BELLEVUE
Transformation
Of A Suburb

Bellevue. Mere mention of the name at cocktail parties evokes winces, chortles, and wine crack jokes involving Portage and MainWades, Smith City, Car City, Strip Commercial. Parking lots. No side-walks. Congestious consumption. Station wagon-style-use of parking lots. The epitome of suburbia, right?

Not anymore. When Seattle wasn't looking, Bellevue changed. Suddenly and deliberately.

Over the past decade, Bellevue has gone through such a dramatic period of change that in 1983 it is virtually an entirely new urban entity. A key public policy, adopted by the City Council several years ago, directs intensive development into the downtown area, with a holistic view on the intensity of commercial development, in other words, Downtown.

This policy sets a maximum floor area ratio (FAR) for any building outside the CBD at .5. While new development is continuing to occur in areas outside the CBD, it is low-rise and clustered in a few principal areas.

Virtually every one of the dozen of commercial rezoning actions over the last several years has included a requirement for Planning Department design review. Particularly attention is to be given to reduced asphalt areas, improved site planning, tree reservation, sensitively located buildings. Despite these controls, corporations such as Boeing, Hewlett-Packard, and Microsoft have been literally given carte blanche to build.

At the present time over 50 projects, located throughout the City, are being processed.

NEW DOWNTOWN POLICIES

Nowhere within the community have recent changes in public policy been more evident than in the Central Business District. New downtown policies were adopted about three years ago, which are producing dramatic changes. Automobile use is to be de-emphasized, in some instances actively discouraged. Transit has been given a major role in shaping downtown growth. And amusingly for a city with a history of dominance by the auto, the safety, convenience, comfort, and appeal of movement on foot was given high priority.

Walking in Bellevue? Come on, you must be kidding. Not at all.

Two years ago, closely following the adoption by the City Council of these policy directions, a new Land Use Code replaced the one that had produced all of the ugly parking lots that sprawl across the CBD. Two things it did were to slice the parking requirement in half and toss out the need for setbacks. Changing only these two things would have produced an entirely different character. Downtown buildings could be larger and could fill their sites. Combined with shifting market demand, land values, costs, energy considerations, and transportation constraints (i.e., the 45-minute commute time from the float- ing bridges to Seattle), the effect has been phenomenal: parking lots are rapidly disappearing, being replaced by urban builds with parking pushed into garages.

But the new downtown Code has gone even farther than these particulars, albeit significant, changes. Its essential elements are as follows:

1. Pedestrian Population

The new Land Use Code virtually forces people out of their automobiles and into transit.

Downtown projects now can provide only so much parking; there is an unalterable maximum limit (3 spaces per 1000 square feet) that is far lower than historical conditions (3 or more per 1000).

Commercial parking facilities are flatly prohibited in the CBD. Consequently, approximately half of all new employees in downtown Bellevue will not be able to bring their cars. They will have to take the bus or carpool.

The objective is to create a new downtown neighborhood, with residential uses as well as commercial.

2. An Intensely Developed Core

All areas within the downtown have height and FAR ceilings. The three-dimensional height/bulk envelope is a "zigzag" form, which steps down from the inner core to a mid-rise peripheral area. The most intensive, high rise development is confined to the innermost sector of the CBD, an area about 1800 feet by 2400 feet. This core includes a very intense "spine." Theoretically, within this area three or four very large parcels could contain buildings which approach 600 feet in height (40-50 stories), assuming all available bonuses were used and consolidated. However, market absorption and financing constraints are deemed more likely to produce buildings on the order of 450 feet or 35 stories.

The highest achievable FAR, in either case, would be only around 10. This illustrates the power of FAR to control intensity and its inability to control urban forms. Despite relatively low height/bulk limits outside the core, within this zoning envelope downtown Bellevue has a "holding capacity" of over 20 million square feet of commercial space, or nearly equal to Seattle's present state of development.

3. Public Spaces

The new code requires developers to provide several types of public space: 12-16-foot wide sidewalks, a major east-west pedestrian corridor (Figure 3), several special open spaces, and mid-block pedestrian connections. Skyline Tower, for example, was designed so that its plaza would serve as part of a mid-block connection (Figure 2).

