Envision Skagit 2060
Honey I Shrunk the Lots Field Tour
Seattle Area / Mercer Island
March 17th, 2011

Trip Participants

Peggy Flynn – Envision 2060 Citizen Committee member
Grace Popoff – Envision 2060 Citizen Committee member
Kim Mower – Envision2060 Citizen Committee member
Jan Ellingson – Realtor, Envision 2060 Steering Committee member
Kirk Johnson – Skagit County Planning and Development Services, Envision Project Manager
Gary Christensen – Skagit County Planning and Development Services, Director
Carly Ruacho – Skagit County Planning and Development Services, Senior Planner
John Lombard – Envision 2060 Consultant

Photos by Kim Mower and Gary Christensen.
Page 3 contains website links for additional information on some of the projects visited.

Ravenna Cottages

Trip participants were met onsite in a Green Lake neighborhood by John Lombard, Bill Kreager (Honey I Shrunk the Lots), and John Kucher. John K. and Bill worked together through the Threshold Housing Partnership, a non-profit organization whose mission was to design and develop high quality infill residential projects that explored housing alternatives not currently allowed under existing building codes. Bill and John K. provided background information about the development of the 9-unit infill project known as **Ravenna Cottages**.

Based on Threshold's designs, the city allowed Ravenna Cottages as a demonstration project. The project was well received by the neighborhood and buyers; however, the city of Seattle has not approved a "cottage ordinance" to allow more of this type of development to happen. John cleverly marketed the project to the city as "the least expensive housing built in this neighborhood in years," and to surrounding neighbors as the "highest value per square foot housing built in this neighborhood" – both true statements, because of the combination of quality finished and small (900 square foot) living spaces.

The cottages are two-story, have separate private storage rooms, and surround a central courtyard. Nine garages, one per unit, are located under the three "carriage units." A unique feature was the "gazebo" entry gate, complete with security lock and coded-entry key pad allowed at the edge of the sidewalk as a "garden element". The central courtyard was a series of small, multi-level garden spots with an array of decorative shrubs, perennials, and small trees, along with a water fountain, casual seating, and barbeque grill. One of the residents allowed us to tour her home (one of the detached cottage units). The design was well thought out and group members remarked at the spaciousness the unit offered.

Ravenna Cottages' six two story cottages (four wholly detached) and three two story "carriage units" (attached upper-level units above the garage structure) are built on two side-by-side standard city lots each measuring 50 x 100 feet. This yields a net density of 39 units per acre for 9 homes on 10,000 square feet, or a gross density of 28.5 units per acre for 9 homes on 13,000 square feet (10,000 square feet plus one half of the right of way frontage for both the public street and the alley).

High Point

The next stop on the tour was the **High Point** development. High Point is aptly named due to its close proximity to the highest point of elevation in Seattle. The 120 acre neighborhood is an example of sustainable development, with keen attention to creating a livable, walkable community. The site was previously home to an aging 1950s public housing project originally intended as temporary housing.

The housing is designed to be of medium density with a combination of market rate homes and affordable (subsidized) housing. It was often not possible to differentiate the two types by visual observation. A very creative and well thought-out street design incorporates narrow roads and sidewalks, many with pervious pavement, bioswales, and "rain gardens" for rain water runoff incorporated into the landscape. All of the community open spaces, large and small, are designed to have as many front doors opening onto them possible, and each had an element of art. The group viewed the central detention pond/duck pond from a railed platform ("belvedere"), noting views of the City of Seattle, Elliot Bay, and the Cascades in the distance. The "low-impact" drainage infrastructure helps to capture and treat stormwater on-site, through various natural features, metering it slowly into the fish-bearing stream below.

Small neighborhood parks offered community amenities including benches, tables, and jungle gyms for children. There were also several areas set aside and constructed specifically for vegetable gardening. The raised beds seemed to be farmed actively by the residents.

The development had a very open feel and an overall residential density of the site is about 15 dwelling units/acre (gross density, including everything), or 21 units/acre (net density) when road rights of way and parks are subtracted.

Mercer Island

The group traveled to **downtown Mercer Island** to study the redeveloped commercial area. This location used to be auto-oriented strip development; it is in the process of being remade as a mixed-use urban village, featuring apartments and condos above first-floor retail (restaurants, shops, services), as well as "live-work" units. At the high end was an "art park" area along the freeway used as a walking trail and including for sale art objects. The design of the roads and sidewalks and buildings were constructed for ease of traffic and pedestrians.

The housing in this area of Mercer Island is three or four floors above a "podium" of street level retail uses with a parking garage located under the retail businesses. Depending upon the size of the units, this configuration typically generates a density, within the property line, of 80 to 100 units per acre, and can be built with wood frame construction above the concrete "podium." For the residential floors,

wood framing is considerably less expensive than steel or concrete, and therefore helps control construction costs and makes affordability more possible.

Pine Street Cottages

The next stop was the **Pine Street Cottages**. The Pine Street Cottages were built in the early 1900s. This type of development is the inspiration for the recent interest in cottage housing development both regionally and even nationally. There are ten cottages are approximately 450 square feet in size, with one bedroom, a three fixture bathroom, a bright, open living area and a kitchen with accommodation for full-sized appliances. The cottages share a common central, landscaped courtyard, which is very private from outside only able to be entered by a small, obscured gate or the parking area. The project density within the property line, including buildings, open space, driveway and parking areas (one space per cottage with gated entry) is 28 units per acre. Residents are singles and couples who find a detached one bedroom option with ownership more appealing than a unit in a condominium building.

The project could not be built as a new project under current zoning and building codes. Ironically, in spite of the community acceptance, awards and national recognition the restoration of the historic cottages has received (featured on TV's "Good morning America" and in Metropolitan Home Magazine), the City of Seattle has still not adopted a cottage ordinance allowing new cottage construction projects. Pine Street demonstrates how higher density can be obtained with detached homes by careful site planning.

Malden Court

The last stop was **Malden Court**. With the appearance of two large older homes, these two - five unit buildings fit nicely in the historic neighborhood context of larger, older homes, and one large brick apartment building. All ten 1,000 square foot units are two story, one bedroom plus den or two bedroom homes, many with two story living rooms. Parking is underneath a large deck/patio area shared by the ten residents. The homes had a security gate and coded- entry key pad to the courtyard above the parking. Two blocks from Group Health Hospital on Seattle's Capitol Hill, the ten affordable units sold to hospital employees.

The two - five unit buildings are built on side-by-side 50 x 100 foot lots. Including one parking space per unit under the buildings, two buildings, front and back lawns, all within the property lines, Malden Court's density is 39 units per acre.

Additional Information:

http://community.seattletimes.nwsource.com/archive/?date=20010225&slug=ravenna25

http://www.thehighpoint.com/index.php

http://www.mrsc.org/govdocs/S42CottageHousDev.pdf

http://www.mve-architects.com/portfolio/pr/228_Mercer-Island-Mixed-Use-Development

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