

COUPEVILLE FOREST/HOMESTEAD COUPEVILLE

HISTORY, PLACE AND REGULATION -- COUPEVILLE WASHINGTON
ARCH 584, INSTRUCTOR - PETER KEYES
ROBERT WAXMAN OPTION III

Coupeville Forest and *Homestead Coupeville* are, not surprisingly, in the town of Coupeville, Washington, located in Ebey’s Landing National Historic Preserve -- the first historic preserve in the National Park Service and the only segment of the service most of which is privately owned and jointly regulated by local jurisdictions.

Until the 1950’s, Coupeville’s population totaled less than 500 people. Since then, its population has more than tripled fueled primarily by weekend and summer residents and especially retirees. Its historic character, once based on surrounding farms and seagoing commerce, is now challenged by a growing number of postwar suburban ranches and small strip shopping centers. By choosing residential sites, I hope to offer alternatives for Coupeville’s future, ones that capture the spirit of the past and celebrate the vitality of the present.



Ebey’s Landing Historic Preserve



Coupeville, Washington

On Whidbey Island on Puget Sound, Coupeville draws people both by its historic character manifest in its surviving 19th century architecture and by its proximity to water. Immediately to the north of Coupeville is Penn Cove, home of Penn Cove mussels, pleasure craft and the occasional orca. Both of the sites I have chosen have high elevations relative to the rest of the town and enjoy views of Penn Cove. *Coupeville Forest* is the site of a remnant forest of douglas firs still visible from boats on the cove. Historically, this forest has framed the town of Coupeville from the water. *Homestead Coupeville* is on a remnant of farmland close to the town center. As the photos to the left and above demonstrate, the agrarian characer of this area persists to this day.



Site for *Coupeville Forest*

Although much of the forest has been cleared, the site for Coupeville Forest still has numerous douglas firs and other trees, as the photo on the left demonstrates. A development here provides an opportunity for reforestation.

The roads intersecting the site for Home- stead Coupeville were only recently built, replacing the farmland that was here shortly before. A residential development would provide the opportunity to combine housing with the “spirit of the land.”



Site for *Homestead Coupeville*

THE SPIRIT OF THE PAST IS ALIVE IN COUPEVILLE WHEREVER ONE TURNS.
ITS INSPIRATION IS ALWAYS AROUND THE CORNER.



PROJECT 1: COUPEVILLE FOREST

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Site Plan

My goal in Project 1 was to create a relatively dense development of houses principally serving weekend and summer vacationers in a view oriented enviroment. The majority of houses face Penn Cove with living spaces and decks on the second ievel to maximize the view. In additon, I sought to create a forested environment in order to spur reforestation of adjacent areas and to emphasize the importance of the ridgetop forest in framing views of Coupeville from the sea and shorefront. High densities would maximize social access for purchase and rental of this property and clustering houses would also allow common areas that would permit uniform coniferous plantings. High densities were achieved by semi-detached houses, but the only way to do this, given the town’s existing zoning Code, was by treating the development as a condominium rather than ownership in fee.

