

How Do You Define Community Character?

Adapting the Environmental Impact Statement Process to Snoqualmie, Washington

By Gary Pivo

Urban planners face growing concern over threats to community character. People use terms like rural, neighborhood, village and urban character to describe something they value and are asking planners to evaluate development's impacts upon it.

Many planners are unsure of what people mean by character or how to do character impact assessment. They understand environmental, social and fiscal impact analysis but are unaware that they can adapt these procedures to the issue of community character. The following case tells how the environmental impact assessment process was adapted to evaluate the character impacts of a master planned community on a small rural village near Seattle, Washington.

A Growing Concern

With each passing decade, planners add another issue to their list of responsibilities. The 1960s saw the inclusion of social equality, the 1970s added the environment, the 1980s added traffic and the 1990s may add community character. Newspaper articles, public opinion surveys and public policies have begun to reflect the character issue. For example, a recent *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* article on a proposed super regional mall in Auburn, Washington, discussed how the downtown Auburn master plan was designed to give the area more "hometown character" and reported that one issue involved balancing the potential tax base against "a change in the city's character."¹

On the east coast, Shelbourne, Vermont, conducted a community survey during a town plan update. Out of 37 possible community objectives, people ranked "preserve small town character" first and "preserve rural character" third.²

Many public policies also refer to community character. For example:

Small Town

- "The rural element [of local comprehensive plans] shall permit land uses that are compatible with the rural character of such lands..." (1990 Growth Management Act, Section 7(5), Washington State)
- "The character and integrity of existing neighborhoods will be preserved..." (City of Haywood, California, General Policies Plan, Policy IV-20, 1986)

Thus through discussions on land use issues, community surveys and public policies, people are voicing their concern over the maintenance of community character.

The Meaning of Character

What do people mean by character? The *Lexicon Webster Dictionary* defines it as "a distinctive trait, quality or attribute," something's "essential quality or nature," and "reputation." But, what attributes produce the essential quality of a place?

Sociology and urban design have dealt the most with this question and each has a different perspective on the answer. Sociologists naturally focus on social characteristics. According to Roland Warren, various criteria, "thought to characterize communities include a specific population living within a specific geographic area, amongst whom there are present shared institutions and values and significant social interaction."³ The emphasis is on people, their institutions and their interrelationships.

Urban designers are more inclusive and emphasize the natural, visual and cultural characteristics. According to Harry Garnham, "Each and every place has some measure of unique

Gary Pivo teaches in the Department of Urban Design and Planning at the University of Washington and directs the university's Grow A Management Clearinghouse, 410 Gould Hall, JO-40, University of Washington, Seattle, Washington, 98195. Pivo was hired as a consultant to devise a character assessment for the City of Snoqualmie, Washington, when the Snoqualmie Ridge development was announced.

November-December, 1992



What do people mean by character? Can a community's character include the beauty of a spectacular waterfall? These are questions faced by the City of Snoqualmie, Washington (population 1,600), as it anticipates changes caused by a planned unit development proposed for the community. Snoqualmie, a traditional lumber and mill town lying 20 miles east of Seattle, Washington, faces a continuing decline in timber-related jobs. Increasingly, the community has turned to tourism to fill the void. Snoqualmie Falls forms the centerpiece of the community's tourist trade. All photographs in this article are courtesy of Gary Pivo.

November-December, 1992

expression or quality...[and contains] locally special attributes." Garnham says these include aspects of the existing natural environment, the sensory experience (primarily visual) and cultural expressions such as historical structures. Edward Ward offers a similar view. He argues that the aesthetics of rural character lies between the natural and cultural context.⁴

The Case of Snoqualmie Ridge

The City of Snoqualmie (population 1,600) lies 20 miles east of Seattle, Washington, in the Snoqualmie Valley along Interstate 90 and beside the Snoqualmie River (see Map 1). It began as a logging town and the lumber mill continues to operate. Recently, the railroad through the center of town and the downtown station were transformed into an historic railway and became successful tourist attractions. Another tourist attraction is spectacular Snoqualmie Falls which attracts tens of thousands of visitors each year.

In 1988, the Weyerhaeuser Real Estate Development Company, a subsidiary of the Weyerhaeuser Corporation, the owners of the mill, proposed a major development on Snoqualmie Ridge above the city (see Map 2). The plan involved annexing three square miles designated for rural uses in the 1985 King County Comprehensive Plan. The company would phase the project over 30 years and it would contain workplaces for 12,000 workers, housing for 9,000 residents, two golf courses and retail services.

While many residents supported the project, others saw a threat to the

Small Town

community's rural and small town character. For example, a former King County Executive said, "It can't help but significantly damage the rural character of the Snoqualmie Valley," and the president of Friends of the Snoqualmie Valley said, "It sets the stage for a massive conversion of what are currently a rural area and a small town to a large, dense, urban city."

Protecting community character was not new to Snoqualmie. The city's comprehensive plan included a goal to "promote and maintain high quality residential development which is appropriate to the rural character of the [area]" and that "protection and enhancement of the rural character...should be an essential part of the balanced land use concept of development."

The city decided to prepare a study on Snoqualmie Ridge's impacts on the area's rural character and hired the author to prepare it. It included four phases similar to ones found in the environmental impact assessment process. Phase 1 involved scoping to determine the elements of rural character that the development would significantly affect. Phase 2 inventoried the existing condition of these elements and projected the impacts. Phase 3 developed mitigation strategies. In Phase 4 the results were presented and used in the decision-making process.

