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It's called a "charette" — an old process with modern-day applications. By one definition, it evolved from a pre-1900 exercise in France, where architectural students were given a design problem to solve within an allotted time. And when the time was up, the drawings would be taken from the design studio to the college in a cart called ... a charrette.

"It's like a design-oriented brainstorming session," said Bremerton architect Steve Rice.

And last week at Westpark Community Center, they did it. Architects, design professionals, Westpark residents, walk-in members of the public and others spent five days seeking a best-of-all-possibles redevelopment plan for the 66-year-old housing project.

The existing Westpark is part of a larger housing project built as temporary housing for Bremerton shipyard workers during the World War II era. Located on Bremerton's western doorstep by Highway 3, the 82-acre site now is a subsidized public housing project, with 582 units owned and operated by Bremerton Housing Authority.

Faced with aging, cheaply built housing units, a federal mandate to disperse low-income housing, and the city's urban growth needs, Housing Authority officials are redeveloping Westpark.

It will be — literally — a fresh start from scratch. All the existing 582 housing units will be razed, to be replaced with a new community, probably with a new name. The sweeping, \$300 million makeover will comprise a mixed-use, mixed-income development with both rental and privately owned residences, including condominiums, town homes, apartments and individual homes, as well as the new "Firs II" assisted living facility.

Privately owned units will range in price from about \$150,000 to \$390,000. Approximately 190 of the estimated 759 new units will be subsidized, low-income housing owned by Bremerton Housing Authority.

In keeping with the federal HUD requirement, the other 350 families currently living in Westpark will be dispersed to private or public housing throughout Bremerton and the nearby community within BHA's service area. Housing authority officials say their goal is to provide a "seamless" transition for existing residents of Westpark who will be relocated.

Residents will have a relocation coach to assist in finding and moving into a new home adequate for their family and at comparable out-of-pocket rental cost, with BHA providing vouchers for rental assistance. All moving costs will be covered by BHA.

Undoubtedly, some difficulties will arise — but these should be minimal and manageable if the high-energy problem-solving shown in the charette carries over into the relocation process.

Although last week's intensive, five-day exercise provided the genesis of a master plan for the new community, numerous other steps and uncertainties still remain, including vetting the charette designs, more public meetings, finalizing a plan, and proceeding through the city's planning commission and city council to final approval.

But regardless of what is yet to come, the enthusiastic, brainstorming design charette raises the bar for public processes in Kitsap County. It was accomplished with an effective blend of professional expertise and openness both to viewing and substantive shaping by the public.

We hope other government agencies take note because, based on last week's exercise, this century-old process was instrumental in shaping a bright new community for Bremerton's future.