Birchwood neighborhood village plan concepts
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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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## Design Goals

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

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Safety and community</td>
<td>A strong, engaged and resilient community which creates a vibrant and liveable urban space.</td>
<td>Partner with local businesses to put 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.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promote the economic health of the area</td>
<td>Create a vibrant and sustainable economy that promotes economic growth with livability.</td>
<td>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.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed Land Use</td>
<td>Combine zones in important urban centers to maximize utility, safety, and quality of live within a community.</td>
<td>Provide eyes on the street expanding hours of activity throughout the day and evening. Increase diversity of housing options. Plan for diverse household forms.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promote Transit Oriented Developments wherever possible. Promote bike and pedestrian transit. Avoid destruction of habitat. Discourage development near water supply.</td>
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<th>Goals</th>
<th>Objectives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Smart Growth</td>
<td>Reduce sprawl and create efficient (in transit and commercial), healthy, and ecologically sustainable development within cities.</td>
<td>Promote Transit Oriented Developments wherever possible. Promote bike and pedestrian transit. Avoid destruction of habitat. Discourage development near water supply.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Design Goals
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 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 Commercial Core Master Plan. This analysis provides an enhanced understanding of Place’. The aim of each panel will be discussed in further depth in the following reports.

Visual preference surveys (VPS) were developed to allow 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 feasible, 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 tangible, implementable design characteristic 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 feasible, implementable design characteristic which encapsulate the image of the community.

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.

Methodology

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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.

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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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Commercial</th>
<th>Residential</th>
<th>Mixed Use</th>
<th>Streetscape</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High: 3.27</td>
<td>Low: -2.18</td>
<td>Low: -1.60</td>
<td>High: 2.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High: 2.14</td>
<td>Low: -1.60</td>
<td>Low: -2.43</td>
<td>High: 3.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High: 2.77</td>
<td>Low: -1.64</td>
<td>Low: 0.69</td>
<td>Low: -0.50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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.
The Capacity Analysis team took an in-depth look at the capacity for infill within the Birchwood Neighbourhood commercial core. At a community meeting, a figure ground map was presented which showed the parcels and buildings of the commercial core. Other figure grounds of similar Bellingham neighbourhoods 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 green area equal to the park space. This visual further backed up that the density analysis showed all the parcels within the Birchwood core had less than 40% of the lot covered by buildings.

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. 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.

Parked vehicles represent a significant soft site to the Birchwood commercial core and closely surrounding area to identify other areas that community members are more positive about. Third, the 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 center from residents, the team wished to discover which parts of this were seen as a “concrete jungle.” Incorporating these themes as a negative 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.

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 towards the neighborhood 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 not overly hard or soft. Community members were also encouraged to provide additional comments on note cards provided.

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 sidewalks 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.

Parking and 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 parks and greenery were another big topic for the people of Birchwood. Residents feel that Parks and Greenery were another big topic for the people of Birchwood. Residents feel that Parks and Greenery were another big topic for the people of Birchwood. Residents feel that Parks and Greenery were another big topic for the people of Birchwood. Residents feel that Parks and Greenery were another big topic for the people of Birchwood. Residents feel that Parks and Greenery were another big topic for the people of Birchwood. Residents feel that Parks and Greenery were another big topic for the people of Birchwood. Residents feel that Parks and Greenery were another big topic for the people of Birchwood. Residents feel that Parks and Greenery were another big topic for the people of Birchwood. Residents feel that Parks and Greenery were another big topic for the people of Birchwood. 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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 Yeager’s. 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. The 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 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 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.
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.
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 Squalicum 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

Business & Housing Opportunity

Green Community Space

Sense of Place
- Interactive sculptures and places to play for kids
- Identify low-hanging fruit for community to tackle themselves
  - Kipow
  - 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 known for its vibrant neighborhood core, distinct character, safe and healthy community, and recreational opportunities.

Shopping Plaza

A dynamic commercial area that provides and supports complementary uses in a walkable streetscape.

Commercial

An area of mixed-use and integrated commercial buildings.

Business & Housing Opportunity

Landscaping and planting the green areas for the apartments and retail units will increase the sense of place and promote aesthetics and pedestrian traffic.

The type of development accommodates the variety of housing options in the area. The mixture of housing types provides the flexibility of housing throughout the community and allows for great views of the water and mountain views.

Ninth and Avenue: A variety of housing types, from special-interest housing to townhouses, are accommodated in the area.

Commercial buildings that utilize public and private parking, creating harmony in the neighborhood.

Green Community Space

Spaces that provide places of connection and social interaction and outdoor places to view the city. Features such as streets, open space, roads, and parks.

These spaces can be utilized by any and all community members and residents for leisure and recreation.

Green Community Space is a place that can be used for the heart and hub of the community.
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 litter-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.
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.

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.
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 will be a larger flex space with moveable 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.
Connecting Plaza

The Connecting Plaza can be found in the area South of the bridge crossing Squalicum 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.

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.
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 increased 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.

![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 on 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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Commercial (1,000 sq. ft. units)</th>
<th>Residential (1,000 sq. ft. units)</th>
<th>Office (sq. ft.)</th>
<th>Civic (sq. ft.)</th>
<th>Openspace (sq. ft.)</th>
<th>Parking Spaces</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Small</td>
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<td>109</td>
<td>94,053</td>
<td>3,276</td>
<td>297,000</td>
<td>563</td>
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<tr>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>75,000</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>10,195</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>99,900</td>
<td>220</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large</td>
<td>36,000</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>31,000</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>349,500</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>137,592</td>
<td>3,276</td>
<td>436,982</td>
<td>1,481</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current</td>
<td>310,000 sq. ft.</td>
<td>233</td>
<td>0 sq. ft.</td>
<td>0 sq. ft.</td>
<td>17,200 sq. ft.</td>
<td>1,189 spaces</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Proposed Open 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 Squalicum 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 distracting 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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Land Use</th>
<th>Current Units</th>
<th>Proposed Units</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Retail</td>
<td>&gt;50 businesses</td>
<td>330</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residential</td>
<td>0 sq ft</td>
<td>379</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civic</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Space</td>
<td>1 park</td>
<td>10 parks and plazas</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parking</td>
<td>1,189 spaces</td>
<td>1,620 spaces</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Design Team 3
Student Planners: Sara Ulman, Kaeli Wells, Conner 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.
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 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.
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 well-being.

A fresh and revitalized trail space with asphalted paths and grade-level accesses 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 Birchwood’s 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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
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<th>Openspace (sq. ft.)</th>
<th>Parking Spaces</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>265</td>
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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 Braly, 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.
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 pedestrian 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 envisioned 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.

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 inadequacies that the public has requested for. 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.
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 storefront 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.