Phase 1: The Scoping Process

The goal of scoping was to define the community's distinguishing elements that the development might significantly alter. Several assumptions guided the investigation and analysis later confirmed them. One said the elements contributing to a city's character are different from those contributing to the surrounding countryside's character. Another said character is determined by a composite of natural characteristics (e.g., the prevalence of wildlife), built characteristics (e.g., the scale and arrangement of streets and buildings), economic characteristics (e.g., the kinds of work that people do), and socio-cultural characteristics (e.g., political preferences or community traditions).

Our third assumption was that there are recognized characteristics (such as a well-known historical site) that people know contribute to the area's character and unrecognized characteristics that people do not consciously recognize. A fourth assumption was that different characteristics are important to different types of people but some are important to nearly everyone.

We used several methods to uncover the character-giving elements:

- We studied local documents including the city and county comprehensive plans, written and oral comments made on the project's draft environmental impact statement, historical studies of the community and newspaper accounts of public opinion.
- We held focus groups with people who lived and worked

Small Town

in various parts of the area. Different groups represented old timers, newcomers, town residents and countryside residents. Discussion involved topics such as what people liked most about the area, where they would take visitors to give them a feel for Snoqualmie, or how would you describe Snoqualmie to someone overseas.

- We mailed a questionnaire to residents to collect information on their backgrounds, opinions, lifestyles and impressions of whether the community had a character and why.
- We studied published statistics to see how the area compared to the county, the region and suburban cities nearby.
- We reviewed literature on ruralism and small towns to find out about relevant characteristics in other circumstances.
- We examined recent surveys of county residents including one done for the county's Snoqualmie Community Plan.
- We made field studies and examined maps to analyze physical elements of community form such as street patterns, lot sizes and the distances from neighborhoods to open spaces.

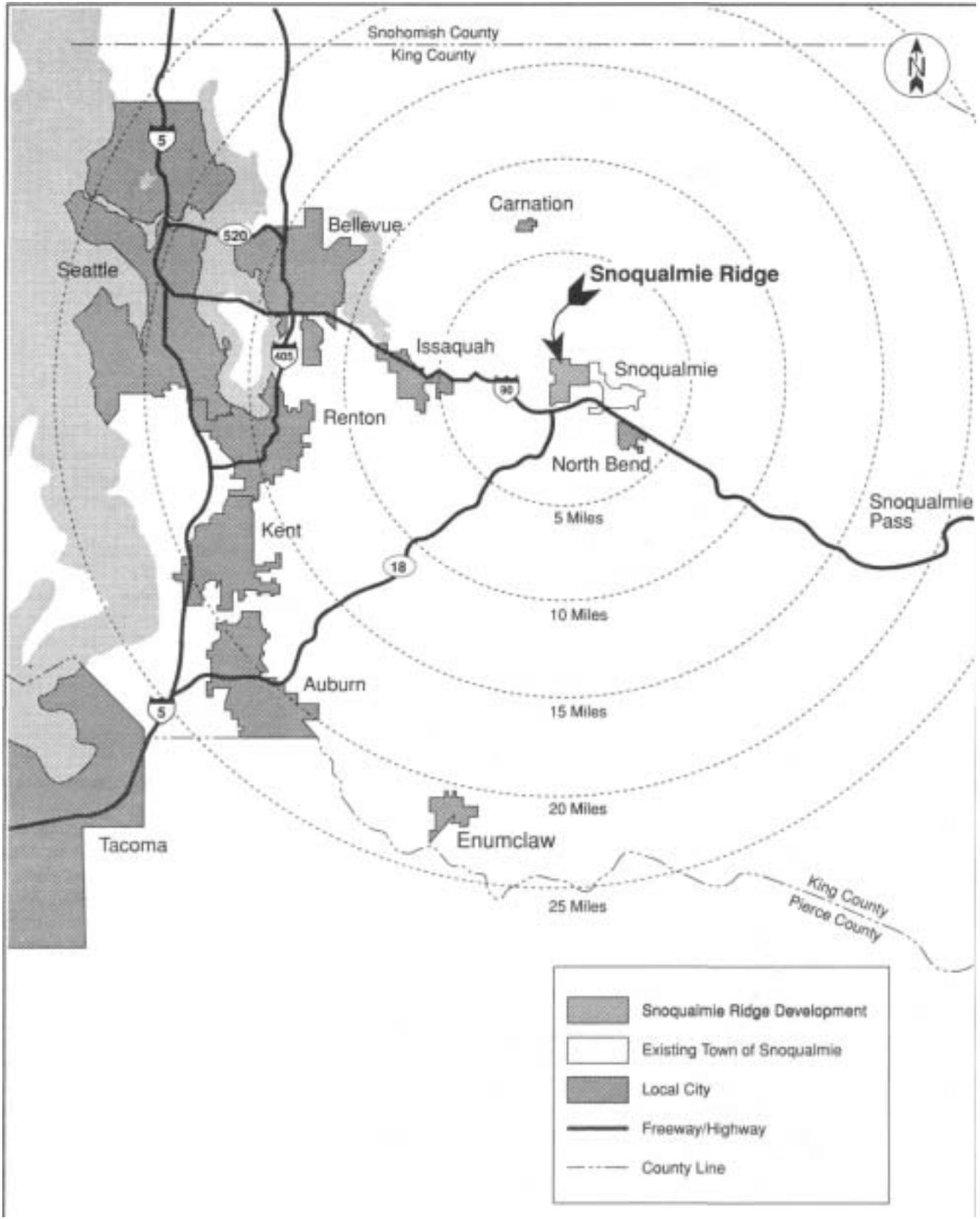
The questionnaire returns illustrate the kinds of results we obtained. We sent the questionnaire to a random sample of registered voters in and around Snoqualmie, as well as individuals on the city's list of water customers. We wanted to identify what they thought were the most important community characteristics and included both open- and closed-ended questions. People had to respond to questions about both the city and the surrounding countryside.

