

**CITY OF BAINBRIDGE ISLAND**  
**ISLAND CENTER SUBAREA PLANNING COMMITTEE**  
**MINORITY REPORT**

To: City Council, Planning Commission  
Date: May 26, 2021  
Subject: Island Center Subarea Planning Process Plan

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The Committee voted to include the following comments in the final Plan. There follows the Minority Report on these two topics: 1) Residential Base and Bonus Density limits; 2) Recommendation of Alternative Three (the most expansion) without sufficient public benefit. This Minority Report is presented by John Decker, Michael Loverich, and Sam Marshall. We are two architects and a transportation data analyst.

**Introduction**

For most people Island Center is the commercial strip on their way around the island. However, just off the road and sometimes under the road are 2 major island streams and two tributaries as well as Fletcher Bay, the Grand Forest, Island Center Cemetery, old barns, greenhouses and one thing that is increasingly rare in today's climate and market are large tracts of former farmland. It also is a landscape populated by people who have lived on that land for generations. Island Center is unique in that it is long and thin versus compact like Lynwood Center and Rollingbay. That being said, there is a richness to the environmental and economic diversity of the neighborhood that is rapidly vanishing from the Island that is not readily apparent when passing through. Island Center's geography, history, environment and businesses require a unique approach to planning.

We've heard from the community about many challenging factors about living in Island Center, primarily regarding the dominance of automobiles in the area and the lack of good, safe, quiet pedestrian infrastructure that allows residents to avoid cars. We've also heard about the community's love for the natural resources and open spaces of the neighborhood. Those factors and others demand that the future of Island Center seeks out innovative and creative community builders to address the cultural and environmental impact of growth in the area. It shouldn't be a plan that is just about infilling planning gaps, or putting a Band-Aid on the current crisis of the day, but linking together disparate elements, working holistically and thinking about the future. All the parts should add up to create a better whole, allowing space for change as well as healing. The subarea planning process is designed to capture the feedback from the community and to not approach planning from the top down but to listen to what the Island Center community is saying and put together a plan that represents those viewpoints.

From surveys, public meeting feedback, written commentary, being stopped in the street or at T&C it has been made very clear what the goals of the community are. Alternative 3 does challenge that public opinion because it expands and increases density and commercial development in Island Center. It does capture a lot of concerns of the community except, in our opinion, the following topics. A plan should be comprehensive and when the strongest sentiments by the community are not represented or are even contradicted in the plan, then we feel the need to dissent.

### **Dissent Re R-8 Residential Density**

The Committee has consistently recognized that the community does not want increased residential density in Island Center. Until the Committee meeting on May 5, 2021, the Committee had reached consensus on a maximum residential density of R-4. Higher densities above R-4 were discussed but were not supported by the community nor by the financial means to bring in the

infrastructure to allow that density to occur. The financial burden on property owners and COBI as well as the environmental impacts made these ideas unfeasible. However, since affordable housing is very much needed, the requirement that all new density be affordable allowed the community to achieve a goal of making space for more affordable housing while managing growth and keeping it at a scale that is supported by the community, environment and finances. The switch to R-8 while it makes a strong statement, requires an infrastructure plan to support it which lacks the financial and community support it needs. Therefore, increasing density to R-8 doesn't have the thoughtfulness nor support that a plan requires.

On May 5, the Committee addressed the fact that the consultant's draft Plan had consistently failed to reflect the Committee's consensus that all upzoned density should be mandated affordable, as the draft plan at the start of the meeting reflected a base density of R-2, and not all NC properties (existing or potential) are currently R-2. Discussion reflected that this was a compromise with the community's rejection of new density in an effort to potentially create workforce affordable housing, consistent with the "blue collar" and agrarian roots of Island Center.

In connection with voting to place the affordable housing mandate in the Plan, a Committee member moved to amend the motion to double the upper residential density limit to R-8. As there had been a Committee consensus of a maximum of R-4, the transportation element had not taken this higher level of density into account, green space requirements for this level of density, etc. Marshall and Decker realized later in the meeting that they were confused about what was being voted upon, and three of those who voted to increase density to R-8 retracted their support and voted to reduce density back to R-4 (Marshall, Decker and Strom). That vote tied, and so failed. Had those three voted originally as they eventually did, the motion to double residential density to R-8 would have failed.

Based on the repeated discussions and rejection of high density by the community, and during Committee meetings, the dissenters request that the Planning Commission consider the impact this doubling of residential density will have on the neighborhood, and recommend a maximum density possible through an affordable housing bonus of R-4 (not R-8). We further request that the Planning Commission recognize that the goal is to provide workforce housing for persons working in the Island Center study area.

