

**Recreating the Social Environment of  
Salmon Beach:**  
An Analysis of the Salmon Beach Community  
and Applications Within the Field of Urban Design

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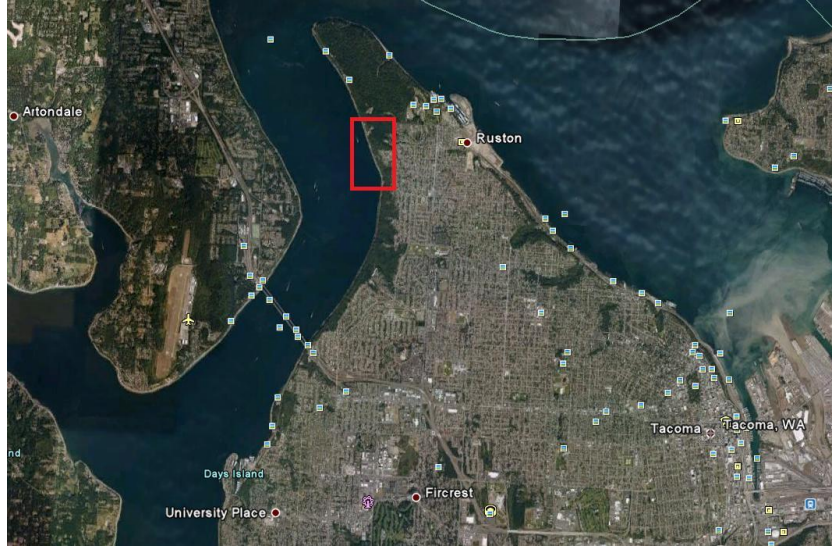
Alexander Brown

## **I. Introduction**

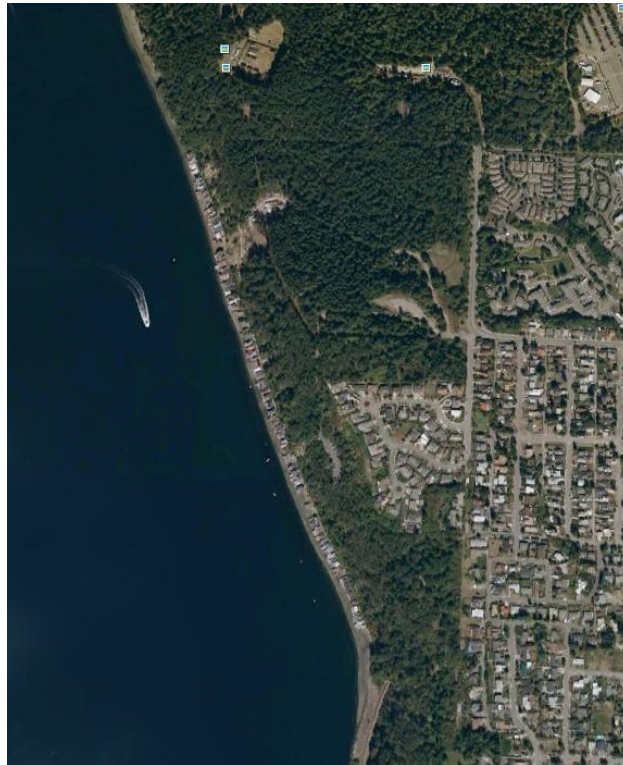
Salmon Beach is a community in Tacoma, Washington that remains relatively hidden and unheard of, even to the local population. To get to this community, one must first find the unmarked entrance, which looks more like an off-limits road that leads into the nearby forest than an entrance to a neighborhood. This road leads to two different parking lots at the end of a long, winding driveway. Once at the parking lots, one must leave the car and descend stairs of over 200 steps down a steep bluff covered in poison oak. Upon arriving at the bottom of the stairs, you have entered the Salmon Beach community, but most likely have not reached your destination which might involve an additional quarter mile walk. Or another alternative to getting to your destination is to come around Point Defiance by boat during high tide or on foot during low tide. If this commute seems bad, the residents also deal with issues ranging from landslides and dangerous tides to a lack of public services and exceptionally rigorous housing regulations and laws. One may wonder what it is that makes these residents put up with all of the inconveniences.

The objectives of this thesis are: (1) to review the history and development of Salmon Beach to see what draws people to this area and keeps them there; (2) to examine the neighborhood layout of Salmon Beach and how the layout helps impact the residents' "sense of place" and social connections within the community; and (3) to address current problems within urban design and propose an alternative neighborhood design inspired by Salmon Beach.

Salmon Beach is a line of about 80 residences that are built on pilings which rest within Puget Sound.



**Figure 1.1:** The location of Salmon Beach within Tacoma and Puget Sound (source: Google Earth)



**Figure 1.2:** The Salmon Beach community at low -tide (source: Google Earth).

The neighborhood is very isolated from the rest of Tacoma. The north half is surrounded by Point Defiance Park while the southern half is cut off by train tracks and steep cliffs. The nearest neighbors are a small neighborhood at the top of the bluff, but this cannot even be seen through all of the dense vegetation surrounding the community. The population consists of a “mix of singles, couples, small families, and grandparents... [and] never has more than a handful of children” (S.B.C, 2010). Although the community is not very racially diverse, it is economically and socially diverse. During high tide, the only thing connecting the houses is a small pathway maintained by the residents, which can be a gravel path or wooden planks depending on where you are. At a glance, the line of houses almost seems random. There really is no unifying architecture or style, and almost every house is a different shape or size. Small, wooden houses rest next to larger, more modern looking ones and all the houses are so close together that one could almost jump from house to house from their decks. One may wonder how this community became the way it is today, so to better understand the current Salmon Beach community and its layout, it is important to first understand its origins and history.