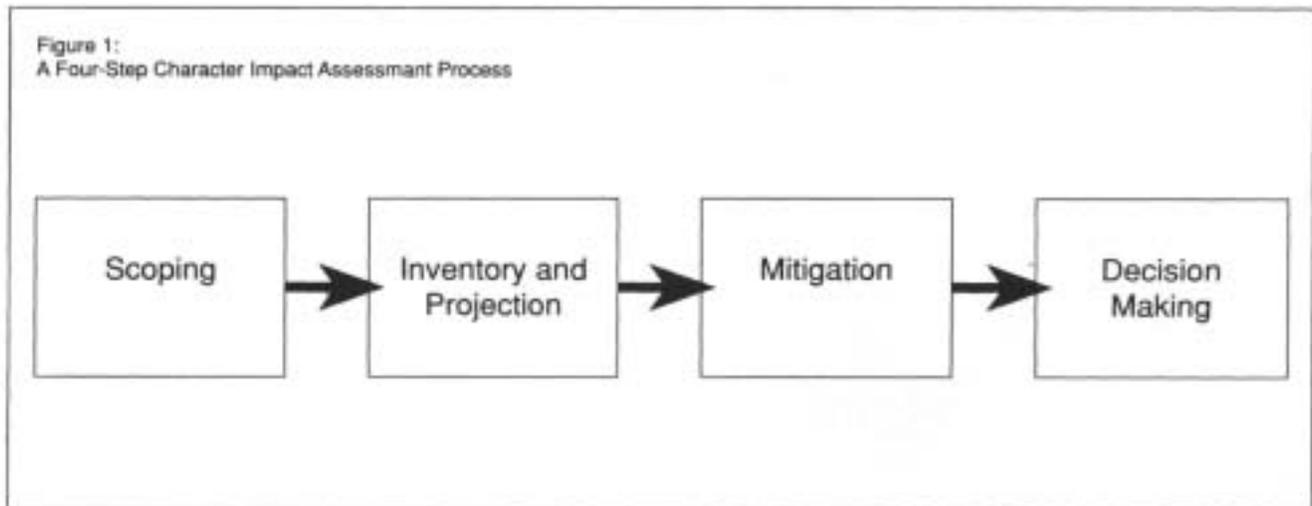
Respondents indicated that the city proper had an identifiable character. Ninety-eight percent agreed or strongly agreed that "Snoqualmie is a small town." Eighty-six percent agreed or strongly agreed that "Snoqualmie has a character all its own." The qualities or places they thought contributed most to the character included the friendly small town atmosphere, the scenic beauty, the people, Snoqualmie Falls, the train station, access to recreation and wilderness, and the logging history and industry. The results verified the assumption that a composite of characteristics contributed to character including socio-cultural (the people), physical (scenic beauty) and economic (logging industry).

Respondents gave equally strong but different answers concerning the surrounding countryside's character. This verified the assumption that different elements composed the city's and the countryside's character. The most important characteristics included expansive open spaces, farming,

November-December, 1992

Map1:
Snoqualmie Ridge Development in Context to the Region





logging, wildlife and farm animals. Compared with the city, people placed much less emphasis on social factors.

The survey results were also notable for the answers not given. Published data and field studies indicated the area was very different from suburban communities to the west but residents didn't mention many of these. For example, Snoqualmie exhibited a more liberal voting pattern and the neighborhoods were more pedestrian-oriented for walking to shops and parks. People didn't mention these items in the surveys, particularly without cues from the questioner. This reinforced the assumption that we would find both recognized and unrecognized characteristics and reminds one of a Joni Mitchell lyric, "that you don't know what you've got till it's gone."

The survey and the other scoping efforts resulted in a list of Snoqualmie's important community characteristics (see Table 1) which overlaps lists of environmental conditions used in environmental impact assessments,⁵ and social conditions used for social impact assessments.⁶ Character impact assessment is indeed a synthesis of these methods. Other communities facing similar problems can use the checklist as a starting point for a local scoping effort.

Phase 2: Impact Projection

We took three steps to project the proposal's character impacts. We first determined the proposal components that might affect the important characteristics. Second, we inventoried existing conditions, and third, we predicted how the development might change them.

We determined the proposal components that might affect community character by preparing a matrix similar to ones used to define interrelationships between environmental elements and development activities.⁷ The main difference was that we replaced the list of environmental conditions with a list

of community characteristics and replaced the list of causal factors with project elements suspected of having some relationship to the characteristics. Figure 1 shows the completed matrix. This focused the analysis on the project components most likely to cause impacts on community character.

Project elements indicated by the matrix as most frequently having a relationship with community characteristics included: size, growth rate, location, land use, neighborhood design, street and infrastructure plans, housing types and prices, employment composition, landscaping, the planning process and off-site growth-inducing effects. Once we completed the matrix, we projected the impacts on each community characteristic by inventorying and describing existing conditions and estimating the changes that the proposed development would cause.

