

Publication: Skagit Valley Herald; Date: Mar 6, 2013; Section: Local; Page: A3



## **Burlington brainstorms plans for retail core**

### **Walking paths, apartment buildings popular**

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BURLINGTON — A Burlington resident strolls along a Gages Slough nature path, shops and dines on Burlington Boulevard, then heads upstairs — right above the retail — and settles in for the night, a plant-covered roof above her head.

That could be a typical Saturday in Burlington if ideas from Tuesday night's public forum are put into place.

The University of Washington's Green Futures Lab visited Tuesday to gather ideas from residents, business owners and other stakeholders about how future development of the city's commercial core should look.

The group of graduate students and faculty is working with the planning department to come up with ways to beautify the city in environmentally sound ways.

"We got a ton of ideas, and these guys know how to take ideas and run with them," said Planning Director Margaret Fleek.

City staff hopes to complete a new comprehensive plan and zoning and stormwater regulations by next year, although the deadline is 2016, Fleek said. Ideas gathered Tuesday will likely be codified there, she said.

The City Council chambers were filled with tables, maps and charts where people could offer ideas and vote on their favorites.

Several people suggested nature paths along Gages Slough and Skagit River, perhaps connecting to a trail along Highway 20. Ideas for urban density, such as buildings with retail on the ground floor and living space above, were big hits.

"I would totally live above our office," said Amber Soria, owner of Soria Real Estate. The building, which is about 110 years old, has high ceilings that could lend well to lofts, she said.

City Administrator Brian Harrison said he thinks people would embrace a walkable retail core.

"That's got some traction," he said.

Votes Tuesday night appeared to confirm that. A park-and-walk mall was one of the most popular shopping development options among the 30 people who attended.

Biking was popular, too. Burlington resident Shirley Featherstone, who has lived in town for about 45 years, said she liked that idea but cautioned against bike lanes blocking parking along residential streets.

The new comprehensive plan, zoning regulations and stormwater regulations will govern future development in the area, Fleek said.

Forum ideas such as energy-efficient building design will not be required of new buildings, but will be encouraged, she said.

Developers will likely need regulations and incentives to work those practices in, said John Ravnik, a Burlington-area resident who owns Ravnik & Associates in town.

“Respectfully, you need to teach an old dog new tricks,” he said.

Ravnik said he thinks Tuesday’s forum is a good step, and that he hopes it doesn’t take too long to implement.

But changes on this large a scale take time, Fleek said.

“Yeah, we’re taking it step by step,” she said, “but at least we’re taking those steps.”

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Fleek