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New Urbanism
Town Planning
Green Building
The Alley

THE CIVIC GREEN-SPACE ALLEY

A New Coastal Town in the Pacific NW Calls for a Different Approach
to the Traditional New Urbanist Alley System

New Urbanist planners have long advocated rear alleys over suburban-style front-loaded garages for the simple reason that such a system relegates automobiles to the backs of houses and facilitates pedestrianism. These alleys, of course, need not degenerate into unsightly service entrances. Indeed, at sites of great natural beauty, particularly those where the alley constitutes the sole vehicular approach to the site, an aesthetic transformation of the traditional alley system is invited or even required. Not only is double facing of individual houses dictated in such instances but also perhaps a structural change in the notion of “alley” itself. As recently mapped out by participants in a late January charrette at Seabrook, a New Urbanist town located in northern Washington near Olympic National Park, alleys can not only be radically enhanced but transformed fully into civic green spaces.

The planners have dubbed their solution to the challenge “the drivable piazza.” The enhanced alley in the new ocean-front segment of Seabrook will feature formalized bosques and allees, and will terminate at an unusual esplanade fronting the Pacific Ocean. It will serve a number of purposes besides simple access to the small cluster of Maybeck-inspired homes nestled into the landscape above the water. It will also provide public access to the beach, connect the two parts of the town divided by Scenic Route 109,

and extend the series of interlocking public spaces that currently run through the town. The town's pedestrian spine at present is a series of multiple-scale green spaces framed by door-yard homes with varying setbacks and comprised of parks, pocket parks, meadows, native habitats, and display gardens of native perennials, shrubs, and trees. When completed, the new segment will connect primordial Pacific Northwest forests at one end of the community to the wind-chiselled bluffs, seaside brooks, Pacific Ocean, and Western horizon on the other.

Seabrook is a new ninety-acre beach town with future expansion of more than 250 acres. The first New Urbanist coastal town on the Pacific, the community is known for its unusually varied eco-urban spaces, innovative design work, and intimate approach to nature—a bold fusion of New Urbanism and organicism. Designers participating in the January charrette included Laurence Qamar, Seabrook Town Planner; Stephen Poulakos, Seabrook Urbanist; Lew Oliver and Robert Pulliam of Lew Oliver, Inc.—Whole Town Solutions; Peter Brachvogel and Nathaniel Werner of BC & J Architects; and Peter Bergford of Scott Homes. The charrette ended with the inauguration of Café Tashtega, Seabrook's newest community feature.