We used various sources of data on existing conditions. We collected data on economic and demographic characteristics from the city, the regional council of governments, the U.S. Census, the survey, focus group discussions and primary field observations. The project's environmental impact statement gave us data on physical factors, including housing, circulation, infrastructure and natural systems. Information on land use, town scale, separation between settlements, lot patterns, neighborhood design and other factors came from U.S. Geological Survey topographical maps, city maps, air photographs and field observations recorded as notes, photographs and sketches. Social characteristics (e.g., voting, education and crime) came from census, county and city records. We gathered social data about religious and social activity from community organizations and churches. The mail questionnaire provided some social information such as where residents' friends lived and the balance of old timers to newcomers.

We used three techniques to forecast project impacts. The first estimated how existing characteristics would change if the project were built. In most instances we estimated the



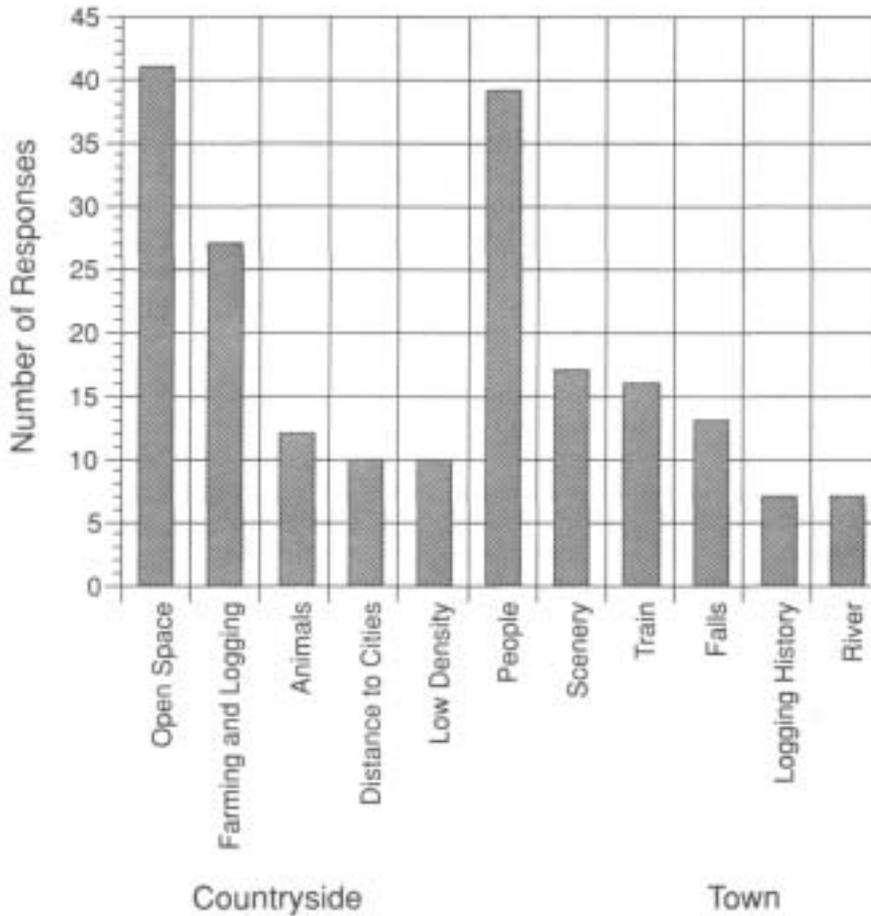
A group of railroad enthusiasts have transformed the railroad running through the center of Snoqualmie, as well as, the old downtown depot, (top) into an historic tourist attraction. The rides offered along the railway (center) have turned Snoqualmie into a desired tourist venue. The city developed the land along the tracks into a park (bottom) that honors the community's timber and railroad past.



Table 1:
Character Giving Elements and Indicators in Snoqualmie, Washington

Economic	percentage of lots remaining vacant.	Trees and vegetation: acres of undeveloped forest and farmland; density of vegetation in the city.
Residents' occupations: percentage of blue collar; percentage of timber and agriculture.	Separation from the city/suburbs: distance to nearest neighboring city/suburb.	Noise: levels; timing.
Jobs in community: percentage in timber and agriculture industry.	Residential density: median lot size; median dwellings per acre of residential land.	Lighting: density of visible stars at night.
Jobs/housing balance (self-containment): percentage of residents employed in the vicinity.	Mix of land uses: percentage of residential; percentage of open space; percentage of employment; percentage of vacant land.	Social
Income distribution: mix of income groups.	Town edge: amount of leapfrog development; amount of low density.	Political participation and preferences: proportion of registered voters who vote; proportion of population registered to vote; mix of party affiliation; positions on environmental issues.
Journey to work: length of commute; mode of commute.	Historic structures and places: number of historic structures and places.	Community cohesion: level of agreement on community goals.
Job growth: rate of increase.	Circulation and traffic: number of cars per minute on main streets; proportion of roads meeting suburban standards.	Crime: crime rates.
Business ownership and services: proportion of business owned locally; prices and types of local goods and services available.	Neighborhood design: block and lot dimensions; lot coverage and setbacks; street dimensions and pattern; tree density; building dimensions; land use mix; total area size.	Friendships: proportion of residents whose relatives and best friends live in the community/area; proportion of customers known to store clerks and vice versa.
Demographic	Infrastructure Character: taste/quality of drinking water; proportion of homes with mail delivery; number of phone number prefixes.	Clubs, sports and organizations: participation rate; sense of invasion, turnover; rate of growth and change.
Population Growth: rate of increase.	Commercial building scale: height/bulk; facade width.	Education levels: education level of population.
Population age: mix of age groups.	Town entrance: natural setting of town entrance; distance from town to freeway.	Religious activity: proportion of population active in church/synagogue; growth and change in congregations.
Household Types: proportion of households with children.	Scenic beauty: number and quality of views to the countryside; air quality/visibility; naturalness of views around Snoqualmie Falls area.	Sense of control: sense of control over change.
Retired population: proportion of population over 65 years of age.		Balance of old timers and newcomers: proportion of residents that arrived within 5 years; proportion of families with 2 or more generations living in town; proportion of residents whose parents lived in town.
Physical		
Housing stock: percentage of detached housing; medium home price and rent; value of existing homes; average number of bedrooms.		
Open space: percentage of area undeveloped.		
Town area and form: square miles of town area; average distance from neighborhoods to open space; number of town centers;		

