

FALL 2006

OPAL NEWSLETTER

HOUSING ISLAND PEOPLE, MAINTAINING ISLAND CHARACTER

OPAL ADDRESSES IMPACTS OF NEW NEIGHBORHOOD

The process of designing the Mt. Baker Road neighborhood began last April when the public was invited to give feedback during a design charette. The design team—made up of architects, engineers, sustainability experts, and OPAL staff and board members—visited the site and listened to OPAL's needs, standards, and vision for the project. The result is a conceptual site plan (see page four) that will now allow OPAL to move forward with platting, permitting, and site work. Even with an open and inclusive design process, not everyone agrees with all the decisions. The major tensions in the Mt. Baker Road development have arisen from issues of density and neighbor relations.

DENSITY. OPAL has received contradictory messages about density. Donors consider it OPAL's responsibility to make the greatest use of the land they helped to purchase—in short, to get the “biggest bang for their buck.” An alternative view has been expressed by some current OPAL

homeowners, who argue that plans for a high-density development on Mt. Baker Road are the antithesis of what OPAL does, which is to build neighborhoods that foster healthy communities. Because of the tremendous need on the island for affordable homes, the lack of available land, and the high cost of land, OPAL feels it must get the most it can out of the space available—recognizing that OPAL standards for building and quality of life will not be compromised.

“Density is perceived, not measured,”
—William Krieger, Mithun

NEIGHBOR RELATIONS. Despite OPAL's best efforts and intentions, not everyone who will be affected by the Mt. Baker Road development is happy. These are some of the ways that OPAL is trying to lessen the impact on neighbors:

- Homes will be sited to avoid casting shadows on neighboring homes.
- Homes will be sited away from property lines, as much as is practical while still maintaining solar gain, daylight, and private spaces.
- Visual separation will be created through careful grading, fencing, berms, and landscaping.

“I like the idea of having lots of good neighbors,” —Ginny Reagles

One neighbor who is basically pleased is Ginny Reagles, the nearest neighbor to the southwest on Mt. Baker Road. In fact, she is a double neighbor, as the back of her property abuts OPAL's Oberon Wood neighborhood. Based on her experience with Oberon Wood, Ginny commented, “I know what OPAL does, how careful they are in every detail, the quality of their homes, the attention paid to the ground, the trees, etc. I'm excited to have

the new neighborhood going in on Mt. Baker Road. I'm going to be 65 next year, and I like the idea of having lots of good neighbors.”

FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR: LISA BYERS



The phrase “dynamic tension” describes a situation in which apparently opposing forces, or opinions, are expressed and analyzed in an effort to reach common resolution. OPAL’s staff and trustees regularly engage in discussions where dynamic tension exists, but two examples discussed in this newsletter are particularly complex: the design for the Mt. Baker Road property, and the idea (not realized) of including affordable housing in the lowlands of the Turtleback property.

Our mission states, in part, that “OPAL collaborates with others, develops improvements and stewards the land in a manner that is cooperative, stable, environmentally sensitive and socially responsible.” That statement in and of itself is filled with dynamism and with tensions.

Do we adhere to the values in our mission if we build the maximum number of homes allowed by zoning on the Mt. Baker Road property (the maximum allowed would be 56 homes)? What do we do when we can’t achieve our purpose without locating a new OPAL house in what is now a neighboring property owner’s bucolic pastoral view? How do we collaborate effectively with the Preservation Trust, for example, when their mission is to conserve land, and our mission is to provide affordable access and housing on land?

Articles in this newsletter reveal how OPAL’s trustees and staff resolved some of the questions posed above. What I want to highlight here is the process we follow in making these decisions. Embedded in OPAL’s bylaws is a step-by-step process for consensus decision-making. The introduction states that “built into this process are the assumptions that we are all trustworthy, that we are all equal, and that each of us has part of the truth and none has all of it.” With skilled facilitation, this process assures that everyone has the opportunity to speak and that every opinion is honored.

In my experience with OPAL, consensus is the foundation for the trustees’ strong leadership. The trustees’ deliberations are civil, deeply thoughtful, highly informed, and, in the end, I believe, much more efficient than voting prematurely on an answer that has not fully matured. I am grateful to OPAL’s founders for adopting consensus in the bylaws, and I thank each trustee for embedding this value more deeply into OPAL’s organizational culture.

MISSION

The mission of OPAL Community Land Trust is to acquire and own land so that islanders in need may have access to permanently affordable homes and workplaces. OPAL collaborates with others, develops improvements, and stewards the land in a manner that is cooperative, stable, environmentally sensitive, and socially responsible.