### **A. History of Salmon Beach**

It is possible that early Euro-American settlers or Indians from the Pullyallup tribe may have lived in the area, but the origin of the Salmon Beach community dates from around the 1900s (S.B.C, 2010). By that time families and fisherman had begun to use the area, originally known as the Tacoma Narrows, as a summer camp site. Most of the structures in the area were wooden platforms on which people would put up tents or other temporary residences for the summer. In 1906, Andrew and Thea Foss purchased the land which would later be the site of a general store, constructed in 1909, that catered to

fisherman and other people in the area. The owner of the store, Charlie Ziegler, was actually the one who helped change the area's name from the Tacoma Narrows to Salmon Beach. As the area developed due to the store and the nearby North Pacific Railway right-of-way, Salmon Beach became more and more populated and started to develop more permanent structures (Edward, 2006).

During the Great Depression, people were attracted to Salmon Beach because the cost of owning or renting a home there was incredibly cheap, due in part to the fact that the homes could be destroyed or people evicted at any moment. During Prohibition, moonshiners were drawn to Salmon Beach because it was relatively hidden, hard to gain access to, and had several natural springs to provide water for their stills (Edward, 2006).

Then, during 1949, Salmon Beach faced a major turning point in its history. A horrible earthquake in 1949 caused a major landslide to the north of the community. This landslide prompted John Baker, who owned the property up on top of the hill, to evict everyone from their beach homes. The community responded by organizing the Salmon Beach Improvement Club (SBIC) to fight the eviction. As a means of fighting the eviction, Henry Foss, Andrew Foss' son, decided to lease the tideland to the residents, thereby forcing Baker to prove he owned the tidelands. Upon investigation, it was discovered that the state still owned the tidelands of Salmon Beach, so the Bakers then sued the state for the land. The legal battle continued for many years. Even after Baker's death in 1955, the Baker Investment Company continued to pursue ownership of the tidelands on which Salmon Beach was built. In 1958, the Washington State Supreme Court finally awarded the Baker Investment Company legal title to the tideland.



With the Baker Investment Company owning the land, Salmon Beach Incorporated was forced in 1959 to strike up a deal for leases. These short term leases allowed the community to continue to exist until 1973 when the Tacoma Planning Commission declared the Salmon Beach community a historic shoreline, which prompted Baker's company to sell the land back to the state. The SBIC was then able to negotiate with the state to purchase the land through an arrangement, completed in 1977, by which SBIC bought one half and exchanged the other half for a land parcel. This deal turned Salmon Beach into a series of leaseholds on land owned by two nonprofit companies formed by the community. Since Salmon Beach owned the whole parcel of land and the land had not been subdivided, the tenants paid their leases to the nonprofits based on the width of their property. This created an incentive to build the houses even closer together (Edward, 2006; S.B.C, 2010).

Once the Salmon Beach residents owned the land and no longer feared eviction, the community entered into a period that can best be described by the terms 'regulation' and 'gentrification'. Ever since Salmon Beach had begun establishing more permanent residences, the community had been attracting people who wanted to escape society, the city, or expensive real estate. But now the price of the property was going to change because the threat of eviction was gone and there was an increasing demand for coastal property on the Puget Sound.

## **B. Gentrification**

Now that Salmon Beach owned the property, it should have most likely followed the redevelopment and investments that many of its neighboring areas, such as the nearby Gig Harbor, experienced. Gig Harbor had a history of being a place people went to get

away from the city and consisted mainly of summer cabins, much like Salmon Beach, until the Tacoma Narrows Bridge was built. Then there was a population boom because people wanted the waterfront properties and more natural landscapes. In a very short time, Gig Harbor went from being rural and a cabin destination to a more gentrified suburban area. Residents recalled how the land, just across Puget Sound from Salmon Beach, originally had just a few residents and houses not too long ago, but now is lined all the way across with expensive homes. Even today the demand for coastal development is apparent through Tacoma and the nearby town of Ruston, even during economically hard times (S.B.C, 2010). But of all of the surrounding area, Salmon Beach is one of the last waterfront properties that does not appear to have been greatly impacted by gentrification.

So how has Salmon Beach managed to slow the processes of gentrification and development? It appears that there are three major reasons. The first reason is the legislation and regulations that Salmon Beach became subject to after they acquired their land. During the 1970s, in effort to preserve the tidelands and coastal areas from development and pollution, Washington passed the Shoreline Management Act and established the Washington State Coastal Zone Management Program. It also began to address the dwindling salmon population by passing legislation to protect the fish and their spawn. To protect the spawn, legislation was passed so that existing structures above water were prohibited from increasing the amount of water they covered because the shade could hide the predators of Salmon spawn (S.B.C, 2010; Washington State, 2011). This meant that the homes on Salmon Beach could no longer expand outwards into the Puget Sound. During the interviews, almost all of the residents complained about

having to pay for licenses and wait for approval for some of the most basic maintenance and housing development needs. This new legislation became so rigorous in some aspects that one resident, whose home was destroyed in a land slide, was unable to fill out the paper work and forms in time and therefore was not allowed to rebuild their house. A few pilings with random bits of woods attached to them now sit where once the house stood. It is not uncommon for people to just build during the weekend when regulators are not working and run the risk of getting fined because the approval process takes such a long time (S.B.C, 2010). Not only that, but some of the regulation has put a stop to the vertical growth of homes; and a few residents have had to remove portions of their decks or house after a landslide displaced them farther out over the water. But even though this regulation is a headache for many of the residents, it does seem to have slowed down the development of homes. Had these regulations not been put in place, homes might have developed much more rapidly, which would have driven up the cost of housing much more quickly.