Figure 2:
Commonly Given Elements of Snoqualmie
Town and Country Character



change by adding the project to existing conditions and recalculating them. For example, we projected change in the community growth rate by adding the project growth rate to the existing growth rate and recalculating a new overall rate. This was feasible for known project elements, such as the land use mix, densities and housing prices.

The second technique used to project impacts was to compare conditions in Snoqualmie to another town where developers had completed a similar project. This required interviews, analysis of secondary data and field observations at the other community. The third technique predicted impacts based on their known association with project characteristics or impacts. For example, city population was known to be

associated with increased crime rates.

The following discussion illustrates these methods using some of the important impacts that we projected. The full impact analysis is available in the original report.⁸

We projected that an acceleration of the ongoing shift from a resource-based economy to a higher-paid, white collar, office-based economy would cause most of the changes in the area's economic character. Over 80 percent of survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that "natural resource production was an important part of the community's character." One out of every four respondents listed logging or farming as contributing to the countryside's rural character. In 1980, 30 percent more Snoqualmie area residents worked in nonoffice and blue collar occupations than residents in nearly suburban cities. Snoqualmie also had a higher percentage of timber industry jobs. We projected the number of jobs the Ridge would create by multiplying the proposed business park's acreage by the worker density found in similar ones. The type of jobs created were projected by examining the developer's projections for tenants, the park's physical character, the proportion of floor area planned for office use and the experience of the comparison case study. The indicators pointed to a job mix heavily oriented toward white collar office work. We added the proposed number and mix of jobs to the existing job mix and recalculated the overall composition to determine the change this would cause in the local employment base. Timber jobs would shrink from 13 to 3 percent of total employment and service jobs would grow from 17 to 43 percent.

We also said the type and ownership of retail business would change. Residents owned virtually every retail business in town. But, Snoqualmie also had a limited variety of services and shops compared to larger cities, such as music, book and plant stores. The focus groups revealed that this contributed to a sense of remoteness and required residents to carefully plan shopping trips to the bigger cities and not take conveniences for granted.

The comparison case suggested that once the area exceeded a certain population threshold, it would attract regional or national chains and the diversity of services would increase. In the comparison case, a larger population supported several

chain stores including McDonald's and a full complement of suburban shopping services. In a worst case scenario, competition from these chains would drive the locally-owned shops in downtown Snoqualmie out of business.

Other changes would occur in the area's population and demographic character. In the mail questionnaire, 81 percent felt, "things have changed slowly," in the area—reflected by the slow population growth rate. The survey also indicated that residents associated the small population size with small town character. More than 95 percent agreed that Snoqualmie and two other cities, each with fewer than 2,300 residents, were small towns, but only about 25 percent said that a nearby town with 7,200 people was a small town. Residents also said that the higher percentage of families with children was a factor that gave the community its character. Census data confirmed this belief.

We projected impacts on population and demographic character by evaluating the types and prices of housing, the age and household structure in the comparison case, along with the developer's population projections and the development phasing plan. These indicated that the city's population would grow to over 10,000 at a much faster pace than in the past. The comparison case indicated that in the earlier phases of development, the retired portion of the population would probably increase, but with the creation of more jobs, younger households with children would replace the retired population.

Changes in the community's physical characteristics were projected by comparing the pattern of development and open space before the project with the pattern that would exist after project completion. Plans and models prepared by the developer were useful for this purpose. However, many design details, such as neighborhood street patterns, had not yet been planned. We projected them by analyzing the comparison case and concluded that the proposal would eliminate a variety of open landscapes critical to the area's character and introduce lower density suburban development where the higher density village form had been the dominant style.

Snoqualmie residents most commonly cited the wide open countryside as contributing to the area's rural character. They also cited it as a reason why they liked living there. They valued its resources, recreational opportunities, beauty, ecology and the separation it provided between the city and the "outside world" of suburbia ten miles to the west. They frequently said the view from the Snoqualmie Falls overlook was an important place in the community.

The development plan would have made changes in the open space pattern. The percentage of open space in the Snoqualmie area would fall from 95 percent to around 80 percent. Two other areas which the survey respondents identified as not rural contained between 80 and 85 percent open space. This suggested that the development might reduce the proportion of open space to below the level necessary for existing residents to perceive the area as rural. Other analyses showed that the separation between Snoqualmie and the

nearest city to the west would be reduced from five to two miles. The project would also include several hundred houses lying within the Snoqualmie Falls overlook viewshed. All of these changes, but particularly the last, would significantly impact important community characteristics.