OPAL’s annual auction raised more than \$30,000. Thanks to the lead volunteers who made it happen: Rinda McGarry, Libi Geddes, Heather Stansbury, Anne Marie Schultz and John Clancy. And, special thanks to our members and guests for their tremendous support!



FACES OF OPAL: THE VAN GELDERS ON LIVING WITH DESIGN

Ian Van Gelder was one of OPAL's very first homeowners, moving into the first cluster of five homes built at Opal Commons on October 1, 1993. He was involved in the early meetings and the full messy process of envisioning, designing, and then realizing the dream of permanently affordable housing on Orcas—together with the intention of creating community and respecting the land as a living being. When Kari joined Ian at Opal Commons in 1996, the house (and garden) began to grow with their relationship. First the upstairs of the one-bedroom house was divided to provide more function for two, then a studio for Kari's artistic endeavors sprouted in the backyard. In anticipation of starting a family, they added a second bedroom upstairs, along

with a family room and basement underneath. Margot's birth in 2001 brought lots of new energy and space needs (like a downstairs bathroom and a playhouse for Margot next to Kari's studio), and their structures continue to grow—like a living thing weaving vinelike through the Van Gelder family's daily lives. The latest offshoot is an office with a desk for each of them. Nearby, the newest member of the family, Banjo the Australian shepherd, makes his home on a blanket under the stairs.



Margot Rose, Ian and Kari Van Gelder in front of "Margot's House" at OPAL Commons.

After 13 years, how much of the original intent of the design of Opal Commons still serves the current homeowners? Even with the evolution in the Van Gelder household, the strongest basic intentions of the design hold true. The orientation of their home and the placement of windows, door, porches, and pathways (including those added later with a sensitivity to neighbors) give them some critical privacy, while the closeness of homes, connecting paths and gardens invite and enhance community. It is a family- and kid-friendly place to live. The mature (and beautiful) landscaping and gardens have fulfilled the desire to integrate the land and the homes with a sense of respecting and celebrating what is alive.

Ian and Kari are not disappointed with the way the neighborhood has evolved. "The intentional design nurtures and encourages those of us who want to be in community with friends and neighbors. It's no guarantee of community, but creates the opportunity. Also, it's not a spectacular thing, but an ordinary thing that has grown over the years. There is a sweetness and richness to it—the joy of just bumping into people that we are in long-term relationships with as neighbors in our daily loops; the ease of walking down a common pathway to visit a friend, borrow flour, pick up Margot from a neighbor's house, share a conversation. It's a wonderful and expansive

place for a child—a village where they know everyone and are loved by quite a few. When children are nurtured, adults can bask in that nurturing themselves," says Ian.