The second major reason why there has not been as much development in the area revolves around the efforts by residents to preserve the traditional character of Salmon Beach. Already, there have been several attempts to develop the land above Salmon Beach and nearby, which could have adversely impacted the community by making it less isolated and destroying the landscape, but the community has so far been successful in preventing any additional development. And within Salmon Beach, residents have been active in trying to preserve and maintain the same visual environment and atmosphere.

And finally, a third major reason is the fact that Salmon Beach is still subject to the forces of nature and other inconveniences. Not many people are willing to pay a lot of money to commute on foot a long way, to have poor response times from police and firemen because of the remoteness of the location, and be subjected to fires, mudslides, and dangerous tides. Even though Salmon Beach has electricity, many of the homes are still heated by wood stoves and wood takes a considerable amount of time to gather and prepare. Many people are not willing to give up some of the luxuries of modern living to reside in Salmon Beach. A more recent example of the inconveniences of living there occurred in 1996 when about 50 residents were without phone service for three weeks (Szymanski, 1996).

Nonetheless, the gentrification process is still underway in Salmon Beach. Evidence of this can be seen in the property value of just the northern parcel of land which jumped from \$1,108,800 in 2002 to \$4,002,700 in 2009 (Washington State, 2011). One resident, who moved to Salmon Beach just as the gentrification process was beginning, remembered seeing the price of their home written on a paper plate outside the house for an “unbelievable cheap price.” They were amazed by the fact that they could afford such beautiful water front property for such a cheap price. But now due to rising property taxes, it has become much more expensive for some of the residents to live there; and some fear they might be forced to move (S.B.C, 2010). Gentrification is not necessarily a bad thing and some urban planners say resisting it can have negative consequences, but it does alter the demographics and socio-economic composition of the community (Duany, 2000).

Since the purchasing of the land, there have been a steady decline in the “hippies” and college students living in the area, who have been replaced with families and more younger professionals. There are still a few homes that have remained open for individuals with less income to lease, but even those are becoming rare and often times still exist only because the people who own the property remain willing to provide cheaper leases. Also, much of the construction on Salmon Beach there has been traditionally performed by a few older “Salmon Beachers” with specialized knowledge about how to replace pilings and other coastal construction techniques, assisted by the younger adults who live in the community. But with rising prices, these younger people might not be able to afford to live in the area. This won’t mean that construction on Salmon Beach will come to an end, but some residents have pointed out that more and more residents are hiring people outside of Salmon Beach to do work that other community members previously performed. This could have an adverse impact on the social bonds that have traditionally held the community together, because relying on workers within the community to do such work seemed to strengthen social bonds among the residents, especially between the different generations. Also, the unique heritage of the community is impacted in that the knowledge and practice of how to do certain repairs on Salmon Beach homes might be lost.

A changing population composition is also having an impact on the politics of Salmon Beach. Because Salmon Beach is owned by two nonprofits and receives little to no assistance from public services, Salmon Beach is often required to provide and maintain its own infrastructural needs. The community is therefore run by those that have property. This can be a source of social tension because, increasingly, there are varying

income levels and approaches to tackling problems. While one group of individuals might want to invest in new improvements, others complain that such investments are too expensive or unnecessary. But even though there are different social groups and sources of tension, a strong sense of community and identity still remains, which I explore in the next section.

## **II. Analysis**

This section examines the Salmon Beach community's "sense of place" to see how strong the community is and determine what factors may underlie this "sense of place."

### **A. Methods**

The Salmon Beach community was studied during the summer of 2010 using the following techniques: (1) a "sense of place" survey, (2) a demographic survey, (3) semi-structured interviews, and (4) a site visit. My field research was funded by the Summer Senior Honors Thesis Grant from the University of Wisconsin – Madison and has received exemption for the Human Subjects Protocol from Social and Behavioral Sciences Institutional Review Board.

The strength of the Salmon Beach community, the residents' "sense of place" was measured using a five point Likert scale question survey (See Appendix 1). The survey was adapted from Kelly and Hosking's (2008) study of a coastal community's "sense of place." For each item, participants were asked to identify how strongly they associated with a statement. The scale ranged from "strongly disagree" which had an assigned value of 1 to "strongly agree" which had an assigned value of 5. Other ways of measuring "sense of place" were taken into consideration, such as an analysis of walking and urban design (Wood *et al*, 2010), but those models required much more data collection than time allowed and seemed to put too much weight into economic factors. In addition to the "sense of place" survey items, there were three additional questions in the survey that were used to gauge opinion regarding neighborhood development and issues of privacy. An additional demographics section asked about length of residency, ownership, and all-

year or part-time Salmon Beach residency. Additionally, an open-ended question asked residents to briefly describe what made them want to live in Salmon Beach.

Information on the recent history, community, and layout of Salmon Beach, was collected during a two week site visit to the area. During that time, a series of 34 semi-structured interviews were conducted. All of the interviews took place in residents' homes. Key questions were asked to give guidance to the conversation, but the interviews were otherwise open ended. There were no time constraints, so the interview times ranged from fifteen minutes to as long as four hours. Also, it was common for multiple residents of a single household to be interviewed simultaneously.

The history of Salmon Beach was documented through interviews, analyzing old photographs, newspaper articles, and documents provided by residents and from archives at the Tacoma Historical Society and Tacoma Public Library.