### **Dissent – Alternative 3**

Alternative 3 recommends upzoning of properties within the Island Center area, but does not guarantee commensurate public benefit. Of primary concern is the south 5 acres of the Anderson property on New Brooklyn, owned by Committee member Anderson and family members. Only where a public benefit would be realized did the Committee consider an up-zone. Public benefit options discussed were 1) requiring that the change in zoning for the Anderson property was contingent on redeveloping the existing businesses/uses to move the buildings on the property at Miller and New Brooklyn back to comply with the design guidelines in the Plan; and 2) designation of the north 5 acres (heavily encumbered by wetlands) as a natural area / undeveloped / trail space with public access for passive uses (to connect to the Cemetery and COBI owned property). This would have included clustering the base density to the south 5 acres, with no loss in development rights.

At the final meeting on May 5, 2021, it was made clear that neither of these options would be required in the Plan. As such, the public's stated needs and concerns are not met by upzoning the Anderson property without the public benefits. Some key desires expressed at the 2020 public meeting included:

- Four-Corners visual/aesthetic improvements
- Environmental protection / access to nature

- Emphasis on agriculture
- Traffic calming
- Minimal fondling / leave it alone
- No large development / No high-density housing
- Pedestrian trails and related safety
- (For a more complete summary of takeaways, please see the links in the Community Meeting section below.)

It does not seem that Alternative 3, as it currently stands, reflects the expressed will of the community. This corner is very important to the character of the neighborhood. The Plan does little to guarantee improvements to the quality and safety of this high traffic, key location. The dissenters request that the Planning Commission recommend dedication of the north 5 acres of the Anderson property to natural area / undeveloped / trail space with public access for passive uses (to connect to the Cemetery and COBI owned property) and that the Commission explore possible ways to improve the corner lot aesthetics in exchange for up-zoning the property. (See appended parcel map.)

**Dissent – Additions to the Comprehensive Plan Excerpts and Community Meetings Report**

***Comprehensive Plan Excerpts***

The Plan references several Comprehensive Plan provisions that apply to Island Center, but omits one that has governed the Committee’s discussions for several years:

**Policy LU 5.2**

**Increased density over and above the existing zoning in the Neighborhood Centers *should only occur through a shift in density from areas identified in the Island-wide Conservation Strategy through PDRs, TDRs or other mechanisms and through the use of density bonuses for affordable housing.***

(2017 Comprehensive Plan, italics in the original).

This provision supports the Committee’s determination that any new density in Island Center must be affordable, and should be set out in the Plan. The omission of this Policy undermines the Committee’s decisions.

Similarly, these additional Comprehensive Plan provisions specifically apply to the

Subarea Planning Process, and support the concerns raised during the Steering Committee meetings, and it is requested that they be included.

#### **Policy LU 5.6**

**Create mechanisms for retaining and preserving open space near designated centers.**

#### **Policy LU 5.4**

**Sustainable development and redevelopment will be focused in the designated centers through a combination of intergovernmental and public-private partnerships, affordable housing programs, “green” capital projects and low impact development standards.**

#### **Policy LU 5.11**

**Commercial and residential density within designated centers may be increased through the use of:**

- **Affordable housing.**
- **TDRs (transferable development rights).**
- **Contributions to public infrastructure and public amenities in excess of what is required to mitigate the impacts of development.**
- **Transfer of residential density within the MUTC and the High School Road Districts or within neighborhood centers.**
- **Preservation of on-site of historic structures eligible for inclusion on a local, state or federal register of historic places.**
- **Locating ferry-related parking under building.**

#### **Policy LU 15.2**

**Encourage the development of neighborhood community gardens or small-scale commercial agriculture where appropriate.**

#### **Policy LU 15.3**

**Promote interagency and intergovernmental cooperation and resource-sharing to expand community gardening opportunities.**

#### **Policy LU 15.5**





Likewise, additional takeaways from this meeting are available on the COBI website at the links below, and a primary theme is that the community is not in favor of increasing density in the Island Center area.

- <https://www.bainbridgewa.gov/ImageRepository/Document?documentId=13159>
- <https://www.bainbridgewa.gov/ImageRepository/Document?documentId=13160>
- <https://www.bainbridgewa.gov/ImageRepository/Document?documentId=13161>
- <https://www.bainbridgewa.gov/ImageRepository/Document?documentId=13162>
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- <https://www.bainbridgewa.gov/ImageRepository/Document?documentId=13170>



The dissenters request that the complete body of public input received at Island Center public meetings be considered when recommending policy, zoning, and project proposals.