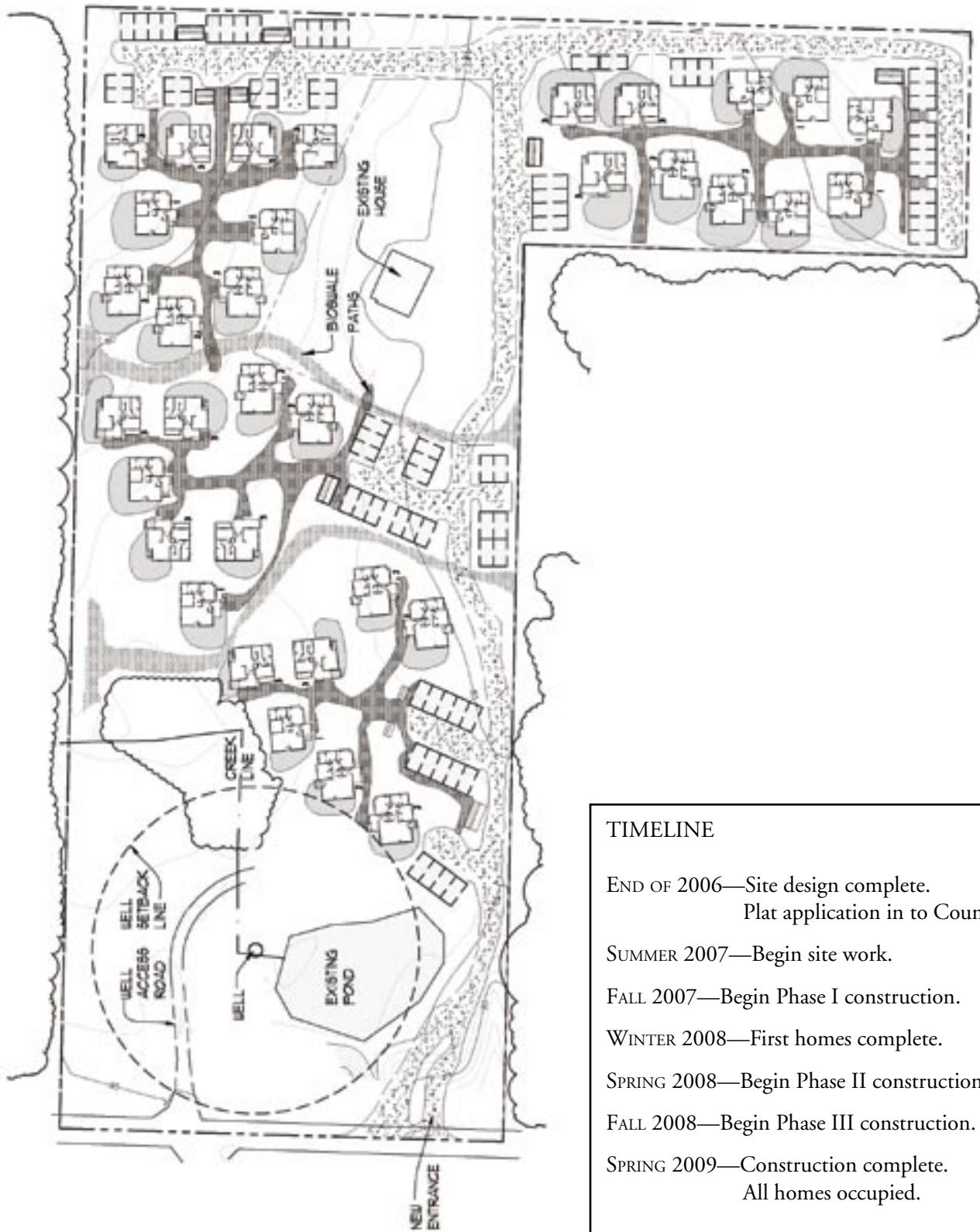
Ian has a busy acupuncture practice at the Healing Arts Center on Orcas and in Friday Harbor. He is on the board of Camp Indralaya and serves as the family gardener. Kari is an artist, landscaper, OPAL board member, and the family farmer. Margot is a five-year-old who delights in a daily round of art projects, berry and flower picking, and books. "We're homebodies," Kari explains. "We want to spend a lot of our time at home—and it's inconceivable that we would live anywhere else."

PLEASE JOIN OR RENEW YOUR MEMBERSHIP TODAY!

Gifts of all sizes are greatly appreciated and will be put to good use. A reply envelope is included for your convenience, or go to www.opalclt.org and just click on the "DONATE NOW" button to give online.

Thank you for your support!

MT BAKER ROAD CONCEPTUAL SITE PLAN



TIMELINE

END OF 2006—Site design complete.
Plat application in to County.

SUMMER 2007—Begin site work.

FALL 2007—Begin Phase I construction.

WINTER 2008—First homes complete.

SPRING 2008—Begin Phase II construction.

FALL 2008—Begin Phase III construction.

SPRING 2009—Construction complete.
All homes occupied.

MT. BAKER ROAD GREEN FEATURES

OPAL is committed to its rigorous green building standards in every project. The standards at their most basic suggest the use of durable materials as well as systems and finishes that improve indoor air quality for a healthy home. These sustainability guidelines aim to reduce maintenance and energy costs for the homeowner over the long term. On Mt. Baker Road, OPAL is committed to innovative green practices that include smaller footprints, green-space buffering and wildlife corridors, more pervious surfaces and responsible groundwater management.

PERVIOUS CONCRETE ROADS AND PATHWAYS. This project will be one of the first (possibly the very first) on Orcas to use this material and method. The porous concrete (concrete without the finest elements) allows water to percolate through to the aquifer. This method is more expensive than crushed gravel roads, which are typical on Orcas, and also presents a challenge during construction as subsoils must be protected from compaction. Pervious concrete roads will require some ongoing maintenance to remove clogging debris, but in the long run, pervious surfaces are less expensive than traditional pipe-and-ditch systems that flush groundwater to the Sound and more sustainable and responsible to the environment.