The suburban form of the proposed development would impact other physical characteristics. It would introduce much larger street blocks, lots and neighborhoods than the existing ones. Existing neighborhoods were small-scaled, typically composed of six to eight 120- by 600-foot blocks and totaled 10 to 12 acres in size. A traditional street grid with streets running no more than a few blocks in length formed the blocks. Each neighborhood had 70 to 100 homes on 5,000- to 7,000-square-foot lots. All of the neighborhoods lay less than four blocks from the town center. These dimensions resulted in very little traffic on neighborhood streets, a sense of intimacy within the neighborhoods and a common bond to the town center. Townspeople did not identify these physical traits as important to community character but the sense of intimacy and low traffic volume they created were recognizable characteristics.

The size and arrangement of residential areas in the Ridge plan and an examination of the comparison case suggested that the new neighborhoods would be larger than existing ones and have larger lots, larger blocks and longer streets that would serve more homes and carry more traffic. This would encourage residents to drive to local services and make the city more auto and less pedestrian oriented.

Social Character

We projected social character changes by using both the comparison case study and other case studies in the literature. Most of these changes would occur because of an association with the economic and demographic changes expected from the development. Following are examples of the various associations identified. We based many of the assumptions about predictive relationships on empirical relationships found in the region or the judgment of professionals involved in social work in the area.

An increase in average household income should bring a change in political character leading to greater voter registration and more conservative voting patterns. These characteristics had a positive association in the county with income. Greater support for environmental protection and more negative attitudes towards logging also were expected because of their positive association with income.

We projected other social changes associated with the expected demographic changes. For example, participation rates in church activities and organized recreation would decline based upon the assumption that a smaller percentage of families with children and fewer older persons would generate lower participation rates.

The study based predictions about friendships on assumptions about their association with the average length of residence

Figure 3:
Relationships Between Impacts on Snoqualmie Characteristics and Project Elements That May Cause Them

	Total City/Project Size	Rate of Project Development	Gross Land Use Arrangement of Project	Gross Land Use Mix of Project	Location of Project	Site Plan, Design, Townscape of Project Components	Price and/or Type of Housing	Type and/or Income of Jobs Created	Architecture of Buildings	Landscape Architecture of Building Development	Gross Circulation System of Development	Infrastructure of Project	Planning Process
Impact	Causes of impacts,												
Resident's Occupations	●			●				●					
Jobs in Community	●			●			●	●					
Jobs/Housing Balance				●			●	●					
Income Distribution							●	●					
Journey to Work	●			●			●	●					
Job Growth		●					●	●					
Business Ownership/Services	●	●					●	●					
Population Growth	●	●		●			●	●				●	
Population Age							●	●					
Household Types						●	●	●					
Retired Population	●						●						
Housing Stock	●	●		●				●					
Open Space	●		●		●	●	●			●			
Town Area/Form	●			●		●				●	●	●	
Separation from City	●					●					●		
Residential Density			●			●	●	●					
Land Use Mix	●		●										
Town Edge			●		●					●			
Circulation/Traffic	●		●	●		●	●	●			●		
Neighborhood Design			●	●		●			●	●	●	●	
Infrastructure Character	●		●	●		●					●	●	
Commercial Building Scale	●	●	●	●		●		●	●				
Town Entrance						●				●	●		
Scenic Beauty			●		●	●			●	●	●	●	
Trees and Vegetation	●		●			●	●			●			
Noise	●					●		●			●		
Lighting	●			●	●	●			●	●		●	
Political Participation						●	●						
Community Cohesion	●	●		●			●					●	●
Crime	●	●				●	●	●	●	●		●	
Friendships	●	●											●
Clubs, Sports, Organizations	●	●					●	●				●	
Education Levels							●						
Religious Activity	●			●			●						
Sense of Control	●	●											●
Old/New Timers		●											
Politics	●	●		●		●	●	●	●	●	●	●	



The business district in Snoqualmie runs along one side of State Route 202. Businesses in the community consists entirely of small, locally owned retail and service establishments. The proposed rapid increase in population leaves little room for them to adapt. Few of the businesspeople have the funds to double or triple the size of their establishments in such a short time. Also, newcomers may not share the locals long-established relationship with these businesses. Newcomers usually have more familiarity with chain stores that are projected to move into the area.

in a community. The mail questionnaire and previous research suggested that the number of primary friendships developed from within the community is positively associated with length of residence.⁹ Consequently, the project would reduce the proportion of residents with primary friendships within the community because it would increase the proportion of new residents. This could change the level of friendliness, trust, cooperation and familiarity which the survey and focus groups said were important elements of town character.

A larger city size also changes social character. The crime rate and types of crime, as well as other social characteristics, are positively associated with income and community size.¹⁰ The projected growth in population and income implied an increase in crime rates and in property crimes as a share of the total crimes.

