

**NEWCASTLE / BRECHIN NEIGHBOURHOOD  
NANAIMO BC**

January 25, 2010

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One participant's point of view.

Thanqu, for allowing me to attend the Friday/Saturday (January 15/16) design Charrette.

If I may be so bold, I would like to offer my personal and professional insights into these two neighbouroods that have been my home for over ten years.

My insights are not only professional: I have lived on its immediate southern periphery, walking (I do not own a car) to the store, dentist and to friends, as well as walking to my boat that, for two, years was moored at Moby Dick.

My observations conform, essentially, to the many conversations with friends, my own anecdotal experiences, winter and summer, and, indeed, professional insights.

I have gained a sensibility walking the Ravine, the sea wall and steep grades of Brechin Hill. I hope I may add to the, on-going, conversation without being obtrusive.



An interpretation of the neighbourhoods.

Actually I see six distinct functional areas, although my friend Charles Christopherson, who has lived there for many years, see four: he and Frances live on the sea wall.

Criteria includes, living there, walking the dog, walking to the store, school and into downtown: jogging, cycling and just hanging out in the sunshine.

There was much talk, during the charrette, among neighbours about walking to the store and up the steep east/west inclines. Of course I am in no position to contradict, other than to say that my personal experience walking, all times of the day, and seasons, I have seen very, very little ambulatory traffic or cyclists on the slopes: they are confined to the sea wall.

Lane way housing will not be a big component in these neighbourhoods: nevertheless the current by-law needs to be reviewed, as is the case. As it stands lane ways are allowed provided there is not a "granny suites" in the main residence. This defeats its purpose of densification as well as precluding the advantage of "mortgage helper".

In addition height must be amended to allow for a potential suite over a garage, and the allowable floor area extended to make livable accommodation.

An insight! Vancouver's open space policy is 2.5 htr/1,000 pop: Nanaimo has no policy. Actually, green space in Newcastle / Brechin supercede this but is inequitably distributed. Green spaces could be created at street intersections as per Seattle's, "City Repair" movement.

Newcastle Channel is a large public urban space, an exceptional view amenity.

Total population 3,200 with a potential up to 12,000.

## **CRITERIA, GOALS**

- Densification.
- Retrieve the ferry terminal lands.
- Enhance open green spaces.
- Make connections.
- Clean up the environment.

## **SPECIFICS.**

### **1. MILLSTONE/YACHT CLUB.**

- i. The yacht club waterfront tenure is somewhat fragile and could, if it ever came about, be better located in the Pimbury point area.
- ii. Nevertheless keep the name for traditional purposes.
- iii. Millstone/Yacht club community has two medium (12 stories +/-) rise towers and I suggest that be it. Heights should be limited to six stories.

- iv. Housing comprises two medium high rises, some low rise condominium and SFD's vintage post WWII.
- v. Reasonable walking gradients. Close to downtown and shopping amenities
- vi. Limited lots, typical post WWII suburban densities and character @ 8 +/- / acre. Heritage value is arguable.
- vii. Parkland on banks of Millstone is, theoretically, out side the area,
- viii. On the southern limits there is a gas station, a funeral parlor and a few other small commercial amenities.

## **2. RAVINE.**

- i. Arguably the greatest asset for both neighbourhoods: Newcastle's "Jewel in the crown". There is a partial paved footpath that doubles back onto Walnut but ends up on Stewart in an indeterminate mud path blocked by a divider.

## **3. TERMNAL PARK.**

- i. A badly planned unattractive shopping mall: the first in Nanaimo. It has just undergone extensive renovations, unlikely to change soon.
- ii. It is, nevertheless, in need of diversification: possibly with residential added.

#### **4. SEA WALL.**

i. Probably Nanaimo's most popular asset. Locals would like it to extend further north to Departure Bay village and beyond. This was abandoned last year because of legal complications to do with foreshore rights of a few properties adjacent to the ferries.

#### **5. PIMBURY POINT.**

i. The name comes from the charted Pimbury Point at the north-west entrance to the channel.

ii. The BC ferry terminal exists on Departure Bay from force of habit only: the site is too valuable to languish as parking. It was slated to move to Duke point: another less obtrusive, and better site for destinations north is Nanoose Bay. As larger vessels enter the service the confined entrance to Departure Bay becomes a hazard to navigation.

iii. It is a massive imposition on the both neighbourhoods I do not have the statistics but it is obvious by observation most drivers leaving off the ferries head for points north and other destinations. Summer ferry traffic backs along Stewart much to the detriment of peace and quiet.

iv. The site has great potential as a mixed use, medium density residential, boat building, yachting facility and tourist attraction.

v. Sooner than later Pimbury Point has the potential to morph into a wealth creating asset.

vi. Unfortunately recent extensive additions and alterations mean that the ferry authority will not be receptive to change any time soon. Nevertheless, now is the time to commence the conversation.