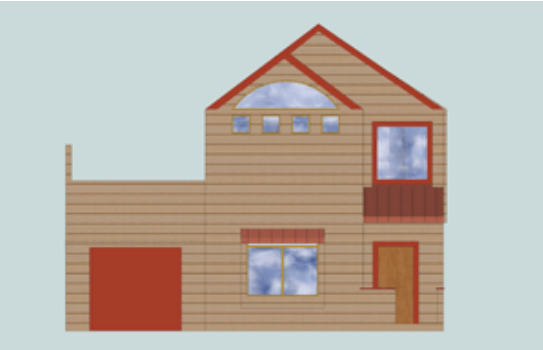


View from Site

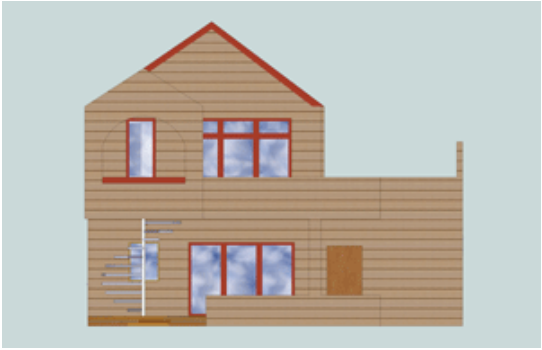


Perspective view of *Coupeville Forest*

Adjacent to a large hospital on the southwest and to a nursing home on the southeast, the site is not close to any large cluster of historical structures. Most houses nearby are postwar suburban style ranch houses on quarter acre lots, reducing any “obligation” to defer to specific historical styles. Nonetheless, my intention was to try to capture the spirit of Coupeville’s older architecture without sacrificing the creativity of the moment. Although proportions and shape never strayed far from orthogonal geometries or pitched roofs, it was important to me that these buildings be contemporary as well as respectful of the past and be whimsical as well. (After all, this is a place where people will *live*.) Most of those people will probably be on vacation or simply taking “time out.” The upstairs deck is large, covering the garage and the rear first floor deck. Immediate access to the ground is provided by a redundant spiral staircase; and the image from the rear (and the street) is analogous to a birdhouse. The cantilivered deck appears supported by the staircase’s pole. Unfortunately,the amount of land required to accomodate a higher density reduced the amount of land that could devoted to reforestation.



