

CITY OF CHENEY, WASHINGTON



Cheney Wayfinding

Final Report – Analysis and Issues

Cheney Community Development Department

11/6/2008

Introduction

Background

Wayfinding constitutes a specific subset of signage.

Defined, wayfinding is a process, through the use of maps and other graphics, by which people are directed to their desired destinations. As you might imagine, wayfinding is a crucial part to any functioning city; it is a primary means for visitors and residents alike to reach their destinations.

Additionally, the benefits of an above-average wayfinding system are far reaching. Great wayfinding can reduce congestion, add to a sense of place, encourage visitors to comfortably explore our city, revitalize the downtown core and, of course, get people to their destinations with the greatest of ease.

An inquiry has been made regarding the effectiveness of wayfinding in Cheney. This final study intends to explain the importance and benefits of wayfinding signage, detail the issues with wayfinding in Cheney, investigate other cities' solutions, and ultimately make a few recommendations on the next steps in Cheney's wayfinding project. The study concludes with appendices giving more wayfinding sign examples as well as a case study on a city that recently underwent a wayfinding project of their own.

Between the early stages of this project some months ago, the staff has made informatory presentations to numerous groups, including the Cheney Merchants Association, the Historic Preservation Commission, the Parks Board, the Planning Commission, EWU's facilities managers / planners, and the Cheney City Council. This final report is being made available to all of these groups.

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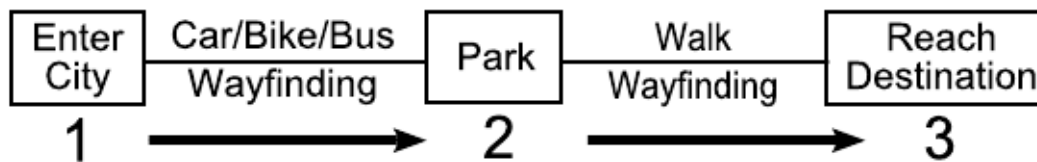
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What is Wayfinding? – Beyond Signs.

Wayfinding is more than signage. Wayfinding is a process of moving from one location to any number of destinations, often by two or more different modes of transportation. A good system will allow the user to carry out wayfinding in the most efficient and least-stressful manner.

Think of wayfinding as a transition between events. There are typically three main events when one is traveling to a city to reach a destination: when one enters the city, when they park, and when they reach their destination. These three events are all interconnected with wayfinding signage. Gateway signs are placed at main entrances to a city and let the visitor know that they have arrived and are within the city's wayfinding system. From there, vehicular wayfinding signs direct to all the different destinations within a city. Once the traveler nears their destination, they may need to search for parking if none is immediately available. This can be a frustrating task if there is no clear parking signage. Once the visitor has parked, he or she may rely on pedestrian wayfinding signs to direct to their location, or any number of new locations in proximity. Finally, location signs complete the process by clearly identifying the physical location of the destination. See Appendix A for more information and examples of sign types.

The Wayfinding Process



A smooth transition between travel events is essential for getting people to their destinations. The best wayfinding systems incorporate different signs tailored to their respective travel modes. When planning a wayfinding system, planners must take into account how people travel, not just how to direct to a destination with signage. Entry and exit points need to be considered, bus stops and parking places must be planned, and pedestrians must not be overlooked. All too often, signage that is passed off as wayfinding simply attempts to help people find their destinations. It does not complete the process by actually *moving* people through the wayfinding process to reach their destinations.