GRASS PAVERS are set in a bed of sand, filled with dirt and planted with grass, creating a mowable road that you can drive a fire truck on. These “green roads” will permit occasional vehicle traffic into the clusters of homes—for emergencies, piano deliveries, moving, etc.—while also functioning as green space, wildlife corridors and groundwater percolators.

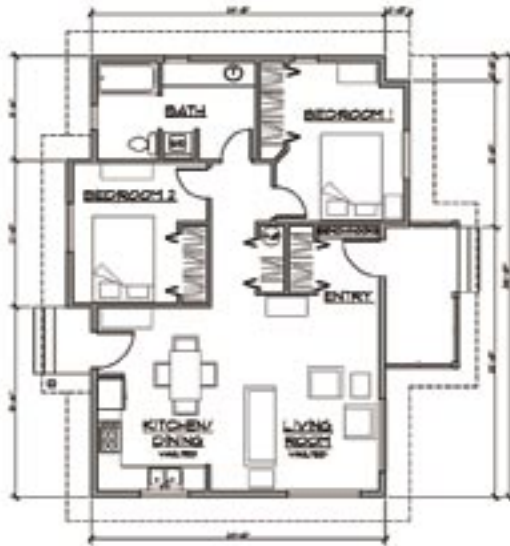
RAIN GARDENS AND BIO-FILTRATION SWALES (BIO-SWALES) will create every opportunity for water to return to the aquifer. Rain gardens and bio-swales are constructed with substrates of sand and/or gravel and then planted to improve absorption of surface water into the ground. In the percolation process, microorganisms in the soil and plants help to remove pollutants. Homeowners will be responsible for some ongoing soil amendments and plantings—but the benefits are additional green space and wildlife habitat. Each home will have a private outdoor garden space and rain garden to catch runoff from the roof.



WEST ELEVATION
SCALE: 1/4" = 1'-0"



SOUTH ELEVATION
SCALE: 1/4" = 1'-0"



These elevations and floor plans represent works in progress. Stay tuned as we move forward with the Mt. Baker Road neighborhood.

NEWS FROM OPAL

TURTLEBACK PROPERTY

This spring the San Juan Preservation Trust and the San Juan County Land Bank launched a historic effort to purchase 1,578 acres known as Turtleback Mountain. As we go to press, it is clear that they will succeed, and the island will all be blessed with an extraordinary nature preserve that will nourish many souls for generations to come.

What is also clear is that affordable housing will not be part of what occurs on the property. During the fundraising campaign, one supporter conditioned his donation on a portion of the property at the base of the mountain being dedicated to OPAL for permanently affordable housing. The Preservation Trust, having recently decided to remain open to opportunities for collaborating on affordable housing, agreed to explore the idea. OPAL staff and trustees examined the property, analyzed zoning issues, talked with neighbors, and negotiated concerns with the Preservation Trust and the Land Bank.

In the end, the idea was not viable. The property's zoning, its location, the restricted mission of the Land Bank and the complicated structure of the deal presented too many barriers. Yet, the process was a learning experience and revealed a great deal about what might be possible under different circumstances. Many people in our community care about both land conservation AND affordable housing, and someday soon it will be possible to craft a transaction where both goals are balanced.

As a result of public exposure gained through the Campaign to Save Turtleback Mountain, OPAL has received new support from a Turtleback donor that will be put toward the purchase of land elsewhere on Orcas Island for the development of affordable housing. OPAL is now actively seeking an alternative site for a future cluster of permanently affordable homes.

NATIONAL CLT NETWORK

On the national stage, OPAL is viewed as a leader in a variety of ways. Thanks to the organizational stability fostered by OPAL's strong local membership, Executive Director Lisa Byers and Housing Manager Julie Brunner have developed expertise that they provide through fee-for-service consulting to other CLTs around the nation. In July, all six OPAL staff members attended the National CLT Conference in Boulder, Colorado, and four presented workshops at the conference. Lisa was elected president of the new National CLT Network, and OPAL trustee and past board president Mary Blackstone was elected to serve on the National Community Land Trust Network board as the NW regional representative. Lisa and Julie serve the new CLT Academy on its advisory board and as teachers, training CLT practitioners nationwide. In October, five OPAL staff members attended the NW CLT Coalition meeting in Bellingham and four presented workshops including: CLT Regional Loan Fund; Messaging and Storytelling; Measuring Success—Regionally and Nationally; and Modular Building.



Gabriel Olmsted, Mary Blackstone, Carolyn Moulton and Suzanne Olson at the NW CLT Coalition meeting at Lake Samish.