Each development within the centermost portion of the core must include a segment of the Pedestrian Corridor. The Corridor is to be a street for people that will link parts of the core area. While it will be built by the private sector, City-adopted design guidelines require retail uses, continuous weather protection, lighting, and special paving, thereby leveraging private funds to produce a public amenity through design.

Since the Corridor is not to be constructed all at one time, it will not be an "alien" feature imposed upon a setting as so many downtown malls appear to be. The effect will be not unlike that of many dynamic pedestrian streets elsewhere, such as Madison Avenue in New York or Blow Street in Toronto. Design guidelines for the Corridor equally emphasize the nature of the walls continuing the space and the horizontal surfaces; the "wall" and "floor" are considered to be interdependent (Figure 3).

The intent is to provide a container within which human activities and physical design create a place where people want to be. A project being planned by the Kell Company will develop a major segment of the Corridor (Figure 4).

In a similar manner, the Code specifies three locations within the core area to be large, defined public open spaces. All are situated at points along the alignment of the Pedestrian Corridor. Like the Corridor, these spaces are to be constructed as part of individual projects, at the developers' cost. The first of these spaces to be developed will be included in the current expansion phase of Bellevue Square. Approximately 10,000 square feet in area, it will be at the western end of the Pedestrian Corridor and will serve as a grand, public, street-related entrance to the Square.

In return for constructing both the Pedestrian Corridor and the Public Open Spaces, developers will receive substantial floor area bonuses. These bonuses are the only means by which to exceed an otherwise fixed maximum FAR of 8 and height limit of 300 feet.

4. Downtown Housing

A major component of the Code provides strong incentives for constructing housing. In two districts, only by constructing housing are buildings of any significant size possible. One project now in the design phase exemplifies the intent of the Code (Figure 1). It includes street level retail shops, several stories of office space, and a distinctive, "erased" 15-story residential tower. It should be noted that in downtown Bellevue, unlike downtowns in older cities, displacement is not an issue since there is almost no existing housing stock in the area. Rather, the objective is to create a new downtown neighborhood, with residential uses as well as commercial. With lowered interest rates and foreseeable economic recovery, significant housing activity is expected.
A Column of Many Orders

In the city fields, cherry-trees... strangers are like friends...
Another BLUEPRINT: for Architecture Competition

A time when people are doing a lot of talking about streets, BLUEPRINT: for Architecture decided to take a look at the tops of Seattle towers in its third competition. The problem was to redesign the caps of any or all of the following buildings: Rainier Tower, the Financial Center, 1111 Third Avenue, the first SeaFirst Bank Building, and the Federal Office Building. Entrants were asked to play with program, allegory, architecture, fantasy, or all of these. Robert Frasca of Portland's Zimmer Gunsul Frasca judged the show. The winner of the $250 award and a few other entries of note are printed here.

The Box The Space Needle Came In
Don Tomasi. "Seattle-First: While it is true that this proposal eliminates several floors of leasable space, higher prices charged by the now-revolving Mirabeau restaurant would more than compensate for any financial loss. Additional revenues would be generated by the proposed observation deck on the level above the restaurant. Federal Building: Japanese architecture is more appropriate to the Northwest than is Italian. Anyhow, if you're intent on putting something which looks like a red tile roof on top of a 36-story building, you may as well go for it."

The SeaFirst Building (Washington Monument) Alan C. Liddle, FAIA. "The SeaFirst Building should be twice as tall as it is. Its present proportions suggest the bottom half of the nearly perfectly-shaped Washington Monument. Presently, the four slightly sloping corner projections are rudely terminated at an arbitrary height. The building should continue up to effect a needle shape with a pyramidal top." Robert Frasca pointed out that this proposal would take the position formerly held by Smith Tower when it dominated the skyline, providing a missing focal point reminiscent of the earlier one. Will the new seventy-six story Columbia Center be able to fill these boots? (Photo by Grant Haller, Seattle Post-Intelligencer)

The Winner Ken Stone. Juror Frasca found the presentation, vision, and detail (particularly on the redesign of the Federal Building) in this entry laudatory. In case you don't recognize them, from left to right are Rainier Tower, the SeaFirst Building, and the Federal Building.