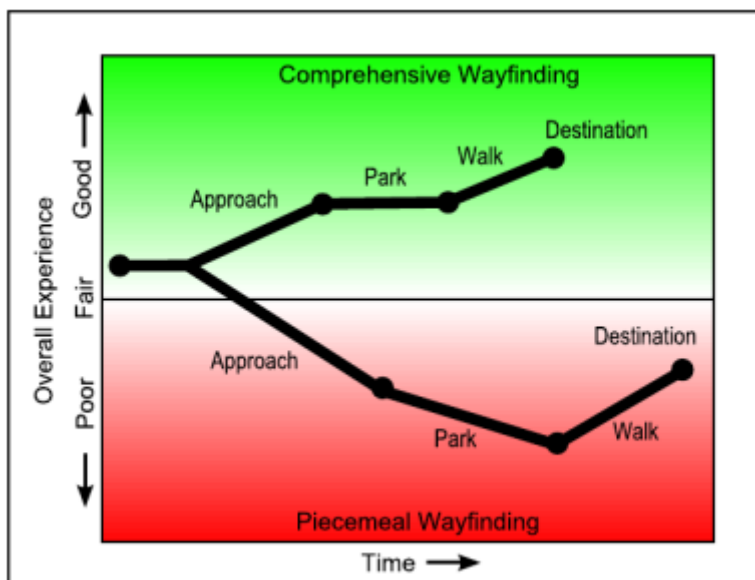
Truly effective wayfinding systems are a hallmark of great cities. The benefits of these systems are well worth the modest investments required. Wayfinding can easily enhance various aspects of cities, ranging from community interaction, resident socializing, commercial patronization, and even civic engagement. Some sort of wayfinding system is, in fact, essential to most cities. The benefits of these effective systems are far reaching and should not be overlooked.

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Benefits of Wayfinding

If designed and implemented well, a wayfinding system has the potential for significant impacts to the visitor experience on one end, and the businesses on the other end. A comprehensive wayfinding system should address every one of these additional benefits:

- **Increases sense of place** – Incorporating the city’s identity on each sign reinforces the city’s ‘brand’. Visitors and residents alike will see the signs and immediately know that they are within the city’s jurisdiction. Dull, boring, signs detract from a sense of place, while vibrant, interesting, signs enhance it.
- **Increases commercial awareness** – The mantra in the business world is “location, location, location.” In any city which has more than one commercial center, there is the possibility that location can affect one center more than the other. Wayfinding can help to balance out the location differences by giving equal representation to all commercial centers and increase awareness and business.
- **Encourages exploration** – If the wayfinding signs are effective, and the user has had positive previous experiences with them, then he or she is much more likely to explore the community. Exploration opens new venues for commerce, entertainment, and service.
- **Increases civic engagement** – Cheney and surrounding areas are a host to numerous destinations, but visitors and residents may not be aware of all their opportunities. While most people may quickly become aware of Moos Field, Hagelin Park, and Salnave Park because of their prominent locations, it may take much more time to become aware of more secluded and out of the way places such as Centennial Park and Columbia Plateau Trail State Park. Civic engagement boils down to interaction with your surroundings. Wayfinding helps by promoting locations.



Comprehensive vs. Piecemeal

This graphic illustrates the time saving and quality of experience benefits of a good, comprehensive, wayfinding system. A piecemeal wayfinding system causes the user to take more time through each of the steps in the process. Frustration builds as a result. However, the comprehensive system moves the user through the process much more efficiently and in a less-stressful manner.

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Observations

Destinations

The first step in analyzing Cheney’s wayfinding system was to identify which destinations might be worthy of having wayfinding signage. Forty-one preliminary destinations were identified. The next step was to determine which of the destinations had signage. Of the 45 locations, only 18 had wayfinding signage. The quality and quantity of the signage was generally less than adequate. In most cases, there was only one sign associated with each location.

There are a few things to note. First, it is conceivable that some locations did not have signage because they are easy to find when traveling down First Street, such as the library. However, this does not preclude the need for signage. In cases like the Post Office on Second Street, while it isn’t difficult to find, a visitor or new resident to the city would have no idea where to begin looking. We also discovered that Cheney’s public parks, one of the most used city facilities, had no wayfinding whatsoever.

Locations in Cheney

Type	Location	Sign?	Type	Location	Sign?
City Services	Courthouse	Yes	Schools	Betz Elementary	Yes
	Fire Station	-		Cheney Alternative HS	-
	Downtown Public Parking	-		Cheney Middle School	-
	Planning Department	Yes		Cheney High School	-
	Police Station	Yes		Reid Elementary	-
	Public Works	Yes		Salnave Elementary	Yes
	Recycling Center	Yes	Recreation	Columbia Plateau Trail	Yes
Utility Building	Yes	Local Camping		Yes	
EWU	Bookstore	-		Local Lakes	Yes
	College Street	-		Museum	Yes
	Main Campus	Yes		Swimming Pool	-
	Reese Court	-		Tennis Courts	-
	Theatre	-		Turnbull NWR	Yes
	Visitors Center	-		Wren-Pierson Building	Yes
	Woodward Field	Yes		Other	Downtown Business District
Parks	Centennial Park	-			Farmers Market
	Hagelin Park	-	‘K’ Street Transit Station		-
	Moos Field	-	Post Office		-
	Salnave Park	-	Public Library		-
	Sutton Park	-	Pathways to Progress		-
	Veterans Memorial Park	-	Rockwood Clinic		Yes
			Spokane County FD		-
			Sterling-Moorman House		-
			WA State Digital Archives		-

Total: 18 of 45 locations have at least one sign (40%).