Front Elevation



Rear Elevation



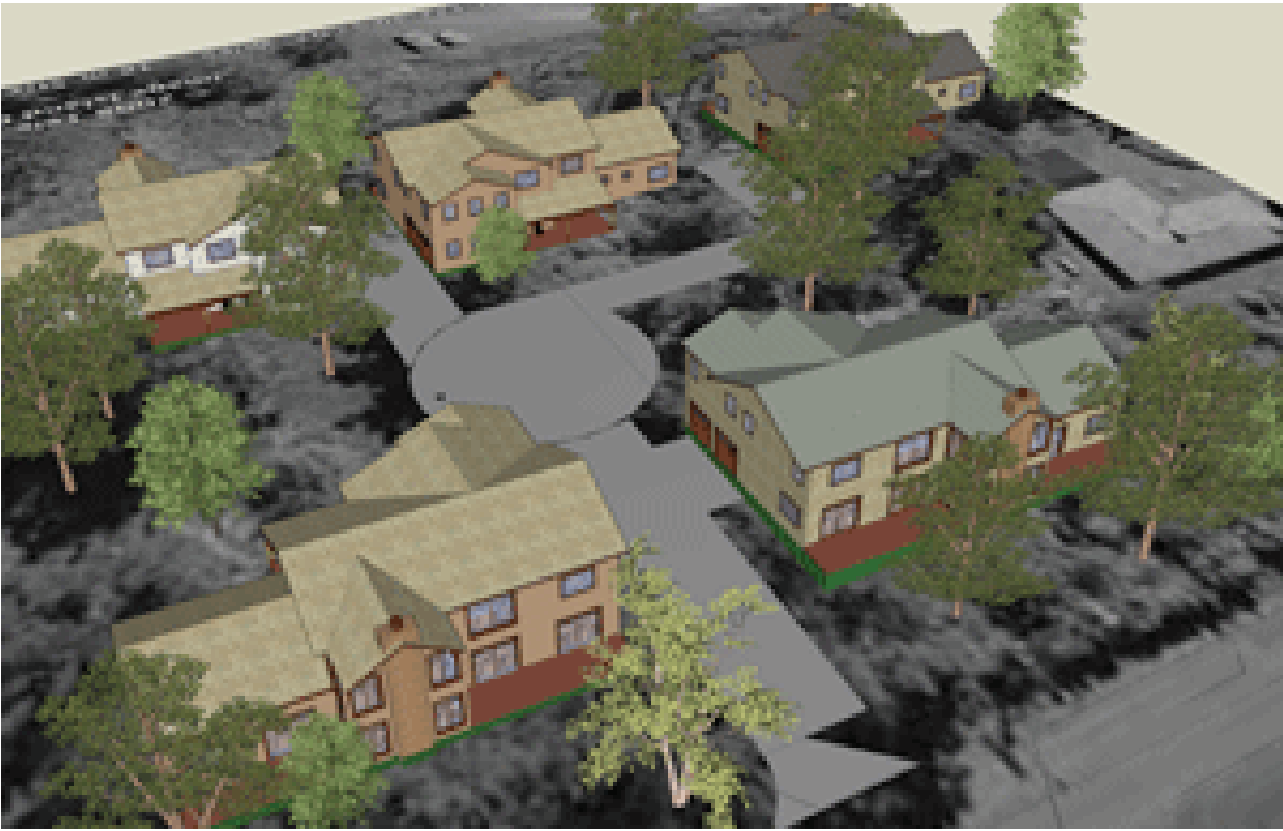
Side Elevation

PROJECT 2: THE HEIGHTS

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Site Plan



Perspective

The minimum lot size requirements of Coupeville’s zoning ordinance virtually invite developers to fill the allotted space. Despite being denominated “high density,” the minimum lot width is 70 feet. Minimum square footage of individual lots is 9600 square feet. Duplex dwellings and multi family dwellings are required to have 4000 square feet of lot per dwelling. Moreover, because the site sits on one of the highest view lots of the town, its cost per square foot is almost certainly high. A developer doesn’t have to be a cynic to appreciate that it is probably easier to build a few large houses to make a profit, as opposed to selling many small units for a profit, especially in a difficult economy. In addition, the town’s Code is generally hostile to high density development (even here in the high density zone); more units on compact lots is certain to invite protracted battles with city officials and residents. (Notably, to be eligible for Planned Unit Development status, a lot must be at least five acres.)

Nonetheless, the challenge to build wisely is worth the battle. Compact housing is possible if one divides the 4000 square foot per unit minimum into the square footage of the lot as a whole. My strategy is to present the option of compact market rate housing accessible to to a large number of people, as opposed to a semi-private enclave of monster homes available to the very few. This also affords the possibility of reforesting the ridge, at least in part.

“Sweeping views ...
double height ceilings
1600 square foot master suites ...