A Collage of Building Forms Steve Johnson. Rainier Tower's top was left purposely untouched to indicate a desire by the designer to achieve a diverse and healthy mix of periods and forms in tower top architecture.
Monday can be tolerable. On Mondays teachers in the Option Program at Seattle's "City School" on Capitol Hill (otherwise known as Stevens Elementary) propose a few alternative electives to their students. From these the kids choose one and commit themselves to spend forty-five minutes a day for the next week on that subject. One Monday Harper Welch suggested that students take a two-week look at skyscrapers. First, the twenty-five or so 1st to 5th graders looked at pictures of old New York skyscrapers and suggested alternate shapes and tops. Next, they made a long and wonderful list of possible functions which might occur at the top of a tower. Then, Welch asked them what different forms these uses might suggest. The first week was "laborious" and the results "pretty tight and reality-based," says Welch. The next Monday they took a different tack. Welch read part of a list from a contest The Weekly held to find alternate nicknames to "The Emerald City." The teacher asked the kids to decide on their own nicknames for Seattle and then make the city live up to its name. That did it. These young architects hit a hot streak. A few of the products of that inspiration are shown here. They were all entered in the BLUEPRINT: for Architecture "Top This" competition, and many received kudos from juror Robert Frasca. The ideas portrayed by the kids are often fresher and more imaginative than those of the grown-ups. For the last year, students in the Option Program at Stevens have been learning urban survival skills: how to find your way around, how to catch the right bus, how to keep yourself safe, how to use newspapers, telephones, and libraries to answer questions, how to handle money and shop, how to find restrooms and something to eat. In the last week of May, fifty-four 3rd, 4th, and 5th graders moved their classroom downtown to enjoy the city and to use the skills they've learned. They took surveys using criteria they developed to evaluate how well the city is serving the needs of children. They looked for restrooms and water fountains, shelter from the rain, and interesting things to look at along the street level. They compared streetscapes in the retail core to the financial district, plazas at the base of office towers, and a few hotels' contributions to the street. On Friday the students passed out the "orchids and the onions," acknowledging some of the owners/developers who have made the city a more comfortable and secure place for children to be. In a ceremony with the Mayor, the 5th graders awarded orchids to such downtown places as the Bank of California Building (for its places to sit and its cafeteria in the sky), Market Park (for its proximity to the Market and full harbor view), Rainer Square (lots of people and a feeling of safety), the First Methodist Church ("It's pretty nice to have a low building among all the tall towers."), and Waterfront Park and Streetcar. While they gave an onion to a concrete block at the corner of Fourth and Pike (it will cast a long shadow across Westlake Mall). The 3rd and 4th graders gave orchids to Freeway, Waterfront, and Myrtle Edwards Parks and Waterfall Garden, and onions to Occidental and Market Parks. In mid-1984 the Child in the City Conference will be held in Seattle. It will be a four- to five-day international gathering of people from professions that deal with children—from health to design. The kids at Stevens plan to take part. Conference organizers hope to help create a network between different groups that do work relating to children. Ideas will be shared and model programs displayed, both on international and local levels—programs such as the one at Stevens School. Doxiadis' World Society of Ekistics and the Japan Institute for the... continued on page 12.
Portland's Warehouse District

A R/UDAT Study:
Portland's Warehouse District

On the west side of the railroad tracks, bounded by Burnside Avenue, the Union Station, Old Town, and Interstate 405, the Northwest Portland warehouse district is an area in transition. For over eighty years, this industrial area had been a viable distribution center. But during the last ten years, due to the rise of single-story suburban warehousing facilities, many of the multi-story buildings have lost their purpose. So few important industries remain in the area, and so few Portlanders drive through the area, that few cries of alarm sounded when "For Lease" signs appeared. The warehouse district is the only area adjacent to the urban core that was not included in the 1973 Downtown Plan of Portland. On the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the City's planning effort, Portland architects asked the National AIA to send a Regional/Urban Design Assistance Team for four days to review and evaluate the Northwest Warehouse District. Should it be included in the Downtown Plan?