EWU Population Impacts.

Cheney has a fairly unique situation with EWU students making up such a large portion of the city’s population for much of the year. Total enrollment at EWU is comparable to Cheney’s total population, both around 10,000, but just how many EWU students are living in Cheney?

According to Eastern Washington University, in 2007 there were 3632 students reported to be living in Cheney. The City population for 2007 was 10,210, which makes EWU students living in Cheney account for 36 percent of the total city population. Over the past 10 years, the percentage of EWU students making up Cheney’s total population has fluctuated between 33 and 42 percent.

With an estimated 36 percent of EWU students living in Cheney in 2007, we can speculate that approximately 1/5 to 1/4 of them leave the city each year and are replaced by new freshmen and transfer students. Therefore, we can hypothesize that EWU students alone account for up to nine percent of Cheney’s population being new to the city each year. This rather unique situation can have huge impacts on our city.

The question has to be raised regarding the ability of these new students to find destinations in Cheney, especially when considering how traffic to the EWU campus is routed. What kind of shopping, entertainment, and recreation habits are formed when students are most familiar with Betz and Washington Streets? Are students exposed to all the possible destinations in Cheney? Can students and new residents alike find their destinations in spite of Cheney’s somewhat unusual street pattern?

With Spokane so accessible to college students, the City of Cheney should take special note of how these students are choosing and finding their destinations.

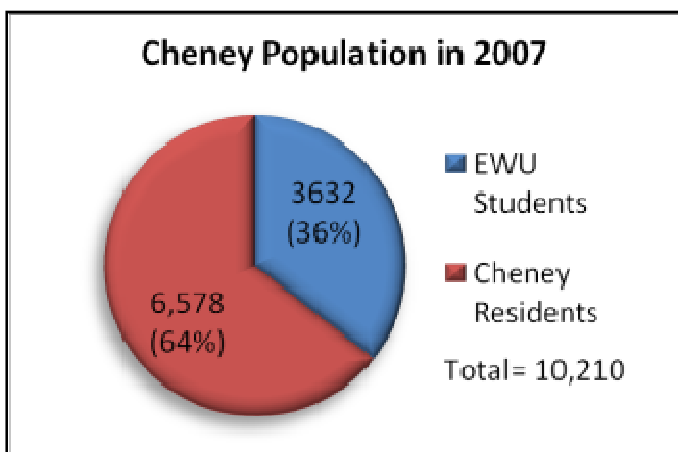


Figure 1

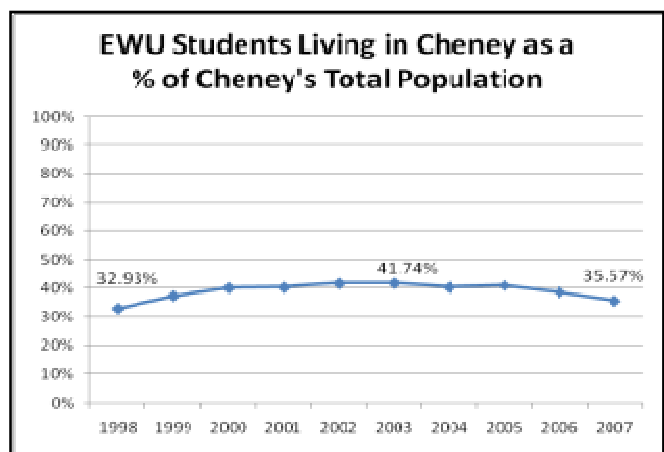


Figure 2

Data obtained from EWU and The Office of Financial Management.