LISA BYERS RECEIVES STATE AWARD FOR WORK WITH CLTs

The Washington State Housing Finance Commission presented Lisa Byers with a Friend of Housing award on September 12th, during Housing Washington, the annual statewide conference on affordable housing. In addition to the beautiful glass award that now adorns the OPAL offices, Lisa was awarded \$2,000 from Bank of America to be donated to the nonprofit of her choice. Lisa chose OPAL because she believes the support of OPAL members is what has made it possible for her to be able to reach out and participate more broadly with her work.

MEET THE TRUSTEES: CAROL & HELEN BEE



Helen & Carol Bee (approx. 1940)

Sisters Carol and Helen Bee have called Orcas their “heart home” since childhood, when they would spend significant time at Camp Indralaya with their parents. They have both lived on Orcas “on and off” until 2001, when Carol came back, and 2003, when Helen returned to Orcas full time. Helen is one of OPAL’s newest trustees. She took the position that became open when Carol left to care for their mother in Seattle.

Carol attended OPAL meetings in the early ’90s, but it wasn’t until she returned to the island in 2001 and faced the harsh reality of escalating housing costs that she became actively involved; in 2002 she bought a home in Oberon Wood. “Being a very grateful new homeowner, I felt a responsibility to do more for the organization. So when asked to join the board as a homeowner representative, I agreed, although I’d never been on such a board before. Nevertheless, I wanted to contribute whatever I could to this vital effort.”

When Helen and her husband, Carl de Boor, moved to Orcas in 2003, she was inspired to get involved by Carol’s participation, and by her “increasingly clear understanding that the need for affordable housing was huge and getting huger all the time. I think it is vital for the island’s future that we preserve both the land and the quality of the human community who live here.”

What has been your experience serving on the OPAL board?

HB: Service on the board has been something of a revelation to me. I’ve served on lots of other nonprofit boards, but I’ve never been on one that was made up of such uniformly bright, committed, thoughtful people who wrestle month after month with really large and difficult issues.

CB: It was rewarding to be part of such a great team. I enjoyed contributing my writing and editorial skills to various projects—which I continue to do. In general, it was challenging to consider—and be responsible to—what a really big job we’re doing here: acquiring land, building houses, maintaining those houses and relationships with homeowners and renters, helping to sell houses, developing the support to do it all.

What are you passionate about—other than OPAL?

HB: I am passionate about Indralaya. I have served on the Indralaya board for 18 years, and volunteer there in any way I can. I am also passionate about singing—folk singing, chanting, and choral singing. And finally, I am passionate about sloth! One of the true pleasures of retirement is the ability to spend an entire day reading or being lazy without any speck of guilt.

CB: I am also passionate about Indralaya, although currently not as deeply involved as Helen.

Besides my two children and three grandkids, my other interests mostly involve the arts, especially acting, singing, dance, writing, and visual arts. Currently I am taking a wonderful Artist’s Way class and singing with the warm and wacky OK Chorale. I’m also keen about environmental causes and doing a little political work with MoveOn.org.

What are your hopes and dreams for OPAL going forward?

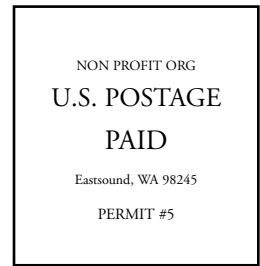
HB: To complete the Mt. Baker Road project on time, on budget. Longer-term, I hope that Lisa stays forever as ED; that we can find ways to do a better job of educating the community about OPAL and so widen the support for the organization; and that we create at least a small endowment to ensure a firm financial footing into the future.

CB: I hope Lisa stays forever, too. But since that’s not realistic, I hope OPAL develops a transition plan and gives more attention to the Big Book of organizational history and best practices. I also hope OPAL can find a way to increase its staff and spread out the load. Our work just keeps getting bigger and more important, not only on Orcas but nationally, as OPAL, under Lisa and Julie’s leadership, increasingly serves as a model for the CLT movement.

“I expect to live on this island for the rest of my life, and OPAL is essential to the quality of my own life, let alone the lives of those who purchase OPAL houses.”—Helen Bee



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IN THIS ISSUE

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Layout: Suzanne Smith Olson



Rinda McGarry in the yellow house

CONGRATULATIONS
TO THE NEW
MADRONA STREET
HOMEOWNERS!



Skyler Cookston, Tirza Fiorito and Luca in the teal house.