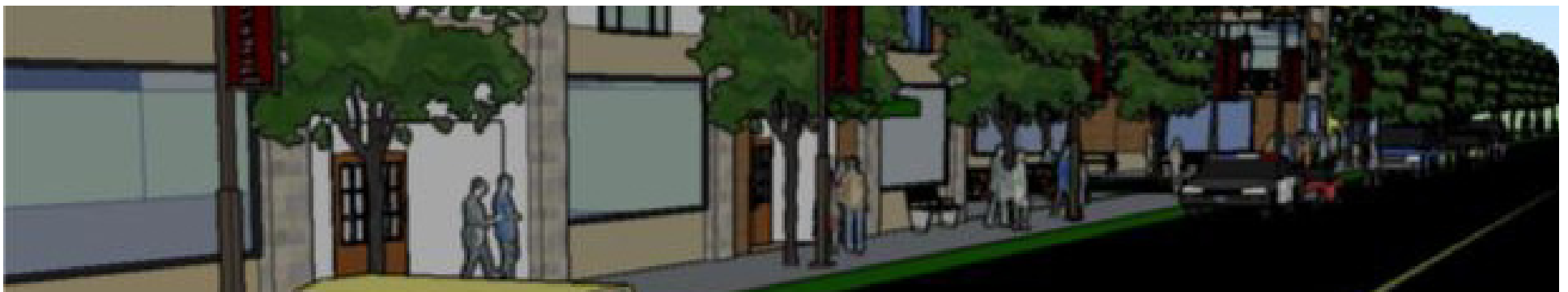


Master Plan Interest Area Map

Area 1

The first area of focus is the Birchwood Avenue strip. This area had an emphasis on drastically increasing the density and level of use along Birchwood Avenue. This includes taking the underutilized fringes of the parking lot in front of Albertsons and adding 3 story mixed use residential buildings, as well as on the southern side of Birchwood Avenue. This concept also adds on street angled parking to Birchwood Avenue, helping to slow down traffic and create a buffer between pedestrians and moving vehicles. Increased density of commercial and residential units will help to bring life to the core of Birchwood and add a welcoming and lively atmosphere to the streetscape. With shops and restaurants oriented to the street, increased greenery and lighting, eyes on the street from residences, and a more pedestrian friendly environment.



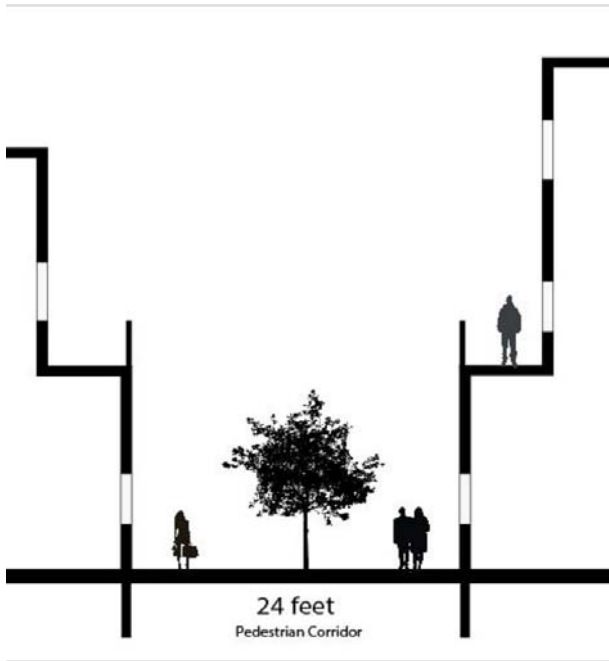


Area 2

The next area is the Birchwood Town Center and pedestrian mall, located on the site of the current Park Plaza Shopping Center. This location sought to preserve the current footprint of the Albertson's building, recognizing the importance of a neighborhood grocery store. However, with the news that Albertsons will soon be closing, this building could now be targeted for redesign,

possibly breaking it up into a smaller grocery store site with more shops. The remainder of the area has been visioned for an entire reconstruction, drastically increasing leasable square footage of retail and adding corridors of pedestrian-only environments with mixed use residential units to the area. The pedestrian corridors will be characterized by small to medium shops on multiple levels, increased lighting and