## **6. PRINCESS ANNE.**

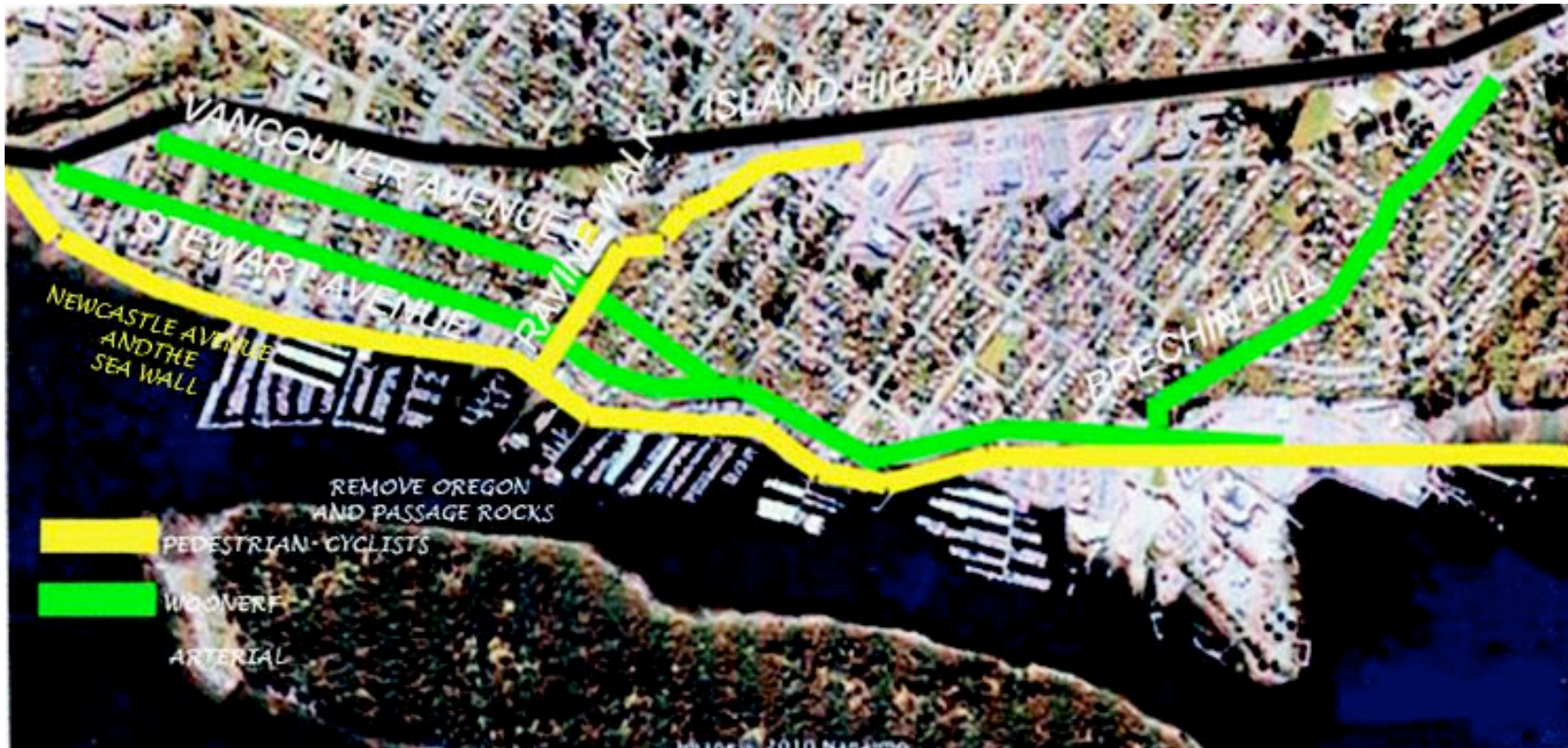
i. On the north-west quadrant, a secondary school and benign small park close to the island highway.

ii. This is the one area lane way housing is possible, albeit limited. Lane ways are the most unobtrusive form of densification. However in this case they are limited to areas that have lanes: i.e. Princess Anne community on Maple, Poplar and Larch.

iv. Enjoys the advantage of Parkland on banks of Northfield creek that is theoretically outside the area.

GENERALLY the housing stock is pre/post WWII well kept, single-family dwellings. There is a well-founded pride among neighbours.

Some may see heritage value in parts, but that is dubious. My personal gauge of heritage goes back to Celtic barrows and Roman walls: perhaps I am prejudiced!



### Circulation and connections

1. Sea wall: pedestrian, cyclists
2. Woonerfs: prioritizes pedestrian, cyclists public transit, private auto in that order.
3. Arterial: The island highway



Open space

1. The banks of the Millstone river. There is a well maintained foot path connecting the sea wall, Maffeo-Sutton park to Bowen park.

An interesting salmon spawning river in the fall.

2. The Ravine.

3. The secondary school grounds with an adjacent small park.

4. Northfield Creek escarpment and ravine. Theoretically out side the study area but a necessary amenity adding to the dearth of green space across the two neighbourhoods.

NEWCASTLE CHANNEL is, in my opinion, a public urban space amenity not only for sailors. Indeed it is the most sought after view attraction of the two neighbourhoods.

Two submerged rocks, Passage and Oregon, right in the middle of the fairway, are a hazard to navigation and should be removed: especially since recreational marine activity is such a vital component of he local economy.

In conclusion:

\* Note: the charrette is a popular technique to rationalize planning and architectural design. I have participated in a few. My observation is: until the client or neighbourhood participants overcome their deference to authority, be it the architect or municipal planning official, the status quo will prevail.

With their professionalism Ramsey Worden Architects, and staff, need no advice or help from me: they can handle all exigencies.

Nevertheless, as a participant, I feel an obligation to share my views.

Thanqu again for the opportunity to participate in, and enjoy, a most informative colloquial.