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Issues

The initial signage inventory uncovered a number of issues. Aside from the under-representation of destinations, one striking observation was the lack of a standard design. When a new sign is needed, it is put up with little regard to the designs of existing signs. This piecemeal approach taken over the years has resulted in a collection of confusing and dissimilar signs. Together these signs add to visual clutter and can actually negate their wayfinding effects.

It is important to analyze the current wayfinding system with a comprehensive approach. Every aspect of good wayfinding should be considered in regard to Cheney's system.



Lack of standard design creates visual clutter.

A major question that needs to be answered is whether the city is benefiting from its current system.

- **Does it increase sense of place?** None of the wayfinding signs in Cheney, apart from the five gateway signs, promote the city itself. The opportunity for increasing a sense of place for the visitor is completely missed. There is no character to the existing signs (aside from the gateway signs).
- **Is it increasing commercial awareness?** The only signs with the potential to increase commercial awareness are those that direct to the "business district." These signs are severely limited due to their locations and design.
- **Does it encourage exploration?** Whether or not the current signs encourage exploration is difficult to qualify. However, a lack of a standardized system would seem to indicate that it doesn't, especially when coupled with the complete lack of recreation signs for locations within the city.
- **Has it increased civic engagement?** Looking at the deficit of locations actually represented by signage, it would appear that they do not provide a meaningful increase in civic engagement.

In addition to considering if the benefits are being attained or not, we also looked at three specific issues. The following three issues were found to be of major importance when considering wayfinding in Cheney and warrant their own detailed analysis. Addressing these could have the largest impact on wayfinding in within the city.

- Lack of adequate wayfinding in general.
- Poor / non-uniform design.
- Downtown routing and parking.

Another consideration for future wayfinding plans involves the Washington State Department of Transportation. Since 1st Street is also I-904, it partially falls under the jurisdiction of the DOT. That means Cheney and the DOT will need to work together when planning for signage on 1st Street. See Cheney Signs section for some examples of DOT signs in Cheney.

Lack of Adequate Wayfinding in General.

It is difficult to convey the lack of wayfinding unless one is actually engaged in the wayfinding process. The best attempt that we can make is to create a list of potential problems created by the lack of signage. Again, the solution is to not simply place more signs. Visual clutter can often worsen the overall problem. A good wayfinding system can thoroughly direct users to many locations without the need for an obscene amount of signage. The following are some highlighted problems:

- No signage for any recreational locations within the city limits.
- No signage for the downtown business district in the most critical locations (gateways to town on I-904).
- Business district signs are placed in illogical locations.
- Only one sign for two of the six public K-12 schools.
- No signage for the downtown public parking lot.
- No signage for the post office. This is a key location but not represented.
- Three of the five city gateway signs are very outdated.
- Bike routes are not addressed by signage.
- Vast majority of signs are on First Street. There is little internal city signage directing towards first street.
- No pedestrian-oriented signage. Pedestrians are forced to use vehicular signage which may make them feel unwelcome and out of place.
- No map kiosks downtown. This is a missed opportunity to increase commercial awareness.

Another key problem that affects nearly all signs is that they are simply placed where the street that the location is on intersects First Street. Many locations are within a block or two of First Street, and they typically have just one wayfinding sign. For example, someone coming into town from the north would have no idea where the police station is unless he or she was to stumble upon the sign while driving down First Street. In this sense, the current wayfinding signage simply acts as a method to attract travelers who happen to be on First Street near the location. There is no process involved. Either you see the sign on First Street, or you don't.

A more comprehensive wayfinding system would consider where people enter the city and what they might be looking for. Of course, it isn't practical to have one massive sign at the north entrance to the town displaying all 45 destinations, but you can group some of the locations together. Again, a traveler wouldn't know where to look for the police station. Right now, he or she would either continue on 904 at the Betz intersection, or turn right onto Betz; but if there were a sign directing down 904 for "All City Services" the traveler would know which way to go.

Poor / Non-Uniform Design.

Wayfinding systems run the risk of doing more harm than good if they are distracting or confusing. In Cheney there is little cohesiveness in sign design and size, and as a result there is no chance that the wayfinding system can create a sense of place. Many Cheney signs effectively detract from a sense of place as a result of a lack of planning.

The first pair of images below show conflicting designs directing travelers toward the same destination. However, to the unfamiliar traveler, it may be unclear if “Eastern Washington University” and “EWU Campus” are the same place. The second pair of images are for two different elementary schools in Cheney. It is obvious that one receives more attention than the other.