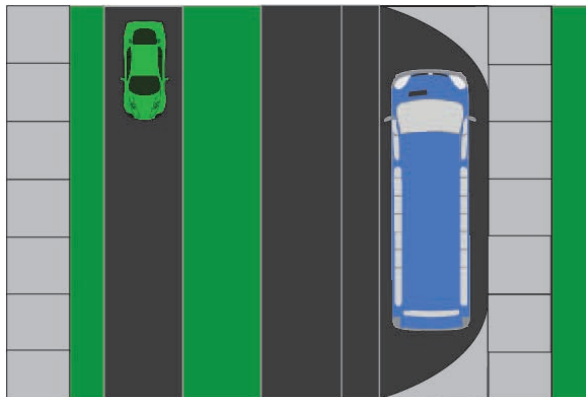
vegetation, seating and restaurants, and a few small public plazas. All of this in an environment that emphasizes pedestrians, rather than automobiles, has a distinct character creating a destination.





Area 3

The Birchwood Community Center is the area located directly to the north of the Northwood Hall and Northside Lounge restaurant. This area is currently a vastly underutilized parking lot and the site of the North Coast credit union. A recurring comment from Birchwood residents is a lack of safe youth oriented destinations and activities in the neighborhood. The concept here includes the construction of a 70,000 sq. ft. community center. This building could host basketball courts, fitness classes, art courses, and many other potential activities appealing to the young and old alike. In addition this could serve as a community gathering space with meeting rooms. This addition would provide a unique and distinct asset to the residents of the neighborhood and add much needed civic spaces to a community that currently has none. This area also includes a reconfiguration of the bus stops along Northwest Ave, adding bus pullouts to allow transit to exit the flow of traffic at stops, thereby keeping traffic flowing smoothly along Northwest Ave.



8ft Sidewalk 5ft Buffer 10ft Vehicle Lane 10ft Median 10ft Vehicle Lane 5ft Bike Lane 15ft Bus Lane 8ft Sidewalk 7ft Buffer



Area 4

The intersection of Cedarwood and Birchwood is the center of our park development. Many of the comments received from the first and second meeting indicated the need for a public green space for the neighborhood. Right behind the Rite Aid, west of Northwest Avenue, is where we have proposed a dog park to be located. This area, which is currently underutilized as an empty parking lot, has the ability to be transformed into a usable space that can address indicated inadequacies that the public has requested for. This dog park gives the neighborhood the greenery it desires. This park will also be connected to the small pocket park on Birchwood and Northwest Avenue and the underpass trail. Our proposal also seeks to improve the access to the trail through a connecting trail entrance near Morris and another after the Salvation Army. Some of the connectivity

improvements that this plan proposes for this area are improved pedestrian cross walks along the small 3 way intersection as well as improved lighting near and within the trail and parks. The retail land on the corner of Cedarwood and Birchwood would also be a prime location for a community gathering space that could serve as a commercial use. The variety this area will have will help create a destination for pedestrians as well as increase the walkability and safety because there will be more eyes on the street.



Area 5

The last area we focused on was the shopping area just south of the bridge. Our proposal would decrease the size of the parking lot by adding a building. This will help reduce the visibility of the parking lot and increase the amount of store frontage on the road. Our group recognized this area already had a highly developed commercial use and we did not want to displace the businesses by redeveloping the entire neighborhood. Adding this building will help achieve increase in variety and number of shoppers, stick with a cohesive main street theme throughout the neighborhood, and create a commercial node in the south. This increase in the usability of the retail lot can help make it a walkable destination as well.





Part II
Plan Implementation
Spring 2016