BE UP WHERE YOU BELONG
AT THE HEIGHTS!” *

*ad copy courtesy of Premier Homes of the Pacific Northwest



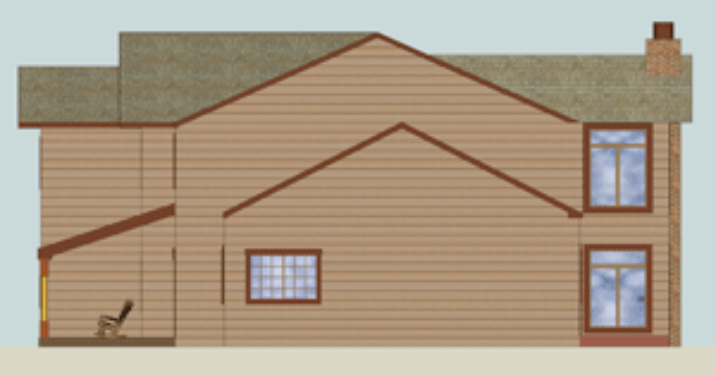
Front Elevation



Rear Elevation



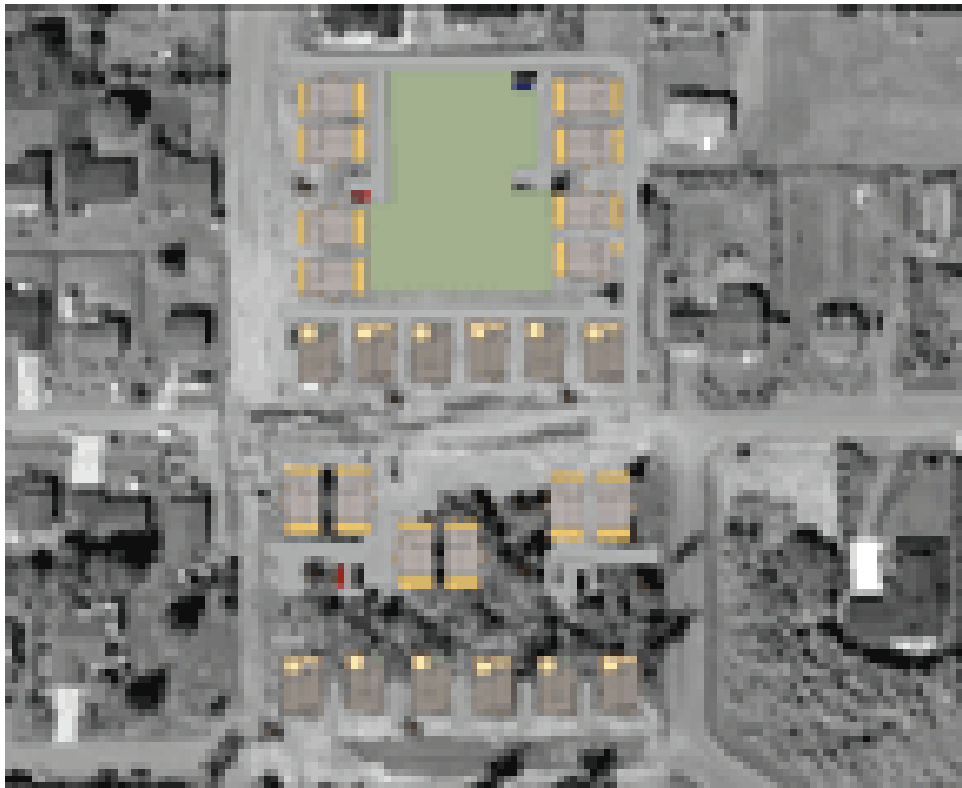
Side Elevation (Left)



Side Elevation (Right)

PROJECT 3: HOMESTEAD COUPEVILLE

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Site Plan

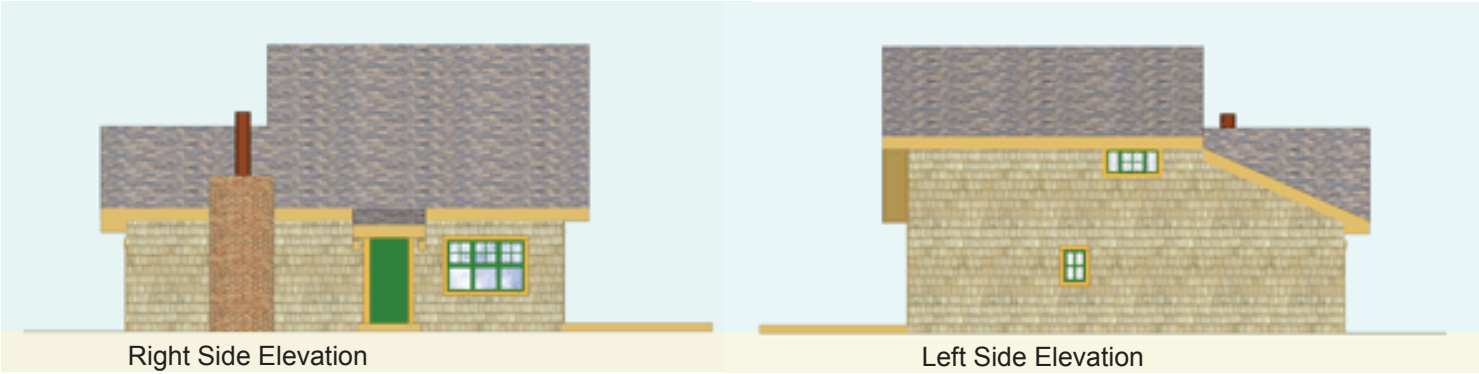
Homestead Coupeville is an opportunity for Coupeville to reconnect with its agrarian roots. Consisting of two basic designs -- an open loft two bedroom house and a four bedroom house with two master suites, i.e., a three generation house -- *Homestead Coupeville* is situated on two newly-created blocks only recently removed from cultivation. The southernmost block is steeper than the other and more heavily wooded, affording the best views. The northernmost block is gently sloped on its northern half, better suited for agriculture. The communal garden consists of almost 30,000 square feet of soil for twenty five households.