## **B. Results**

The population of Salmon Beach is about 200 residents, but since my survey and interviews did not include anyone under the age of 18, the potential pool of interviewees and people that could complete the survey was approximately 180. The surveys were hand delivered during the month of July 2010. July was selected because the maximum number of residents would be residing on Salmon Beach at that time because of the summer season and community event (July 4<sup>th</sup> celebration). During a fifteen day period, 70 surveys were distributed and 57 responses were received (a response rate of 81.4%). This sampled approximately one third of the adult population. Much like the exact size of the population, the demographics of Salmon Beach are unknown, but it is estimated that one third of the residents live there year round, one third rent, and one third are seasonal



residents (S.B.C, 2010). Of the surveys collected, 91% (52/57) of the people lived on Salmon Beach year round and 74% (42/57) owned their home. This means that the survey statistics are potentially biased by the people who live there year round, and are home owners. Even though the survey results might be biased by oversampling the full-time residents of Salmon Beach, the full time residents more likely represent the “community” environment than the part time residents. The responses also appear to be representative of what the majority of people think because so many of the responses were similar and were confirmed during the interviews. The surveys provide a quantitative measurement of “sense of place,” but also insight on a variety of different topics was obtained because people were more comfortable with anonymous survey responses and residents were more likely to talk about conflicts and issues within the community on paper than in person.

The semi-structured interviews provided an opportunity to gain a more in-depth understanding of the survey responses, and helped in gaining an understanding of how the Salmon Beach neighborhood layout played a role in the community’s social interactions. The interviews were especially helpful because topics were raised that had not been included in the survey.

The survey revealed that the residents of Salmon Beach do have a strong “sense of place.” The three strongest responses, in order of ranking, were: “I care about Salmon Beach” (4.92/5); “I feel that it is an important part of the history of Tacoma” (4.75/5); and “I feel relaxed when in Salmon Beach” (4.67/5). Almost all of the responses scored much higher than Kelly and Hosking’s (2008) study of the coastal Augusta–Margaret River region, in which “many of the residents felt a deep attachment to the place and its

community.” A comparison of the two studies also reveals that many of the Salmon Beach residents feel that they are in more control of what happens in their neighborhood and are more willing to participate in future planning than was the case in the Augusta-Margaret River community. Even the lowest rated question, which was “I want people outside of the community to know about Salmon Beach,” scored a 3.00, which indicates that most people were neutral about the question.

**Table 2.1:** “Sense of place” survey responses as stratified by home ownership and all year or part time residency.

	n	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Avg.
Owners, Year- Round	37	4.92	4.65	4.54	4.30	4.09	4.15	4.44
Owners, Part-Time	5	4.80	4.80	4.60	4.00	3.80	4.80	4.46
Renters, Year- Round	15	4.93	4.93	4.93	4	2.5	4.67	4.33
Overall	57	4.93	4.75	4.67	4.18	3.63	4.48	4.44

**Table 2.2:** “Sense of place” survey responses as stratified by length of Salmon Beach residency.

	n	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Avg.
0-10 yr(s)	24	4.87	4.87	4.67	4.20	3.67	4.40	4.45
11-20	15	5.0	4.80	4.80	4.80	4.10	4.60	4.68
21-30	5	4.89	4.67	4.56	4.22	4.96	3.89	4.53
31-40	9	5.00	4.50	4.00	3.25	3.75	3.75	4.04
41-50	5	4.5	4	3.25	3.75	3.75	3	4.25
overall	57	4.93	4.75	4.67	4.18	3.63	4.48	4.44

Survey results were analyzed by subgroup to distinguish between: (1) owners versus renters, (2) all-year versus part-time residency, and (3) lengths of Salmon Beach residency (see Tables 1 and 2). Even though one might think that part-time residents would have a weaker “sense of place,” the results told a different story. Each subgroup had similar values in their responses (Tables 2.1 and 2.2). There were two notable differences in responses though, which were discussed in interviews. The first was that year-round owners scored lower than the other three groups in response to the statement: “I believe my neighbors are concerned about what happens to Salmon Beach.” During some of the interviews, residents explained how they feared that different social groups might not value different aspects of Salmon Beach enough. But almost none of the residents who expressed these fears had similar reasons for being concerned. Some of the owners were worried about landslides and/or economic factors, while others worried about social groups and historical aspects. The second difference was that the year-round renters were more likely to want people outside of the community to know about Salmon Beach. During many of the interviews, home owners expressed a fear of Salmon Beach losing its privacy and the potential consequences. Not only were some residents annoyed by the tour boats that come by in the summer and the curious people that come to Salmon Beach to witness its uniqueness, but they also feared more attention might bring more development to the surrounding area or raise housing prices.

Some scholars argue that place attachment or “sense of place” is relative to how long a person lives in one place (Sampson, 1998; Brown *et al.*, 2003 ; Kelly & Hosking, 2008). But surprisingly, the Salmon Beach results did not corroborate this assertion. Even those that had been in Salmon Beach for less than a year to 10 years felt they had just as

strong a connection as those who had lived there for 40 years. This difference in results may be due to sampling bias. However, interview participants were quick to describe how many of the residents “instantly fell in love” with different aspects of the community. It is possible that Salmon Beach provides an environment that can quickly invoke a strong emotional bond.