Downtown Routing and Parking.

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Traffic routing by means of wayfinding signage potentially has huge impacts on Cheney. The graphic to the right illustrates how current wayfinding signage on I-904 for Eastern Washington University diverts traffic away from the downtown commercial district. When considering that EWU students make up approximately 36 percent of Cheney’s population and there are thousands entering and leaving the city daily for eight months out of the year, this routing issue could have huge impacts on commerce in Cheney if the students are unaware of what the downtown commercial district has to offer.



EWU traffic is diverted away from the downtown.

Additionally, there is an issue with “business district” signage. These signs are located within the vicinity of the downtown area; however, there are no signs anywhere at the entrance of town. When visitors enter town from the north on 904, they could be completely oblivious to the fact that there is a historic downtown commercial district just two miles down the road. It’s conceivable that many commercial dollars could stop at the north end developments and never have a chance to reach the downtown.

Placing signs for the business district in the vicinity of the district does nothing to address possible routing problems. Once again, wayfinding needs to be a comprehensive system, not just a group of signs.



Ambiguous business district sign at 1st and Spokane (Elm) Streets.

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Through previous work in the comprehensive plan visioning process, we learned that a major public concern for downtown Cheney is the availability of parking, especially in the winter months. This information came as somewhat of a surprise because Cheney does indeed have a free public parking lot in the downtown core. However, it was found that there is a complete lack of signage for this parking lot. Furthermore, it may be perceived to be owned by an adjoining restaurant, which may deter its use even more. Poor wayfinding and location signage contribute to this situation.



Types of Wayfinding Signs

Examples

Numerous web searches uncovered a variety of wayfinding systems in cities around the world. There are seven main sign types that best fit into the wayfinding process. Again, the goal of a wayfinding system is to most efficiently help people move through travel events – enter the city, find the vicinity of their destination, park, and walk to the destination. Below are examples of seven sign types which each serve their own special purpose in the process.

Gateway

Gateway signs are placed at primary entrances to the city and serve as a welcome sign to travelers. Their main purpose is to create a sense of place and boundary. Gateway signs are sometimes overlooked as wayfinding signs because they do not direct to specific locations, but they do serve to begin the wayfinding process for visitors to the city.



Vehicular Trailblazer

Trailblazer signs are located at key intersections and main routes within the city limits. They are known as trailblazers because they are located along the primary “trails” to destinations. Their main focus is vehicular guidance, but work fine for pedestrians as well. For optimal legibility, they should not have more than three or four destinations. Text size, graphics, and all colors should be optimized for legibility taking into account vehicle travel speeds and reading distances.



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Bike Trailblazer

Bicycle travel is growing in popularity and should not be ignored for wayfinding signage. Portland, Oregon, for example, has a strong biking community. The city has installed bike wayfinding signs along main bike routes. They not only list distance to the destination in miles, but also in travel time. This makes them much more relevant to travelers with a limited range.



Pedestrian

Pedestrian signs are meant solely for primary transportation wayfinding. They should be placed in ways which minimize their exposure to vehicles because drivers slowing to read the smaller print on pedestrian signs create a safety issue. This particular sign has distances measured in units that pedestrians can easily relate to: blocks.



Parking

It is critical that parking lots not only have wayfinding directing travelers to them, but that they also are easily identified. This example is easy to see, has the hours and requirements clearly marked, and has a logo of the city to increase a sense of place. Note: The 'P' symbol is recognized as a symbol for parking in many places around the world.



Map Kiosk

Map kiosks are strictly for pedestrian purposes. Ideal locations are in high-traffic areas and transition points from secondary to primary transportation. They orient the user to the surrounding environment and list all destinations within reach. They can have the added potential bonus of serving as community bulletin boards on the opposite side.



Location

Location signs have some leeway in design. The design can be unique to the type of destination, but should remain consistent within that destination category, for example, school signs can look different than park signs, but all school signs should look similar. These signs mark the actual destination and end the wayfinding process.



