

CORONA FARM: THE GREENWAY-WAY

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At a time when farmlands are beginning to disappear to make way for development, there is one farmer working to save his family farm by *creating* the development himself. Corona Farm co-owner and founder, Robert Greenway, has decided to get creative and make some of his farmland available to develop into housing; but it will be developed the “Robert Greenway-Way,” consciously executed and based upon soundly engineered, environmentally considerate plans.

During this age when most small farmers simply throw up their hands and sell their land to Kaufman & Broad-type developers, I can deeply appreciate the value of the Greenway’s subdivision plans. “Most small farms today are subsidized in some way,” says Robert, “family money, outside employment...this decision (to subdivide) allows my wife Darby, who for years has worked off the farm as a local therapist, to be able to spend more time working on the farm, and less time in an office.”

Painstakingly executed, Robert has spent a great deal of time and money consciously preparing six lots for sale on land previously part of the farm, yet uncultivated. Each lot faces into a circle, in the center of which is a landscaped common area. This central mound was created with intention; the four cardinal directions are honored with four simulated streams using plantings of mosses and thyme. “We studied the water run-off on this entire portion of land throughout the year, and engineered each lot to absorb most of the storm water on the land. This is called a ‘low impact development,’ or ‘LID,’ supposedly more environmentally friendly than channeling storm water to the nearest bodies of water,” explained Robert.

While pointing out intricate French drainage systems and water catchments engineered to include the specific grading of each lot so as to slope perfectly, Robert adds, “What we’ve done, with all the complex engineering, is insure that the water can filter down to deep-level drains, which disperses the water underground, and allows for overflow into a nearby agricultural pond.” This development is a model for conscious development. The intentional plan includes building restrictions specific to each lot, which also preserves the much coveted Pacific Northwest sunlight: no house is allowed to block the sun from the neighboring homes and some height restrictions apply.

Even though Robert hopes to make this land available as affordable housing, the requirements of the Planning Department for extensive road preparation and the decision to install highly engineered, sophisticated water catchments and city water/sewage link-ups have pushed the prices of these lots to between \$ 158,000 and \$ 165,000. Robert is working with the LandWorks Collaborative and other organizations to explore routes for young or first-time buyers without equity to become prospective buyers of the four lots still available. He is also seeking a conservation easement on the farm to preserve it in perpetuity, the original reason for beginning this project.

As this soft-spoken man and I walked the new development, it became clear to me that the cost of Robert’s decision to develop was not restricted to the monetary outlay of engineering and grading and permits and legal fees, but included an intangible cost, much like selling a part of one’s body. This was a choice made to save what amounts to fifteen years of back-breaking labor, even if it was one of love—the Greenway family farm on the other side of the fence. Robert confides, “By the time the ‘low impact development’ was done, with all its city regulations and engineering requirements met, we ended up with what seems to us a high-impact on the land, and that has been painful. Now we’re doing what we did with the farm 15 years ago—composting and building up the soil on the new development, planting dozens

and dozens of native trees and plants—hoping to turn the entire project into a garden-adjacent-to-a-small-farm (i.e., "Corona Gardens"). It will take some time..."

Located in the geographical center of Port Townsend and adjacent to the undeveloped 35th Street Park, Corona Farm today can feed up to 75 people from 230 cultivated beds. After retiring seventeen years ago from a somewhat unconventional career as a professor of eco-psychology, Robert and his wife Darby began to till the very poor, glacial-till soil on their newly purchased six acres, beginning with the beds behind the house. "We've had help over the years: Bob and Sharon, Neil and Rene, Gabriel and Rosanna; it takes at least 150 hours per week to bring off this whole complex operation." Currently, Adam Blake and Em Graham manage the vegetable production with 6-8 volunteers; Darby Greenway manages Corona Farm Flowers, and Rob works with Robert on the farm, currently the site of weddings and field trips for school children. On Thursdays, neighbors can walk-in to purchase vegetables, and *SeedSpring* summer camps are planned. As Greenway says, this farm is serving the multiple functions for which it was originally intended: (1) that it produce food for personal and local consumption; (2) that it be a place of education and healing; (3) that it reflect a spiritual base; and (4) that it be economically viable (or at least break even!). And, as Robert says, "We're still working on that latter goal, and the new development is part of it!"

For more info on Corona Farm, visit their website at www.coronafarm.com