In general, all of the residents, in all categories, displayed a strong “sense of place.” Not a single returned survey displayed a weak or even a neutral “sense of place.” Many of the interviews confirmed this. One of the best examples was from parents who had raised or were raising children on Salmon Beach. They talked about how during pregnancy, people from the community provided meals and helped out with daily chores. As the kids grew older, the community helped raise the kids in different ways and many of the parents claimed that they never worried about the safety of their kids. It is important to note that not everyone in the community shared these views and that there were a few individuals who might have responded differently, but declined to fill out the survey or participate in interviews.

One of the definitive findings from the survey and interviews was that Salmon Beach provides “opportunities for positive [and] causal social interaction” (S.B.C, 2010). When asked whether the layout of Salmon Beach had a positive impact on the residents and their “sense of place” or community, residents continually mentioned how there were a few areas that impacted their connections with other community members more than others. The three most common areas were the walkway in back, the stairways, and the parking lots. Some other commonly mentioned places were the docks and the house waterfronts.

### **III. Salmon Beach and Urban Design**

This section of the thesis examines the factors that impacted the social aspects of the community, provides further evidence to show how social aspects have been successfully incorporated in other environments, and proposes a new design, called the ‘SB Layout,’ that incorporates some of the different Salmon Beach aspects.

#### **A. The Role of Urban Design with Social Interactions and “Sense of Place”**

Before looking into the social interactions and designs of Salmon Beach, it is important to look at the history of urban design and social interactions and some common critiques. Social interactions and connections within a neighborhood have been a source of controversy and research within the urban planning and academic world for quite some time. The theoretical linkage between neighborhood physical design and social interaction can be traced back to Charles Cooley in 1909, but never seemed to gain much attention from academia and general public (Patricios, 2002). More recently, a community’s social interactions have begun to receive even more attention from researchers and the general public due to the growing popularity of urban planning movements (New Urbanism) and literature (like Putnam’s (2000) *Bowling Alone*). So in response to the increased attention, demand, and controversy, researchers and the private sector have been trying to come up with new neighborhood designs that improve and/or enhance the social interactions within communities. Many of the new designs that have been implemented have failed to meet their goals. For example, the once hailed New Urbanism town called Celebration has recently been forced to deal with record foreclosure rates, residents leaving, and violence (Howley, 2010).

Some scholars respond to these goals and failed attempts to improve or create social interactions within communities by claiming that they are “outdated” or “romanticized.” They argue that, with a globalizing world with new, faster forms of communication, it might not be necessary to form social connections with people that are physically close and that attempts to make neighborhoods more socially interconnected are just a neo-traditionalistic response to social change by clinging to “the good old days” (Blokland-Potters & Savage, 2008; Harvey, 1997; Veninga, 2004).

Just because communication has changed, that does not mean that social interactions within communities and neighborhoods are irrelevant and outdated. "Proximity and neighborly contact are the basis for the simplest and most elementary forms of association with which we have to deal in the organization of the city. In the social and political organization of the city it is the smallest unit" (Patricios, 2002). Because most people live somewhere for a substantial period of time, it is important for them to develop a connection with the community of their residence.

A study by the Knight Foundation and Gallup (2010) revealed that “how accepting a community is of diversity, its wealth of social offerings, and its aesthetics” are the three biggest factors in determining whether or not someone develops a residential attachment (also known as “sense of place”). The Knight Foundation study was conducted in different sized cities, cities with different urban densities, and in different locations of the United States. The study even collected data during economic recessions, and those three factors were still considered more important than economic incentives for moving into a neighborhood.

This “sense of place” is important because there have been numerous studies that show how strongly someone is attached to place is an important indicator of the degree to which that individual’s behavior will benefit the area and community. While some urban planners and designers are convinced that it is an economically growing city that is happy and healthy, it appears that it is the “communities with the highest levels of attachment [that have] the highest rates of gross domestic product growth.” And not only do the communities benefit from having residents with a strong “sense of place,” the individuals reap psychological and social benefits as well (Knight Foundation, 2010; Sampson, 1998; Brown et al., 2003; Kelly & Hosking, 2008).

The Knight Foundation study findings match up with what the residents of Salmon Beach said on the surveys and in interviews. When the residents of Salmon Beach were asked why they came to Salmon Beach, the two most common responses were (1) view of the water and nature and (2) community. Even though not every neighborhood can be situated on water front property in such a unique location as Salmon Beach, there are ways of utilizing some design aspects that can mimic Salmon Beach. By looking at the layout of Salmon Beach, one can imagine a neighborhood that meets the criteria in terms of how accepting the community is of diversity, its wealth of social offerings, and its aesthetics.

## **B. What impacts the social interactions?**

During the interviews, many of the residents responded to two major forces that impacted the strength of the community’s social ties. The first one was the natural disasters. Residents recalled how everyone would have to get on the decks to fend off logs or other debris that could get caught in the pilings below the houses and knock them



loose. No matter how bad the weather, everyone would get together and help pass the objects down the length of the house fronts until all of them were safely past the community. If there was a landslide, everyone would be out the next day with shovels and whatever else was needed to clear the paths and help everyone who was impacted. Everyone acknowledges that it is not only the right thing to do, but necessary because the next time some natural disaster strikes your area of the beach, you will need all the help you can get. What affects one person on the beach most likely affects everyone else.

Even though almost all of the residents interviewed acknowledged how the elements can bring people together, it is impossible and impractical to put residential areas in locations where bad weather can threaten homes. One additional point the residents mentioned that is more obtainable is the likelihood of encountering each other around the community. One resident claimed that he usually would have to leave a half hour early just to get to his car because he was more than likely going to run into someone he knew and strike up a conversation. And it was not like there was just one spot in which everyone could run into and encounter each other. When residents were asked about what places they most likely encountered each other the most frequently mentioned places were the stairs, pathway, parking lot, and on the decks (deck encounters occurred with people in boats). Most of these places are areas in which residents are walking and provide an area to interact and socialize.

