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GROWTH

Architect: Cities can save the planet

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THE BELLINGHAM HERALD

Cities are what will protect natural areas like forests and they're going to have to start acting like forests, according to Bert Gregory.

"Cities will help save our planet," Gregory, president and CEO of the Seattle architecture, design and planning firm Mithun, told about 100 people in the Bellingham Cruise Terminal Thursday evening.

"If we can create better neighborhoods at higher density, we don't have to take that farm out or we don't have to cut that forest down."

Gregory is on a steering committee designing a new program aiming to extend green-building standards across whole neighborhoods, taking in issues like compact development, livability, walkability, environmental protection and energy efficiency. He showed examples of ways to have neighborhoods meet their own energy needs, while cutting their need for water and the storm water they add to city treatment systems.

"Wouldn't it be wonderful if cities acted more like forests?" he asked. "An interconnected, natural system in balance."

Efficient land use means compact development and also things like using streets and sidewalks as public space, Gregory said. He pointed to the example of a downtown street that's only busy on weekdays.

"Perhaps that street could be closed on Saturday or Sunday," he said. "Perhaps some basketball hoops could be put up on Sunday."

The local business network Sustainable Connections hosted Thursday's talk. Derek Long, the group's program and development director, said outside of Thursday's presentation that the redevelopment of Bellingham's central waterfront could potentially be a part of the pilot project for the green-neighborhood standards.

Local officials and professionals are meeting today to go over the standards in more detail, using the waterfront as an example.

GREEN NEIGHBORHOODS

Who: The U.S. Green Building Council, Congress for New Urbanism and Natural Resources Defense Council.

What: New neighborhood development standards under the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design program.

More information: go to www.usgbc.org and click on "LEED."

Before Gregory talked, Seattle architect Susan H. Jones spoke about redevelopment in Malmo, Sweden, where the city bought about 400 acres formerly used for car and ship manufacturing. Jones, a Bellingham native, focused on a 40-acre area that includes about 1,000 homes, mostly in five-story buildings, along with a skyscraper that twists up to 54 stories.

The development includes things like solar heating, green roofs, a storm-water system where you can see water's path to the sea, incinerating waste to create heat and recycling of food waste into biomass power, Jones said. "They think of waste as an economic opportunity."

The logo for The Bellingham Herald, featuring the text "THE BELLINGHAM HERALD" in a serif font with a small mountain range icon above the word "HERALD".

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