Cheney Signs

Cheney primarily uses three different sign types. It is somewhat difficult to classify all the wayfinding signs into just three types because of the lack of a uniform design. Generally, the three types are illustrated below:

Gateway

Cheney has two excellent gateway signs. They are newer, show the city logo, and both are located on I-904 at the entrances to town. However, there are three other gateway signs, one at Cheney-Spokane Road, one at Cheney-Spangle Road, and one on Salnave Road that are quite outdated and in need of replacement.



New version of gateway sign.



Older gateway sign.

Vehicular Trailblazer

Cheney has numerous trailblazer signs and it appears that these signs are made to meet Washington State Department of Transportation standards. They all appear on First Street (I-904), have large fonts, and are designed to be easily viewed by passing cars; however, they seem out of place for pedestrians.



Vehicular for EWU (DOT).



Vehicular for local lakes (DOT).



Vehicular for local lakes (DOT).

Hybrid Auto / Pedestrian

These signs work for both vehicular and pedestrian wayfinding, however, they do not perform exceptionally well for either travel mode. Instead the need for high-visibility for vehicles suffers while trying to remain friendly for pedestrians.



Hybrid for City Hall and EWU.



Hybrid for business district.



Hybrid for EWU.

Next Steps

Recommendations

Short term - 3 Months

- Finalize project direction
- Identify a funding strategy to complete analysis, develop plan, and design
- Partner with University on joint overall wayfinding project
- Work with DOT to immediately modify SR904 and I-90 signage

Mid Term – 3-6 Months

- Establish stakeholder group
- Complete supplemental Area Analysis
- Develop Wayfinding Plan
- Prioritize phased implementation

Long Term – 6-15 Months

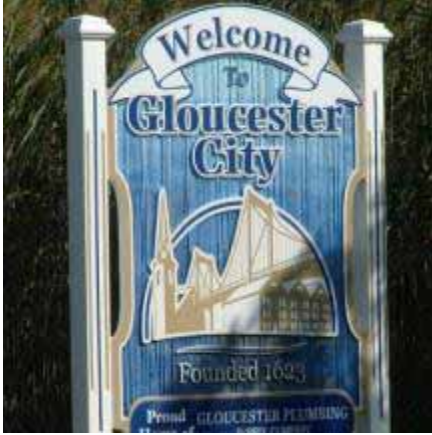
- Develop working drawings and specifications (leveraging EWU design work)
- Get Community Feedback (survey, website, full scale mockups)
- Finalize signage design
- Implementation begins

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Appendices

A. More Wayfinding Sign Examples

Gateway



Vehicular



Bike

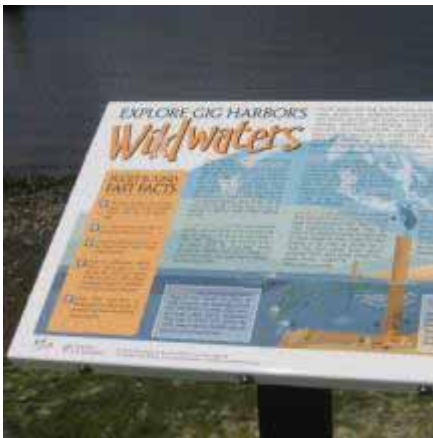


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Pedestrian



Kiosk



Location



B. Gig Harbor, WA, Case Study.

Gig Harbor, Washington – A Wayfinding Case Study

City of Cheney, August 26, 2008

Introduction

Gig Harbor is a city in Western Washington with a 2008 population of 6,910. The city lies about 10 miles west of Tacoma. It shares many similarities with Cheney. For one, it could be considered a bedroom community of Tacoma in much the same way as Cheney could be for Spokane. While not nearly as large as Eastern Washington University's campus in Cheney, Gig Harbor is home to a branch of Tacoma Community College. Both cities have their respective historical backgrounds. Also, both cities are located in close proximity to state highways; State Route 16 through Gig Harbor, and Interstate 904 through Cheney.

In 2004, Gig Harbor started a comprehensive wayfinding project. Four years later, Cheney began looking into wayfinding. At the time of this case study, Cheney is still in the information gathering stage. Because of the similarities between the two cities, Cheney could potentially benefit a great deal from learning about Gig Harbor's experiences with their project. For this reason, this case study was put together by the City of Cheney's Planning Department staff, with assistance from Laureen Lund – the Marketing Director for Gig Harbor, and a site visit to gain firsthand research in Gig Harbor's signs. The following information was either obtained from a phone interview with Ms. Lund, or through the site visit and analysis performed by James Caddey – an intern with the City of Cheney's Planning Department.