Although zoned medium density for 9600 square foot lots, the development is authorized by the cottage overlay district which allows significantly higher densities in areas designated medium density on lots of at least one acre with at least six and no more than 12 units per acre. The two blocks consist of 3 acres with twenty five units total. Consistent with the design recommendation to conserve existing trees, there are fewer houses on the southernmost block with minimal development on the steepest and most wooded part. Contrary to the design recommendations, two-bedroom houses have formal entries on the side in order to conserve interior space. Nearby buildings consist of both vintage and postwar houses. Rather than imitate any particular form, I have tried to capture the spirit of Coupeville's past but always attempting to express it in a way that is uniquely of the present and to serve as a new beginning for the future.



Two Bedroom Loft House Facade

Rear Elevation



Right Side Elevation

Left Side Elevation



Homestead Coupeville Perspective



Four Bedroom House Front Elevation



Alternate Facade



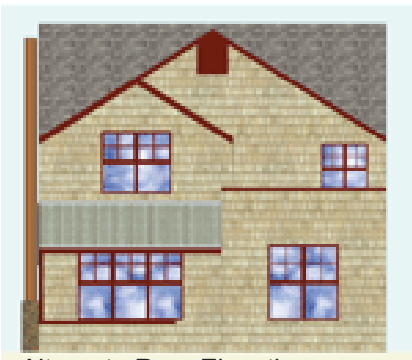
Right Elevation



Left Elevation



Rear Elevation



Alternate Rear Elevation

PROJECT 4: THE VILLAGE

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Site Plan

Coupeville’s medium density zoning requires 9600 square feet of land and severely restricts the number of units that can be built on that space. While the cottage overlay district permits higher densities, “cottage” developments have so far proven to be unsuccessful in Coupeville. On the other hand, monster houses purchased or built by retirees continue to proliferate. The solution for a developer is simple; build more monster houses. Note above that the houses in *The Village* are set back consistent with other houses in the area. They have garages whose doors are on the side rather than facing the street and boast neighborhood friendly front porches (rockers free if you act now!). The houses comply with required setbacks and feature architecture that acquiesces in the recommended standards -- gabled and pitched roofs, facades whose windows are comprised of multiple lights, and walls sheathed in clapboards and shingles. Arguably, compliance with these standards would be irrelevant if a development’s net effect is offensive to those standards. A case could be made that the massive scale of these houses -- approximately 4800 square feet -- is simply too large. But these houses are outside the “historic area.” Given their popularity in the marketplace and their consistency with explicit legal requirements, denial of approval by the town would raise serious questions of equal protection and due process. Given the hesitation of local municipalities to bring suit in the Jefford’s controversy, it is probable that Coupeville can be sufficiently intimidated by threat of lawsuits to approve their construction. Of course, this just demonstrates that there are much more serious issues to confront than front porches and gabled roofs.

A stroll at the water’s edge,
a sprinkle of rain,
a neighbor’s wave,
clouds glowing crimson in the sky ...