Phase 3: Mitigation Measures

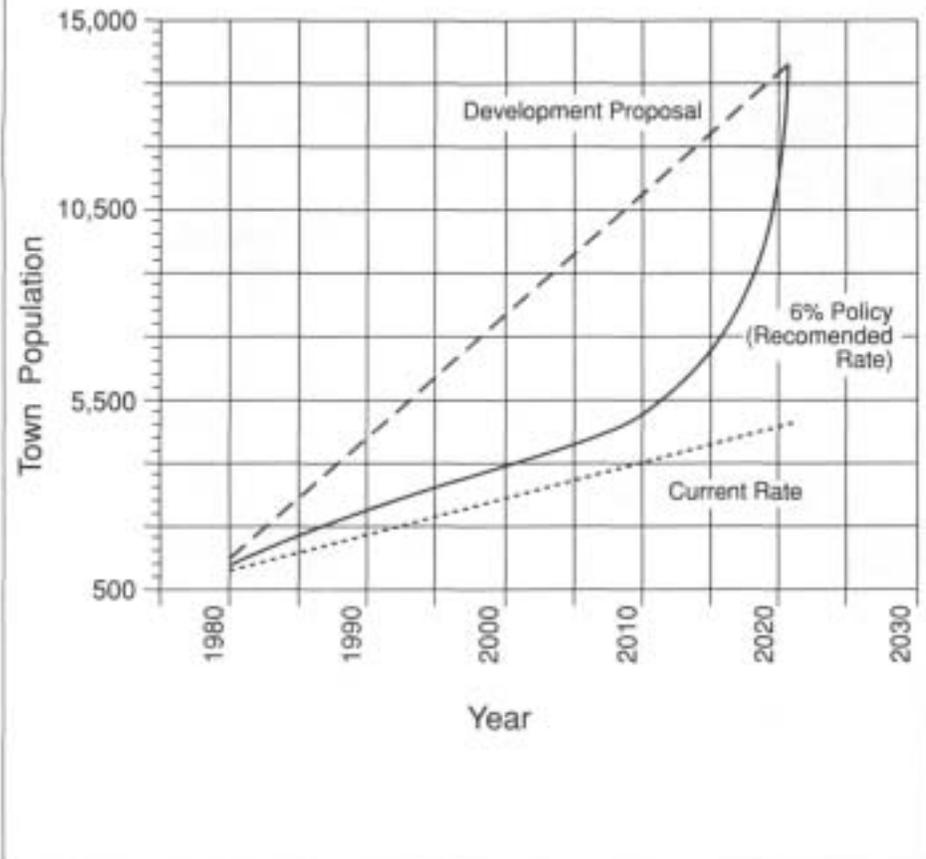
The mitigation measures can be categorized two ways. The first distinguishes between changes to proposed project elements and new project elements introduced to expressly mitigate impacts. The second distinguishes the type of element addressed by the measure. Seven elements were addressed:

land use planning and urban design, phasing, circulation, social and educational programs, economic development, infrastructure, and off-site policies and programs. In several instances, assumptions about what might mitigate impacts were tentative at best and could be improved with future research.

We proposed land use planning and urban design measures to mitigate impacts on community economic, demographic, social and physical characteristics. For example, the project could mitigate the shift from timber- and resource-related employment by reducing the scale of the business park. The shift toward a more affluent, younger population could be mitigated by building more affordable and senior housing. The loss of open space could be reduced by increasing the project's open space component and implementing off-site preservation programs. Impacts on the Snoqualmie Falls views could be eliminated by relocating part of the project. Adopting design measures known to discourage criminal activity could reduce crime problems.¹¹

We recommended a change in project phasing to reduce changes in social character associated with a rapid population increase. Slowing the project growth rate would reduce the proportion of newcomers in the community, which affects the

Figure 4:
Alternative Approaches to Development Phasing



level of social integration. We recommended balancing each project phase in terms of jobs, housing and infrastructure to reduce rapid changes in the community's demographics and to avoid turning Snoqualmie into a bedroom community.

The circulation system was a useful vehicle for mitigating impacts on the area's physical character. We recommended modifying the major road through the project to be similar to the forested corridor that already provided access to the community. We also suggested laying out neighborhood streets in variously oriented grids like in the existing neighborhoods. Then, we suggested constructing a train or trolley to the new area to extend the town's railroad ambience.

Community development and educational activities also could mitigate impacts on social character. A newcomers program would introduce new residents to community organizations and traditions, and provide opportunities to facilitate friendships and relationships between community residents. Educational materials, such as a brochure on commu-

November-December, 1992

nity history and logging's importance to the economy and culture, might temper conflicts that could surround the logging industry. We also recommended eliminating project elements that discouraged community integration or symbolized segregation, such as neighborhood walls and a separate town center.

Some recommended changes in project infrastructure included separating its well water from the town's spring fed supply in order to maintain its mountain spring flavor, retaining the single telephone prefix for the whole town in order to preserve the custom of referring to phone numbers by the last four digits and keeping mail pick up at the local post office rather than beginning home mail delivery.

Several mitigation measures relating to off-site impacts were recommended because of anticipated growth-inducing and spill-over effects. These included stronger open space and resource preservation programs, zoning to protect the existing commercial area's scale, establishing a view protection program and implementing measures to protect historic structures.

The Final Decision

The report's findings and recommendations were used in the public debate and negotiations over the project. Several goals relating to community character were included in the city's comprehensive plan element for Snoqualmie Ridge. These included:

- That a balanced mix of land uses be provided to avoid creating a bedroom community.
- That the development be designed around elements of existing community character.
- That land uses be compatible and sensitive to the city's existing rural and small town character and minimize automobile usage for meeting residents' daily needs.
- That neighborhoods created be compatible with small town character.