### **C. SB Layout characteristics**

Many urban designers agree that a neighborhood's "walkability" is one of the critical components of a good neighborhood and community. Some urban designers see making neighborhoods independent and "walkable" as a way to reduce the use of cars and help

the environment, encourage more healthy behavior, and potentially increase the chances of social interactions (Wood *et al*, 2010). In Duany's book *Suburban Nation* (2000), he claims that an ideal neighborhood should have many of its resources within a five minute walking distances. But when other urban designers try to increase social interactions between the residents, they focus on points in which people might meet and not the paths they take. This focus on making similar destinations usually leads designers to incorporate commercial areas or a community center into neighborhood designs. Even though it might seem like sharing similar destinations would increase the chances of social interactions, residents might not share paths to those locations and might not stay long enough to encounter one another. Just because there are destinations and "facilities for daily needs" that may attract people to those locations does not necessarily keep people there and does not necessarily facilitate social interactions. Indeed, "the presence of commercial destinations may inhibit social interaction among local residents" because they might attract "strangers" and increase in traffic which makes residents spend less time socializing in the neighborhood (Wood et al., 2010; Zang & Larson, 2009).

By sharing common pathways and areas, as the Salmon Beach community does, no matter what their destination is, residents will be using the same paths to get to where they are going and increase their chance of face-to-face interactions. To achieve the goal of creating shared pathways, the SB Layout neighborhood design features only one main path entering and exiting the residential areas.

In terms of the width and substance of the walkway, the walkway should be paved and be at least 10 feet in width. Any car or emergency response vehicles should be able to navigate the walkway. Even though this might seem too wide, adding moveable benches

will make the path appear to be narrower and provide rest and meeting areas. This walkway width is necessary for construction, moving, and emergencies since there is no other access to the houses. The presence of a vehicle on the walkway should be very rare and only used when all other options have been exhausted.

A second design aspect of the SB Layout deals with both the aesthetics of the area and the social interaction. One popular way in which urban designs try to increase the social interaction among its residents is to create clusters. These designers view the cluster shape as being optimal for making people feel like they are a part of the same community and increase chances of social interaction, but as Vischer (1984) points out, “when residents were in the form of enclaves (circles), some of their most common complaints were privacy and “visual intrusion into the units of other buildings.” Vischer goes on to argue that “residents seem to show a preference for greater anonymity and control over the opportunities for socializing with their neighbors, such as may be offered by more conventional street plans.” This is why the SB Layout will arrange the homes in a single line. The first goal of this design is to make the layout feel more open. Because the homes would not have a common central area, this design would create larger visual landscape. Even though the residents may not have a great landscape or coastal view, such as that at Salmon Beach, it is possible that the view from their house can be made to imitate a more natural landscape. This is important because humans have been “hard-wired” to find certain visual settings, like an open environment, to be more visually pleasing or relaxing, and a person’s environment can have a large impact on their emotional health (Sullivan, 2005). Also, the SB Layout design has the pathway running

along the line of homes, and the homes must be placed closely to the other homes to maximize the space in back.

The side by side housing and the single path creates more opportunities for people to run into each other and might allow for a greater mixing of different age groups. The one path that goes through the community will run along the front of all the houses. That means that someone who lives at the end of the path must walk past all of the other homes just to exit the area. Some might argue that whoever lives closest to the exit would have a lower chance of running into someone else, but every resident would be required to walk past the nearest home to get to their home. It has been observed that those that live in high traffic areas, like houses on street corners, have larger social networks than those in the middle of the blocks (Raman, 2010). Even though the occupants of the house closest to the exit would spend less time walking to get out, they will have considerably more people passing by their home.

This design might also be used to help out different age groups. One way that a neighborhood might be more accommodating to an older population is to provide housing for them closer to the exit on the pathway. And the same works for the other end of the age spectrum. The houses on the far end of the pathway might be viewed as less desirable and therefore cheaper, which might allow younger people or people with lower incomes to move into that end.

In terms of density, the homes will be placed close enough to one another to achieve a medium density neighborhood which is about 80-100 households/hectare. The reason for this density is “visible social interaction in outdoor public spaces” seems to be highest in medium density neighborhoods (Raman, 2010). Some argue that denser

environments present more opportunities for social interactions, but in “high densities, residents feel that they have less control over their social environment and are inclined to withdraw from the community” (Williams, 2005). The survey responses from Salmon Beach might be taken to suggest that medium density is better because medium and low density community residents feel that they can play a part in the decisions and events of their community.

More than one Salmon Beach resident talked about their old neighborhoods, where everyone got into their cars and left for work. Some talked about how if they didn't see someone on the stairs, they were more than likely going to run into them in the parking lot. One resident recalled how different the Salmon Beach parking lot was compared to an old community in which the resident had previously lived because many of the houses had garages built into them. “If you really wanted to, you could never see your neighbors. The most common greeting you might get would be the wave of a hand before they pulled into their garage and disappeared” (S.B.C, 2010). So in response to these claims, this design would feature a parking lot located at the end of the main pathway. If cars were allowed to be near the homes, this would decrease the face-to-face interactions and defeat the purpose of the single, shared pathway.