The R/UDAT defined the problem in three parts:

1. Help the current owners, tenants, city planning agencies, developers, and citizens to better understand the value of the area.
2. Initiate discussions about the area's future.
3. Recommend short and long term actions for both public agencies and private groups.

For a day and a half, the team interviewed over sixty public officials, developers, property owners, tenants, and representatives of artist and community organizations. The market, political, and physical forces were also examined with the aid of local resource people with both public and private points of view.

After considering five possible alternatives, ranging from "Do nothing" to "Maximum High Density Development," the team chose two options for further evaluation:

A. "Make It Work Better" — This option develops a minimum set of actions that would permit the area to maintain its current functions with fewer transportation and social conflicts. Recommended steps include:

1. Formation of a neighborhood association
2. Rebuild certain streets and establish new parking guidelines
3. Creation of special retail service/truck loading streets closed to through automobile traffic
4. Improvements for a Transportation Center and extension of the Transit Mall

B. Northwest Triangle — This option involves a greater degree of public intervention that would result in a richer mix of uses, greater economic return, and an improved image for the City. There are five sub-districts within a larger area that are termed the Northwest Triangle:

1. Transportation Center — Relocation of the Greyhound Terminal and redevelopment of the Union Station.
2. Burnside Office/Retail Area — Increased commercial development and retention of neighborhood support services for the elderly and street people.
3. Mixed Use/Preservation District — Creation of a fifty block historic area for guiding adaptive reuse and new construction that would house a mixture of professional, service, distribution, and arts activities.
4. Business Park — Establish a twenty-one block business park with both modern and rehabilitated buildings for warehouse, assembly, and office users that would generate over 1200 jobs; a second phase of roughly similar size would be added in the adjacent railroad yards.
5. Riverfront Development — Develop a mix of commercial, office, and retail activity between the Fremont and Broadway Bridges, with Greenways along the River's edge and through the center of the Triangle.

The R/UDAT team recommended that the following four steps should receive the highest public and private priority:

1. Complete the Transportation Center planning.
2. Establish a Northwest Triangle Area Organization
3. Define a Preservation District in the warehouse area
4. Evaluate the feasibility of extending the Willamette Greenway and connecting the South and North Park Blocks into a continuous Portland Greenway that reaches the River near the Fremont Bridge

The members of the R/UDAT included:
Charles Zucker, Deputy Director of Design Arts Program of the National Endowment for the Arts, Washington, D.C.; William Felsig, President of Citywest, an urban design and development consulting firm in Los Angeles, California; M. Dale Henson of Dale Henson Associates, Inc., an Atlanta-based economic development consulting firm; Russell Keune, AIA, a specialist in historic preservation; Rick Kusner, AICP, President of New Alternatives, Inc., a transportation, urban planning, and development consulting firm in Chicago, Illinois; Lawrence Kutnicki, architectural writer, teacher, and practitioner in New York City; James Pettinari, Associate Professor in the School of Architecture at the University of Illinois; James Pettinari, Professor of Psychology and Director of the Center for Consumer Research of the University of California, Davis.

Evolving a sense of place for the warehouse district requires a new attitude, not a lot of money. The team chose their set of options, a report that gives Portland a starting point for a planning process.

Martha Bergman

Martha Bergman is Chapter Executive of the Portland AIA.

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Housing for Whom: Advocacy and Activism. Visit Stinson Beach, and San Francisco Planner Allen Jacobs addresses the issue at Broadway Performance Hall/SCCC, 7:30. Sponsored by the AIA Living Downtown Lecture Symposium.

PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT OF Dutch Polders: Utopia and actual New Towns, a lecture by Landscape Professor Frederick Stинтер at the UW's Gold Hall Room 322, 8 PM.

Kites and Banners: exhibit by fiber artist Keryn Behr at the Seattle Art 6/20-2. Opening 6/2-3, 4 PM.