Vehicular WF sign on Pioneer Way.

Background

Gig Harbor's wayfinding project came about as a solution to tourism issues in 2004. Initially, the city had hired a consultant for tourism / marketing purposes. One recommendation of the consultant was for the city to address wayfinding as a way to increase tourism. The consultant offered to do a study, but their asking price was too high for the city's budget. This led to the project being done in-house by the city's Marketing Director, Laureen Lund. In 2005, Ms. Lund spent most of the year working on the project.

Local businesses were an invaluable asset in the early stages of the project. It was felt that Gig Harbor already had many signs with a nice look; the system just needed some refining. There were requests for more signs based on existing designs. Much of Ms. Lund's time early on was spent on inventorying signs while driving around the city imagining herself as a visitor. Once the plan was completed, the city approved it and went ahead with the project.

Implementation

The project was carried out in three phases to mitigate funding issues. The city selected the least expensive contractor for manufacturing the signs. There were different funding sources depending on what the signs advertised. For example, the lodging tax paid for tourism signs. Additionally, each city department paid for their own signs, such as the library, or public works.

Looking back on Gig Harbor's project, Ms. Lund gave us one main suggestion; that is, we should begin working with the Washington State Department of Transportation early on in the project. Gig Harbor had some issues with the DOT guidelines for signage along SR-16. The problem involved naming requirements on SR-16 signage. Eventually, everything was worked out, but the negotiations were time consuming.

My Experience

For a visitor, Gig Harbor's wayfinding appeared to be quite efficient. The system consists of a few different wayfinding sign types. Most destinations seemed to be in the heart of the historic downtown. As you exit State Route 16 and enter the city, you are immediately greeted by a vehicular wayfinding sign. Directions are very clear and there were no problems finding the downtown district.

Parking was available right in front of the Visitors Center – which turned out to be an enormous asset. The Visitors Center is open and staffed seven days a week. Inside, you can find a plethora of educational pamphlets and maps. In just the few minutes that I was there on a sunny Saturday afternoon, I witnessed half a dozen travelers come in to ask for directions, seek advice on events, or simply use the restrooms.

The pedestrian-oriented wayfinding worked just as well as the vehicular type. The signs were clearly legible on lampposts and finding the destinations posed no problems. The downtown map that I picked up at the Visitor Center nicely complimented the signage. As I walked down the main pedestrian boulevard near the waterfront, I came across numerous historic markers. These kiosks, of sort, provided information on the historical background of the area and were a great addition to the pedestrian friendly environment.

It was obvious that most patrons of the many gift shops and tourist-oriented stores realized that walking is the most efficient mode of transportation. Cars were backed up at the main 3-way intersection in the middle of downtown. Much of the parking here was already taken, but parking was plentiful near the fringes of the district. It was little inconvenience to park away from the center of activity and cover the square mile or so that made up the downtown on foot.



Pedestrian wayfinding sign.

In fact, the pedestrian friendliness of the environment can't be stressed enough. Gig Harbor's downtown district contains many characteristics of a walkable neighborhood. Sidewalks are wide and not crowded, for the most part, and crosswalks are clearly marked. Vehicles, although plentiful, are calmed by the narrow streets, on street parking, and stop signs. Cyclists are numerous and courteous to drivers and pedestrians alike. Additionally, Pierce Transit busses run through the area hourly on weekdays as well as weekends. I suspect it would have been quite easy to catch the bus in Tacoma and ride it to Gig Harbor.

The environment is built to a human scale. Buildings are not overly tall, open spaces compliment building footprints, and houses are mixed in with the commercial stores and activities inherent of a functioning harbor. Overall, Gig Harbor's downtown is very much a pedestrian environment. It wasn't long until I found myself in a bookstore and purchased a book to sit down and read in a waterfront park. The wayfinding signage program serves as a final touch to an already well-planned system.

More Pictures



Exterior of Visitor Center.



Map of downtown outside of Visitor Center.



Interior of Visitor Center.



Informational historic kiosk on public street.



Water fountain, historical kiosk, and trash can.



More vehicular wayfinding.