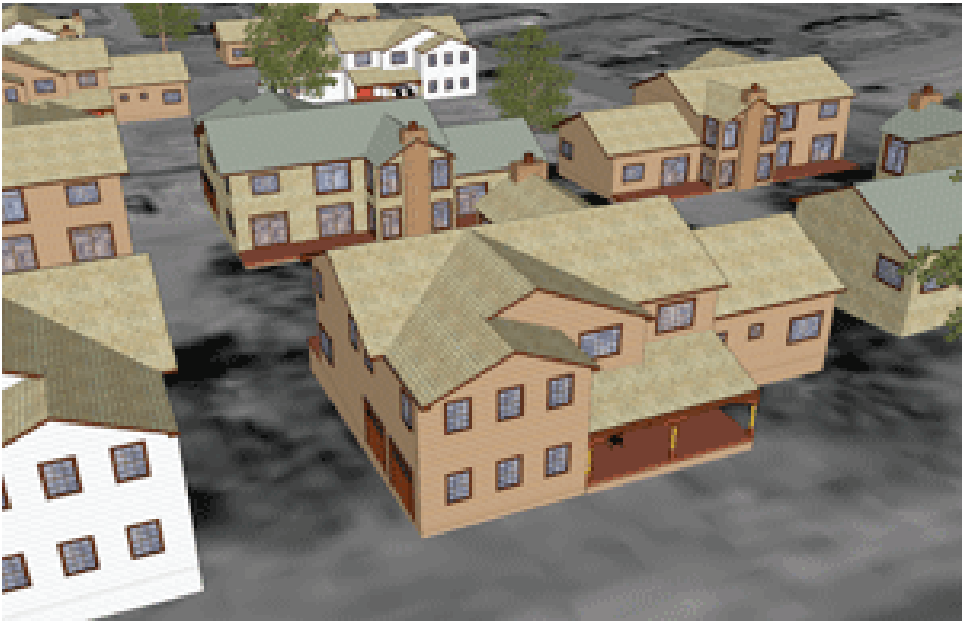
Why settle for just another “community”
When you can own something ***special***
at **THE VILLAGE**?

* Advertsing copy and images courtesy of Premier Homes of the Pacific Northwest



Perspective

A porch ...



A chair ...



Are yours to share ...



At the **VILLAGE**!

CONCLUSIONS

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What is Coupeville's future?

This?



This?



Or this?



Or is this even the right question?

I. Coupeville is unique -- special by virtue of history, its surviving nineteenth century architecture, and its unique relationship both to a pastoral landscape and the sea. The latter is especially unusual. The only similar area I'm aware of on the Pacific coast is Point Reyes National Seashore, another very special and very "protected" place.

II. Coupeville is not unique. Every city and town in the United States has been convulsed in the same postwar orgy of destruction and construction, social isolation and fragmentation, a quasi-pharmaceutical daze of malls, media, and consumption. It can be seen in Coupeville in strip shopping centers, a juvenile detention center on Main Street, a Main street whose scale cries out to be fed by fast food, and whose hills and surrounding pastures are becoming populated by someone else's idea of heavenly reward on earth. (This gives a whole new meaning to "Apocalypse Now!")

III. If there is a simple or even complex set of rules that one can prescribe as an antidote for threats to Coupeville's architectural future, I am at a loss to know what they are. The effort to formulate such rules has resulted in regulations that are nothing short of Kafkaesque -- high densities that aren't high, setbacks higher for areas zoned high density than for lower densities, setbacks for streets that exist only on paper, minimum lot sizes that virtually guarantee a pattern of sprawling suburban development that is the principal scourge of Coupeville's "vintage" character.

IV. A revised zoning code based on recommended or ideal forms and relationships is one possible solution. Such codes are currently being enacted or seriously considered across the country. They are as yet untested and the jury remains out on their long term effectiveness.

V. Any set of rules or idealized forms poses threats to creativity and individuality. **Law is not design. In law, rules are meant to be bent. In design, rules are meant to be broken.**

VI. Perhaps the best prescription is the process in which we have been engaged in the entire term, helping a community raise its consciousness about its freedom to make choices about its future. It doesn't have to accept the options provided to it by developers who lack imagination (and probably good judgment). It doesn't have to follow the rules set down by someone else with more money, political clout, or lawyers with nice suits. They can exercise their own judgment. They can make their own rules and break those rules when necessitated by circumstance (they're called variances). In short, they can be creative. And in that creativity is power they probably never knew they had.