Several specific policies also were adopted to help achieve these goals:



Existing neighborhoods in Snoqualmie are small-scaled with a traditional street grid. The streets are no more than a few blocks in length. The suburban neighborhood form in the Ridge development would introduce much larger street blocks, lots, and neighborhoods than found in the existing town. The traditional village form of Snoqualmie represents a more compact and efficient settlement pattern than the proposed suburban model.

- The project was reduced by half.
- A single town center would serve both Ridge and town residents.
- Project traffic was limited to the amount existing off-site roads could accommodate without adding new lanes.
- No development or tree removal would occur in the Snoqualmie Falls viewshed.
- The city would not annex further rural lands beyond the project site.
- Design guidelines would be adopted to make development compatible with community character.
- The project would provide open space buffers sufficient to aurally and visually screen the project from adjacent land uses.
- Expansive surface parking in the business park would be separated from the entrance road by forest land in order

to maintain the existing experience of moving through a forest when driving between the city and freeway.

- A balance of jobs and affordable housing would be provided in every phase of development.
- Housing and jobs would be located within walking distance.
- Neighborhood retail services would be located in the immediate vicinity of residential and working areas.
- Historic district regulations would be adopted to protect the downtown area from incompatible redevelopment.
- New well water would not mix with the city's mountain spring water.
- Street and yard lighting would be minimized to preserve views of the starry night sky.

Not all of the recommendations were followed. Those falling outside of the typical scope of the project review

process were largely ignored. Most of those dealt with social or off-site open space impacts. The social programs seemed to be ignored because they were different from subjects normally addressed in the physically-oriented land use planning process. The growth-inducing effects on unincorporated rural open space appeared to go unaddressed because the city had no planning authority over them and couldn't work cooperatively with the county because the county opposed the project for conflicting with the county comprehensive plan. This suggests that until legal or political forces demand we pay greater attention to social and interjurisdictional issues, they may receive limited attention in policy discussions on community character.

Conclusion

A growing number of planners will face the issue of community character in the coming decade. They will need to assess the impacts of plans and projects on character in a variety of environments—from urban to rural.

The Snoqualmie Ridge case suggests that the environmental impact assessment framework can be adapted to character impact studies. The procedure follows a typical process of scoping, analysis, mitigation and decision. The scoping phase is a major task because of the need to define the significant elements of a community's character. It involves identifying characteristics that are both recognized and unrecognized by community members.

Important characteristics can be physical, demographic, social and economic and will differ among places. We can analyze impacts by making comparisons between development proposals and existing community character, by associating known project characteristics or impacts with other impacts and by using comparative studies of communities that have already experienced developments. Mitigation measures can include changes to project elements that would cause impacts and new project elements that would reduce impacts. However, the acceptance of mitigation measures which require jurisdictions to cooperate or that address social issues which are less common to environmental and physical planning circles will be difficult.

One potential problem with this approach is that it tends to reduce the character of a place to individual characteristics, leading to protecting some characteristics and not others. It is possible that community character is a summational or holistic phenomenon that requires maintenance of a critical mass or system of characteristics. We know almost nothing about the interdependencies among community characteristics and need to learn whether we must maintain certain groups of them in order to protect a certain type of community character.

The collection of characteristics addressed here suggests that community character impact assessment combines elements of social, urban design, economic and environmental studies. Indeed, many of the important characteristics identified are already studied to some degree in these other

fields. More important, however, than whether character impact assessment is a new field or a synthesis of existing ones is that it is time for planners to understand what gives a place its character and how to analyze impacts upon it.

¹George Foster, "Huge Mall Still Only a Proposal," *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, My 9, 1991.

²David E. Robinson, "A Survey with a Difference," *Planning*, Vol. 57, No. 1, January, 1991, pp. 22-23.

³Roland L. Warren, *The Community in America*, 2nd Edition, Chicago: Rand McNally and Company, 1972, p.2.

⁴Harry L. Garnham, *Maintaining the Spirit of Place: A Process for the Preservation of Town Character*, Mesa, Arizona: PDA Publishers, 1985; Edward Ward, "Report on the First Conference on the Aesthetics of the Rural Renaissance," *Design Methods and Theories, Journal of the Design Methods Group*, Vol. 22, No. 2, 1988, pp. 830-832.

⁵Thomas Dickert, "Methods of Environmental Impact Assessment: A Comparison," in Thomas Dickert, Editor, *Environmental Impact Assessment: Guidelines and Commentary*, Berkeley, California: University of California Extension, 1974, pp. 129-131.

⁶Kathleen Christensen, *Social Impacts of Land Development: An Initial Approach for Estimating Impacts on Neighborhood Usages and Perceptions*, Washington, D.C.: The Urban Institute, 1976, pp. 3, 18-19, 23-25.

⁷Dickert, p. 133.

⁸Gary Pivo and Associates, *Impacts of the Snoqualmie Ridge Annexation Proposal on the Small Town and Rural Character of the Upper Snoqualmie Valley*, Snoqualmie, Washington: City of Snoqualmie, 1988.

⁹Peter Rossi, *Why Families Move*, 2nd Edition, Beverly Hills, California: Sage Press, 1980, pp. 85-89.

¹⁰Richard Appelbaum, *The Effects of Urban Growth: A Population Impact Analysis*, New York: Praeger, 1976, p. 27. ¹¹Oscar Newman, *Defensible Space: Crime Prevention Through Urban Design*, New York: MacMillan Company, 1972.