



THE BELLINGHAM HERALD

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WWU students study how to redevelop Bellis Fair, downtown Bellingham

JARED PABEN - THE BELLINGHAM HERALD

BELLINGHAM - If redeveloped, the Bellis Fair mall property could hold about 7,000 residents, along with commercial and community space, according to some students at Western Washington University. Some of the mall's infrastructure could even be reused.

And Cornwall Avenue between Chestnut and Champion streets could be transformed and revitalized into a bustling residential and retail strip if anchor stores were placed at each end with smaller spaces in between, including in the alleys. Parking structures would be needed, but a shuttle from the bus station and through the retail area could bring in many people without cars.

These are a few of the concepts that WWU planning students will unveil in a public presentation in City Council Chambers, on Wednesday, March 10. It's part of the Urban Transitions Studio, which is new to the university this year. Through the program, students from various disciplines examine a project from their own studies.

Urban Transitions Studio is a partnership between WWU, the Bellingham planning department and Sustainable Connections, a Bellingham-based nonprofit organization. City and nonprofit staff have provided information and data, as well as a mid-term critique of students' work.

Planning students have unveiled concepts. Later, students will study everything from changes in laws needed to implement the concepts to the environmental impacts of them.

The presentation Wednesday will show the community how to transform single-use development, like Bellis Fair, into areas inspired by smart growth concepts and New Urbanism, which focuses on mixed-use, walkable communities and alternative energy sources, said Nick Zaferatos, associate professor of environmental studies.

The students focused on what happened to downtown after city leaders encouraged construction of the mall near Interstate 5 in the 1980s.

"We lost the vibrancy of the economic center of the community," Zaferatos said. The corner of Holly Street and Railroad Avenue is a small example of how to reverse that,

with the creation of mixed-use buildings where a vacant pit or run-down buildings used to be.

"The big question is what do we do with these things we did in the '60s, '70s and '80s?" he said.

City government wants to accommodate future residents through mixed-use urban villages. But this goes a step further, with students studying potential for areas that aren't expected to necessarily redevelop in the next two decades, the period the city plans for under state law.

ATTEND THE PRESENTATION

What: Western Washington University students will present ideas for transforming areas along Meridian Street and downtown using New Urbanism concepts.

When: 7 to 10 p.m. Wednesday, March 10.

Where: City Council Chambers, 210 Lottie St.