"ART AND SEXUAL POLITICS," a lecture by Tom Case, presented by Art in Form and 911 at 8 PM. 911 Pine.

BEATRICE MOVY BY PHILIP NOVOC'S political mysteries deal with themes of architecture, development and manipulation. The 8th Seattle Film Festival, 6:30 PM, Egyptian Theatre.

PERSONAL FINANCIAL PLANNING: a seminar by Tom Porter at Totsie Bob's 6PM, at the Seattle Art Fair. For information, 622-4358.

THE GALLERY OPENS AT LINDA FARRIS, an exhibition with the Karl Bernsten Gallery, San Francisco. 6/7-7/3 at Dommelly Hayes. abstract paintings by Dwight Colem, 6/19-7/1; at Francie/White, Glen Garrod's oil paintings on piths and Berens Venier's mixed media. 6/2-7/3.


NEW BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES in Real Estate: a workshop by Western Addition. 8 PM. Through 6/25.

RECENTLY PUBLISHED: "Remember the terminal points" by Frank Lloyd Wright is open for discussion at the 911 E. Broadway Performance Hall/SCCC, through June.

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Continuing at the Galleries:
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CONTINUING and Polders: Dutch Awards: a Seat­ tle­time in the Rainier Square Arts and Sciences at Broadway Performance Hall/SCCC, 7:30. Sponsored by the AIA Living Downtown Lecture Symposium.

ITALIAN GARDENS: a lecture by Pat O'Brien at San Francisco's Art Institute Experimental printing brokerage firm, at The Printing Place in the Market, to 6 PM.

"China: 7000 Years of Discovery," an exhibit of ancient objects related to science and technology. Artifacts from architecture, printing, papermaking, carving, hydro­ therm al analysis, medicine, alternative med­ icine.


"FOR THE LOVE OF WINE," presented by the Karl Bornstein L.L.C. at the Seattle Art Museum, to 6/9-7/5; at Equivalents, 6/15-7/5.

"Art Under Fire," a group show by photographers who were working in Egypt during the Anwar El-Sadat administration, is open through 6/18.


RENO, AMERICA'S BIGGEST LITTLE CITY, will be shown in "Trip 7/16 or 17. $25 per person, half­day trips. For information, 624-7000.


"Olympia Gateway," a competition for a design of a gateway for the 1982 Summer Olympics in Los Angeles, is sponsored by the L.A. Chapter of the AIA. The competition is open to all and has prize money of up to $1000. The deadline for registration is 6/23. Further information, 6/24.

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THE EXPERIMENTAL COLLEGE OFFERS summer classes, beginning 7/7. For information, 543-4372.

THE HEART OF ENGLAND," A UW LECTURE SERIES, coordinated by Professor of Landscape Architecture David Streatfield, will include country house, their interiors, and garden settings. The lecture is the first of four Sunday presentations on 18th and 19th century English aesthetic ideals sponsored by the Seattle Art Museum. 3 PM at Volunteer Park.

THE GRAND TOUR," THE 18TH CENTURY English gentleman's trip into antiquity, is the subject of a lecture by Professor of History, Fritz Levy. Sponsored by the Seattle Art Museum, at Volunteer Park 3 PM.

THE FLIGHT OF BIRDS," AN EXHIBIT of wings and other, at the UW's Thomas Burke Museum, continues to 7/31.

COOKING CHONG, ARTISTIC DIRECTOR for the Fuji Theatre Company, leads a workshop on theatre, performance, and visual arts. The workshop, 7/20-22, will culminate with a performance with Paul Karjakin. Sponsored by On the Boards. For information; 325-7901.

IMAGIN CUNNINGHAM IS AT THE HENRY Gallery through the expression of her photographs, 7/23-7/31.

ROBERT ADAMS' INTERPRETATION OF Antiquity," a discussion of the drawings and paintings of the late 18th century English architect by Professor of Art and Interiors Warren Hill. 3 PM at the Seattle Art Museum, Volunteer Park.

