

# Sustainable Connections Speech

April 10, 2008

It is a great honor to share the stage with someone like Scott Eaton. Gerding Edlen has consistently and intentionally manifested and made real the values and the best practices of urban environmentalism in a manner that is inspiring to us all.

Intentionality is a powerful force. Intentionality is transformative. An individual, or a community can choose to default to the way things have always been done, or act in response to reality. Or, an individual, or a community, can choose to shape reality, to act out of a conviction about what reality should be.

In Bellingham, we choose the latter. When I took office just a few months ago, one of the first things I did, as part of my 100-Day Plan, was to inventory the City's resolutions and commitments to green practices, along with new and ongoing initiatives. These commitments and practices spanned the areas of climate and energy, green building and planning, transportation, watershed protection, Lake Whatcom stewardship and habitat protection and restoration. This inventory alone, cataloging our City's ongoing green practices, filled almost a third of the pages of my 100 Day Plan Report.

But our green vision is even broader, and, as a community, we are restless – committed to identifying new and better ways to manifest our values. For the last several weeks, diverse members of our community – builders, neighborhood leaders, community health leaders – have been meeting to collaborate with the City in developing Planning Academy II. This Planning Academy, which will take place next month, is called “Green Bellingham: Achieving Infill, Enhancing Character,” and will provide neighborhoods a toolbox of strategies they can choose from to achieve our shared infill goals, while making decisions

This is not easy work. But it is vital. And it is, to put it bluntly, fun. At the end of the day, we each have a personal, emotional vision of what Bellingham means to us. For me, that is the dream that when my children's children walk the neighborhood streets of Bellingham a hundred years from now, that those neighborhoods will **feel** the same as they do today, each with its own unique character. And, that when they step outside the city, that they will look upon the same green hills and stretches of farmland that I see today. Another person's dream may be that her or his children can afford to buy a home here, to raise their family in their own hometown. An elderly couple may wish to be able to stay in the home they bought, after the war, as newlyweds. There is no work more satisfying than the proactive, intentional “making real” of such dreams.

Beyond our Green Bellingham Initiatives and Infill Planning Academy, the City's green vision involves a deep commitment to sustainability. As such, I have

recently established an executive-level sustainability function, bundling the function with the CAO position, in my own effort to conserve resources.

To have a Sustainability Director is pretty unusual for a city our size. Moreover, 'sustainability' stands in danger of becoming another throwaway catch phrase. I would rather begin with something modest, and meaningful than something grandiose and empty. As such, we will develop a sustainability program that not only encompasses our existing green practices, but incorporates vital elements such as economic development and community engagement strategies.

Lastly, one of the most compelling opportunities we have, as a community, to practice built environment best practices, is our waterfront redevelopment project. The waterfront project is actually a national LEED-ND pilot project. LEED ND, as most of you know, stands for Neighborhood Development. This is a brand-new set of criteria, that steps beyond construction-specifics to include elements like reduced automobile dependence, housing and jobs proximity, access to active public spaces, and habitat conservation.

This is our opportunity to thoughtfully and intentionally design a new neighborhood that reflects our deepest values as a community – to make real the vision the community has been articulating and advocating for years. We want to see a waterfront neighborhood with a street grid designed to move people, not cars. We want to see public spaces that encourage civic and cultural relationships, that are designed to foster and encourage the shared experience of conversation, art and music. We don't want suburbia on the waterfront, but rather, a natural extension of our downtown core – the extension of a neighborhood where the community can live, work and play. The City is absolutely committed to making real this community's vision.

The idea of "emergent interaction" is active in some branches of science and philosophy. Where reductionism understands systems by reducing them to their smallest constituent parts, emergent interaction theory holds that causal properties arise from the complex interactions between those smaller parts, and that those properties cannot be reduced. For example – out of the millions of electrochemical interactions in our brains, consciousness emerges. Intentionality emerges, a force infinitely greater than the sum of its parts.

In the same way, I look out at all of us gathered here today – developers and builders, environmentalists, civil servants – and believe that out of our individual skill-sets and expertise, something greater emerges. It is that greater, collective force that will shape our reality and the legacy we owe the generations that will follow us.

Mayor Dan Pike