Another function of the parking lot would be to remove the presence of vehicles from the living area. An absence of cars in the area can be important because “residents [have] expressed considerable satisfaction with the safety and tranquility of vehicle free streets” and the presence of vehicles “reduces time spent on the street by local residents thereby detracting from social interactions” (Vischer, 1984; Wood et al., 2010). The

parking lot would also make living at the far end of the pathway less convenient and might make those homes less expensive.

Some might suggest that walking a far distance to your home would create too much of a hassle with daily activities and commuting. But during the interviews, the residents of Salmon Beach never complained about the stairs and the walk. Some mentioned that they were even annoyed by how frequently people ask them how they could live with all of the stairs and the commute. Many of them said they adjusted their lifestyles for the commute. They bought less, ate more fresh food, got more exercise, became more aware of how much trash they produced, and learned more on sharing with their neighbors because “you do not have the luxury of just running to the store” (S.B.C, 2010). Salmon Beach residents have even grown to like the lifestyle the stairs have made for them, and have in fact turned down the offer for someone to install an elevator on the side of the bluff. One issue people might have with a detached parking lot is the fear about the safety of the cars, but some solutions are installing a surveillance camera or having garage units for each house.

A key feature of the SB Layout is a semi-private communal space behind the houses that extends the entire length of the community. Each house will have a small private backyard space that will lead out into the communal area. The reason for having a smaller private area right behind each house is that “less private space also encourages greater social interaction within communities,” but still provides “gradual transitions between public and private space” (Williams, 2005). The backyard provides a barrier so that people can maintain a greater sense of privacy and have some property they can control.

One of the major goals of the communal space is to help with the aesthetics of the SB Layout by creating a greater sense of openness and a more visually pleasing green space. This green space might not be a coastal view, but hopefully it will appeal to the human's subconscious attraction to savanna and forest-like settings (Sullivan, 2005). The other purpose is to provide a common place where the community can interact. On Salmon Beach, during good weather, people kayak, boat, and travel up and down the length of houses. Those sitting on their decks or who are in the nearby water often stop to talk and socialize. The goal of the communal space is to provide an area that everyone can use for activities and allows for the other residents to more easily encounter and communicate with others. The community will decide the communal space's use(s) and will maintain it. As the community's demographics change over time, the space can be adjusted for different purposes and still serve the community's needs. The community should have annual meetings to decide what to do with the communal space. Even though this shared space might be a source of tension, much like some of the Salmon Beach meetings, it might increase community participation and keep the communal space from becoming obsolete or unused. It is important to note that the communal space could be subject to territorialization, but territorialization can be minimized if different areas of the communal space are used by everyone for different purposes (Williams, 2005).

An aspect of communal space that needs further research is the sharing of communal space for pets. If one were to walk up and down Salmon Beach on a warm day, you would more than likely encounter at least two dogs and sometimes many of the dogs can be seen running up and down the walkways in packs. Many of them seem to get along without any territorial behavior, and recognize and respond to most of the

residents. It is possible that having shared communal spaces in neighborhoods might make residents' pets more social with the community and to cut down on the animals' territorial behavior.

Surrounding the communal space in the Salmon Beach layout will be a barrier. People on Salmon Beach report the geographic isolation helps create a "sense of community." The goal is not to create a gated community, but to make the community share a common identity and understand what space they share. Because there is the risk of social seclusion from people outside the community, it is important to make the barriers nonthreatening (Charmes, 2010; Xu & Yang, 2008). Instead of using metal gates, dense vegetation or other welcoming barriers can be used.

Since there is communal space, the SB Layout will not include communal facilities, such as a laundry building or community center. On Salmon Beach, there were a few people who tried to turn one of the larger homes into a community center, but this concept did not gain popular support because people did not want the additional expense and others thought they wouldn't use it. On Salmon Beach, a community center was not necessary to build a stronger community and so it is not included in the SB Layout. Also, a community center is a static structure that can become obsolete and occupy valuable space. There are examples of how community centers can be a classic example of the "Tragedy of the Commons" and become a source of tension (Williams, 2005).



The neighborhood will not have uniform architecture or strict regulation on use of private space as is typical of popular urban designs. One popular approach in urban design is to think that uniform architecture and a heavily controlled environment make people more united. For example, there is a planned New Urbanism community about an hour south of Salmon Beach called the Northwest Landing. When purchasing a home, one is given a long list of what is allowed ranging from the height of fences, to the color of the houses. These rules and regulations on architecture and use of space appear to be a reaction to social instability and a response to some of their fears rather than about promoting social connections (Veninga, 2004; Xu & Yang, 2008; Harvey, 1997). Also, the design rules and regulations may pose problems for minorities who are often underrepresented or misrepresented in the design process and may be unwelcoming to different groups of people (Day, 2003).