Coming up in August: "England Gardens and Country Houses," a presentation by Roger Sharman, R.I. at the Seattle Art Museum; the City Council's public hearing on proposed Land Use Regulations on neighborhood business zoning, 8/8; original Rock 'n Roll movie at the Seattle Art Museum - beginning with "Don't Knock the Rock." 8/7; gallery openings, street shows, summer solstice, elemental experiences of sun and water. Catch these and more in the August/September ARCADE, at newsstands August 1.
Robert Becker, Architect

Robert Becker sees his work as striving for a regional approach to architectural design, but in a manner that does not focus on the traditional building forms and techniques of the Pacific Northwest. His architecture reflects a concern for the way a building is adapted to its site and climate. Orientation, weather protection, the way the light is received in the building spaces, and the spaces the building creates around it on its site are the elements Bob Becker begins to mold as he approaches a building design.

Becker practiced in Paul Thiry's office in Seattle for eight years, after which he spent two-and-a-half years in Sweden as an architect with WAAB White Arkitekkontor, AB. He was involved primarily with work on offices, industrial buildings, and schools, as well as new town planning. There he found a comprehensive approach to planning that is rare in the United States. For Becker, the framework and high standard of planning that he learned in Sweden are a significant part of his experience.

Returning to the Seattle area in 1975, Bob Becker opened his own office in Bellevue. In the past eight years his practice has evolved from primarily residential work to include commercial and institutional projects.

Becker uses the term "enviral-climatic design" to describe his design philosophy. By this he means determining the appropriateness of a design based on local environmental and climatic conditions, fitting each building into its unique setting rather than manipulating a preconceived architectural idea to conform to a location. The fullest expression of these ideas is seen in his recent work, a series of studies for earth-sheltered housing clusters. Here he has combined an energy-efficient dwelling unit with a flowing connection of interior and exterior spaces, forming a strong relationship between the site and the living spaces within.

The connection between environment and climate is less evident in his earlier residential projects, such as the Morton Residence with its glass roof and walls. Becker's concern with capturing sunlight in the spaces of the house and visually extending the spaces to the surrounding trees has neatly fit the house to its setting, but has probably done so at the expense of efficient heating and cooling.

A recurrent theme in much of Bob Becker's work is the changing floor plane, used to define the interior space. "An ideal building," says Becker, "would have level changes at the floor plane, which define spaces, and the roof as a shelter, which would cover and give dimension to the space. The roof would be high in some places, for a sense of spaciousness, low in some places for a sense of protection. Then [let] everything else just disappear. In other words, get architecture down to its simplest forms."

In his architecture Becker has captured not only a sense of spatial definition, but also, through his use of materials, has picked up the strong horizontal lines which emphasize these shifting planes.

A painting by Becker, done while he was living in Sweden and recently shown in the Seattle Art Museum's Exhibition of Northwest Artists, is a clear illustration of this spatial notion. It is a representation of a series of shifting planes, striped with contrasting lines, which give a great sense of depth and volume to the painting. In his architecture Becker has captured not only a sense of the spatial definition similar to that represented in this painting, but also, through his use of materials, has picked up the strong horizontal lines which emphasize these shifting planes. The deep-ribbed aluminum siding, which is used in much of Becker's work, has very much the same effect as the contrasting lines in the painting, accentuating the movement and depth of the horizontal planes.

A change in floor levels is used with different intentions in several of Becker's projects.

Earth-sheltered Housing Project. Proposed hillside housing cluster, with individual units having earth-sheltered roofs. Dwelling units clustered around a central community/recreational space.

Morton Residence, Redmond, Washington. House on wooded steep slope. Living space on three levels, enclosed by steel arches with glass sensor covering.

projects. In the Morton Residence, spaces flow together on different floor levels and connect the various functions within the house. The stepping of levels serves a different function in the Village Green hillside housing project, where the independent levels are organized on the hillside to accommodate automobile circulation and to give each dwelling unit a view. In either example, the architecture reflects not only the idea of the stepped building planes, but also the romantic notion of the landscape cascading through the interior spaces.

There is an effort to connect the building and, hence, the building's inhabitants with the ground plane. It is this sense of continuity between man and nature, built form and natural setting, that Bob Becker is trying to bring to life in his architecture.

