



Village Character

By Mayor Sam Steidel

I find it interesting how challenging of a phrase this is for some folks. I suppose it fits the 'beauty is in the eye of the beholder' type of abstraction.

Thing is, this term is in the Vision Statement of the community and referred to in the Housing Policies directly. I would argue this concept is the crux of the intent of the vision as others may argue it is not. Knowing as I did/do many of the authors who created the two word phrase it is obvious to me. Vague as the term is I can also see how the act of defining is a challenge, thus as said above, 'the beholder'.

There in rests the dilemma, the debate we are currently having. Let's say we avoid defining 'Village Character' for a moment.

Pivot to the theme. Why was this particular phrase enshrined in the Vision statement?

"Cannon Beach will continue to be a small town where the characteristics of a village are fostered and promoted. Both the physical and social dimensions associated with a village will be integral to Cannon Beach's evolution..."

What was the concern of the authors, the community at that moment? What solutions did they install in the hopes to maintain this, their ideal?

Here was a sleepy coastal town where a mill had once been the main economic driver, and yes there was some tourism. Clever minds began to notice how open CB was for 'development' (essentially the opposite of Village Character in their minds, also a term open to interpretation) Easy to see because the seventies had quickly become a time of change. Dramatic in a sleepy town.

Thus, the changes were baked in and the term was used to structure future evolution. Ratios and reviews, setbacks and sight-lines were concluded. The COMP was written in a hope toward avoiding the drama of more change the community saw as undesirable.

So, now, forty plus years later. We discover the boogymen is on the porch and the written word is too amorphous. Not the authors fault, they understood what they meant, easy to see, easy to follow... Then. Now though?

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Seems words need to be clear. The old guard is passing and old words do not hold the burden of understanding as resolutely as was expected. Thus we come to this debate over meanings, word count, emphasis, all the things that laws are built on. No longer can we say: "You know. Character." As if every one understood.

New residents are not to blame, they have that other 'beholder' foundation built in from other places. Long time residents are not to blame, they trusted the words. No real blaming to do, it's simply lucky we might to be able to fix the issues in time, as a community, through the up coming Code audit.

Let us clarify what the authors meant, because that is the object lesson, in this upcoming process. Try not to trespass upon the original intent with modern values. Involve modern capabilities in order to maintain the values that created the community so many admire. As resident or visitor, as newcomer and ancient moss between the toes local, the audit must preserve while shore up the power of the code's very function.

This brings me to the definition part. Or perhaps it may be better to observe what Village Character is not.

One simple first overarching concept I put forward is; Our Village Character is not what everywhere else is. Think on that a bit. CB is not Seaside, nor is it Newport. CB is unique.



Even our closest kin, village wise, Manzanita is different. Unique is a good word, look it up, a very distinct definition.

Unique is a concept that bears quite solidly on the idea one does not use the standards from another. Fads and fashions are not unique, they originate from unique. What is done in the valley may be a lesson to learn from but it is not to be mirrored. Thus we run into our first structural confrontation. Codes and ordinances create conformity, not unique. How does one codify uniqueness? Village Character?

Well this was the answer the past times authors found. They forged a phrase that, to them, everyone understood and yet was loose enough to envelop diverse ideas. But, then came in those sneaky codes. Written down, which, accompanied by human nature, setback rules and ratios; collided to assemble the McMansions (using the 70s inference) in which we see filling the spaces once held by old cabins.

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Does this define Village Character? Not really. Perhaps a touch so in some folks who recognized what they saw when they chose to join the community. Not enough to hold the force of words by literalists though. My presentation may still cause discord in others, those who see only 'property value' and 'ocean views' and 'Best beaches' articles. Remember I do have moss in my shoes, sand and seaweed too. Village character is blatantly obvious to me, but there I am, I grew up in it.



As I sit on the porch of the gallery and noodle this topic an eighteen wheeler tries to navigate the intersection causing traffic discord. Clearly the fears of the authors have arisen. Though they were not strangers to big trucks, log trucks in their day. This one jammed sideways on a busy Saturday afternoon does smack of increase, invasion. It is delivering sparkling water to the market.

Ah well. I might try swapping 'Village Character' with some thing to mull over, 'Unique Character' or Cannon Beach Character? Notice how Character is the theme?

How about a town that bans big rigs on Saturdays?

Stay tuned, obviously this topic is entrenched for a stay.