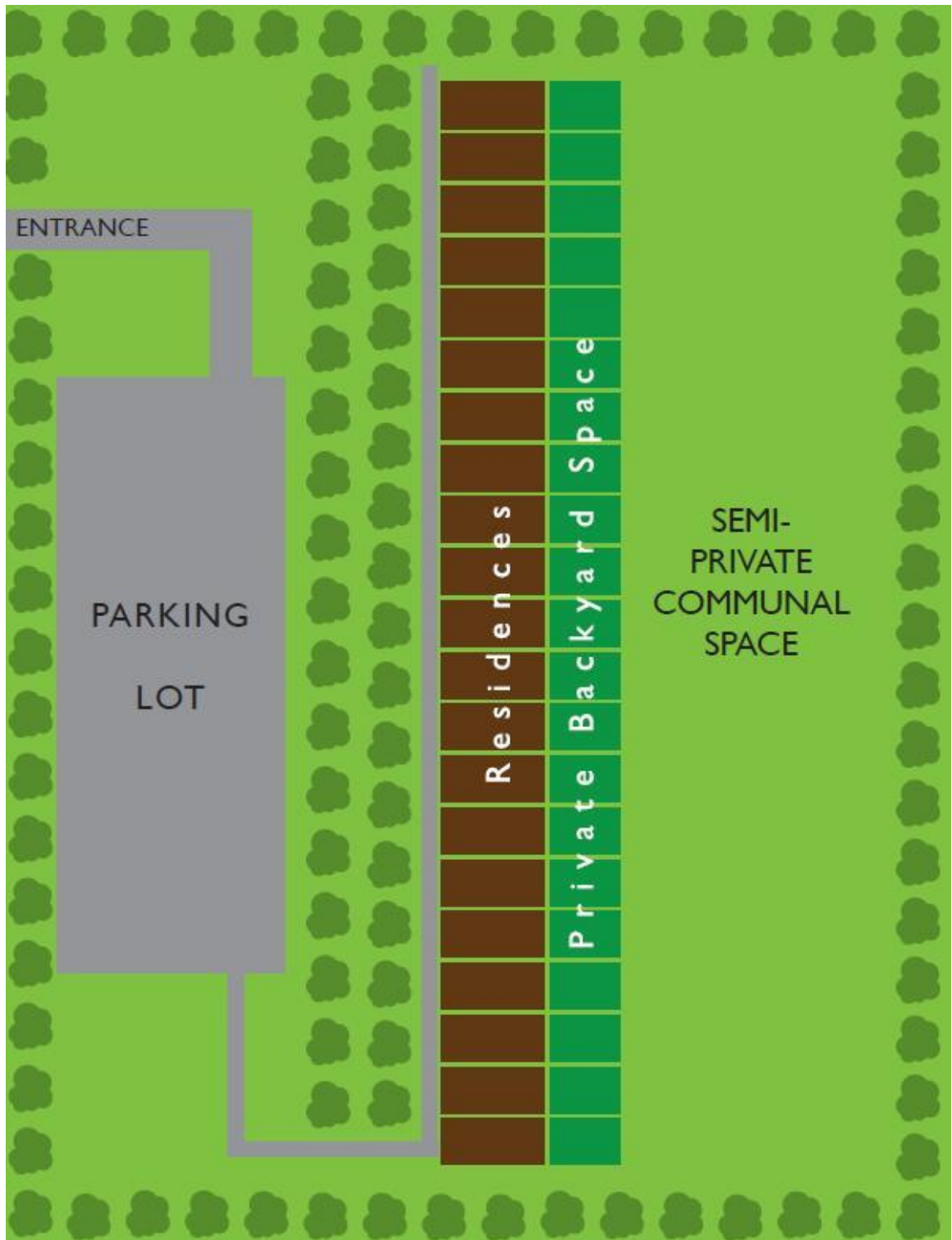
One common complaint on Salmon Beach is a lack of privacy. Privacy can be thought of as personal privacy and physical privacy. Because the homes are so close to one another and so connected, some residents complain that it can be hard to get away from others and the “local gossip.” It is likely that not everyone in a neighborhood or community will get along, so these responses are not unexpected. But it seems that most people on Salmon Beach find ways to improve their physical privacy by constructing walls or staying within their homes. But it seems that with increased social connectivity comes less personal privacy as well, so people will need to ask themselves what they value more.

#### **D. Community Involvement and Education**

The goals of urban planners and designers become more obtainable when the residents are made aware of their neighborhood and implementation through design choices and process (Crawford *et al.*, 2008; Day, 2003). Some of the residents on Salmon Beach mentioned how crucial it is to have a mix of ages and were willing to sacrifice some of their own money or resources to keep people on Salmon Beach. By educating the residents on the importance of diversity, the community may be more open to different economic classes becoming community members and support them.

#### **E. The final product**

The complete SB Layout contains the above components (Figure 4). This design is meant to be implemented in new developments and the redevelopment of areas that were based on a grid system. It is important to note that this layout is meant for medium density and cannot be realistically developed in a downtown area or other dense environments. Also, the houses do not have to be in a straight line, but can turn gently with the landscapes they are built on.



**Figure 3.1:** The SB Layout design

#### **IV. Conclusions**

Salmon Beach has naturally developed a social atmosphere that urban planners have been trying to replicate with their latest urban designs. Even though Salmon Beach has developed organically in a unique environment, there are lessons that can be learned and hopefully recreated in different environments. Even though issues of privacy and debates of communal space may arise, the benefits of having a community with strong social bonds and a strong “sense of place” seem to outweigh the costs and be worth the sacrifices.

## Appendix 1 –Salmon Beach Survey

Questions:	Please circle a number based on how you feel about the statement.				
	Strongly Disagree		Neutral		Strongly Agree
1) I care about what happens to Salmon Beach	1	2	3	4	5
2) I feel that Salmon Beach is an important part of the history of Washington/Tacoma	1	2	3	4	5
3) I feel relaxed when in Salmon Beach	1	2	3	4	5
4) I would be willing to become involved in future planning	1	2	3	4	5
5) I can influence the planning within Salmon Beach if I wanted to	1	2	3	4	5
6) I believe my neighbors are concerned about what happens to Salmon Beach	1	2	3	4	5
7) I want people outside of the community to know of Salmon Beach	1	2	3	4	5
8) The privacy of Salmon Beach is important to me	1	2	3	4	5
9) I think development in Salmon Beach is good	1	2	3	4	5

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