Paul Shema

Paul Shema practices architecture in Seattle with Herzdl/Daly/Isley Architects.
The Gang of One
Four Proposals

"We need more street trees in downtown Seattle..."
—David Briersen, AIA Living Downtown Symposium, April 6, 1983

One ingredient in "a recipe for a true city: On the streets, have buildings of equal size and height on either side without a great deal of variety, and have lots of trees. They then act as a linear park."
—Jaquelin Robertson, AIA Living Downtown Symposium, April 19, 1983

"Seattle is a city I can walk in for an hour. It has great potential. I'm astounded there are not more big trees in the streets in groves. You can almost cure American urbanism by planting trees."
—Jaquelin Robertson, AIA Living Downtown Symposium, April 19, 1983

"We only need look to the World Trade Center in which there is probably less creativity per foot than in any other building in the country..."
—Paul Goldberger, Seattle Skyline Symposium, April 28, 1983

Sketches by Mike Dowd.
“Capitalized on the viaduct.”
“Quiet the noise from the viaduct.”
—City improvement suggestions taken from a poll of planners at the APA Conference, Seattle, April 1983.

“The viaduct is worse than any building. Remove that, and you'll do more than any building or group of buildings can do toward helping downtown.”
—Paul Goldberger, Seattle Skyline Symposium, April 28, 1983

“The major downtown issue is . . . the need to build housing . . . of all varieties.”
—David Brewster, AIA Living Downtown Symposium, April 6, 1983

“A prissy ballerina on her tiptoes gets her feet wet.
(Paul Goldberger, Henry Art Gallery Lecture Series, Seattle, April 27, 1983)
Virtually all major development projects within downtown Bellevue must go through a design review process before a building permit is issued. This is a device for ensuring not only that the letter of the law is being met, but that the intent is being achieved as well. The process is an administrative one involving Planning Department staff; no presentations before boards or public hearings are involved. When a project does not meet the intent of policies or codes, modifications, design modifications are required.

CURRENT PROJECTS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The City is devising additional guidelines to strengthen its ability to achieve the desired character of the downtown. The Planning Commission is putting the finishing touches on a document which stresses the critical importance of building/sidewalk relationships and which calls for the inclusion of pedestrian-oriented uses, design features such as windows, street walls, and sidewalk amenities. Special emphasis is placed upon creating a core area that is lively, diverse, and comfortable to people on foot. The intent of the guidelines is to convey to developers from the outset what elements the City considers to be important. A diversity of individual design expression is encouraged, within a framework of explicit requirements.

Another new direction is the City's effort to create a large public park within the downtown. The Bellevue School District owns an 15-acre tract of land on which stood a secondary school. The School District had visions of this property becoming a rich source of revenue (in a manner similar to the University of Washington's Metropolitan Tract in downtown Seattle) by developing a complex of office, retail, and residential uses. Instead, the City Council decided that the property, largely vacant, represented an opportunity that should not be lost and recently offered $15 million to the District, intending to convert the tract into a unique downtown park. METRO is designing a downtown transit center which will be strategically located in the middle of the high-rise office area. With a budget of $5 million, this facility will have specially-designed shelters, a symbolic monument/kiosk, special paving, and graphics. The transit center is the first result of an agreement between the City and METRO in which bus service will be increased along with an increase in employment density. It will also serve as the east terminus of the Pedestrian Corridor. One could compare the transformation of downtown Bellevue to that of a "new town." A number of fragments of contemporary urban planning and design concepts are evident: a small dense core, a linear "spine" form, emphasis on pedestrian movement, and romantic notions of small town fokishness. Downtown Bellevue, by contrast, will be intense, urban, and even discordant.

Mark Hinshaw

Mark Hinshaw is currently Supervisor of Land Use and Urban Design for the City of Bellevue. An architect and an urban planner, he worked for TRA for five years prior to joining the City in early 1982. He is chairman of the Seattle AIA Urban Design Committee.

KIDS . . .

. . . continued from page 4.

Mark Ashley

Mark Ashley is an editor of ARCADE.

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