



Case Study: Solving problems with an opposition group.

Fairhaven Highlands Design Charette

The project started approximately 15 years ago under different ownership and was violently opposed by both local environmentalists and neighbors.

The property is within the Bellingham city limits and had been granted zoning for the density the developer wanted.

The problem arose from the fact that it was located adjacent to some expensive homes and very influential

name of the previous development initiative from Chuckanut Ridge to Fairhaven Highlands.

To the development team's dismay, the new project was also violently opposed. The neighbors still wanted to prevent any further development next to their backyards even though the city had approved it outright. Those against the development were an extremely well organized community association of property owners and environmentalists.

The developers went so far as to design the property and vest it with the city for a planned contract. The anti-association then started a campaign which used threats of lawsuits, packing the city council and planning commissions with people against the development, an onslaught of letters to the editor to oppose the project, and signage all over town saying stay, "Stop Fairhaven Highlands!"

One of the development's owners was a bank, and of course being a bank were very sensitive to public relations issues ... they didn't like the direction thing were going.

They came to David Christensen because they heard that a charette process could help mitigate community concerns by finding compromises and collaborative solutions. Up until this point they had not reached out to the opposition group.

They hired Masterplanning.com to help build a bridge between the "anti-development association" and the development company.

The first step of the process was to create a well balanced group of those who opposed it and those for it.

We started with a group of about 25 to 30 key people.



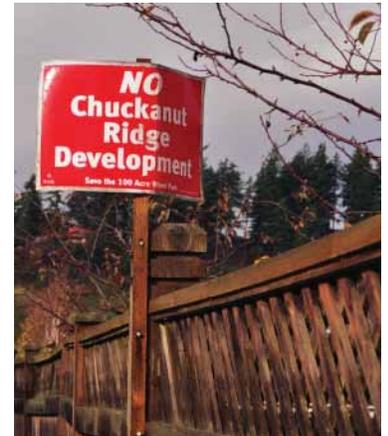
the original masterplan.

people. The property was near to their backyards and they simply didn't want anything done there.

After fighting for many years, the owner decided to take his battles elsewhere and gave 1/3 of the property to a local land trust for preservation of open space and sold the rest to another local developer in partnership with a local bank.

Believing they could proceed with building a new home community, they hired a local planning engineer with the goal of starting the process of development.

At that time, the developers decided to change the





We also invited consultants from environmental, biology, civil engineering, and traffic planning bodies to help determine which of the facts being put out to the public was true and which was false.

In the course of one morning (8:00am to 1:00pm) we heard presentations from specialized consultants on traffic, environment, drainage, and zoning. They covered all types of questions like;

- Are there endangered fish?
- Are there wetlands?
- What are the key environmental issues?
- What habitat does it effect?
- How will traffic effect the neighborhood?
- What are the trail connections (both for people and habitat) through the site?
- What are the open spaces that are currently around the site?

Many of the opposition; neighbors, stakeholders, environmentalists ... were at first skeptical, but willing to come.

In addition to the opposition, members of the city council were invited as were members from the city planning staff. Although, the planning staff declined at the last moment because project was so controversial. Members from the real estate and development community were invited to provide balance and to provide another side of the story.

After being presented the facts about the site, David engaged both the opposition and the development community to find out which issues were relevant. By



the end of the first session we were able to define and then agree on what were the most important issues from each side.

David and his team then worked through the night to come up with a new design for the same number of units, 739 homes. The next day David met with the group again and presented the new design with now included elements that took into consideration the issues presented in the previous charette design meeting.

Some of the changes to the community design were:

- Lowering the height of the houses.
- Maintaining wildlife corridors
- Preserving critical habitat areas
- Allowing the city to buy some of the property through the greenway bond

After the presentation, we went around the group and everyone in the room felt it was a good compromise. It was amazing thing to see the key members from the opposition and developer groups unanimously approve the plan after so many were so violently against the

development.

So the politicians were impressed with the solution, the city is currently negotiating the greenway bond and the project to build the 739 homes is moving forward.



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