

# A Storefront Studio is...what?

## Roslyn Revitalization on the move

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ROSLYN – Storefront Studio isn't a place. It's a project, and more so it's a seed University of Washington (UW) Professor Jim Nicholls planted six years ago spreading roots into several areas of the state. Storefront benefits Nicholls's senior architecture students and the communities whose dreams they transform into real plans and drawings. When Roslyn Revitalization members heard about Storefront, they jumped on it.

"Storefront will bring energy and direction to our town," said Roslyn Revitalization Vice President Jenny Aurit.

"Simply put, we go into a community," Nicholls said, "research, talk, tour, listen, and then, in a series of meetings, define and refine the community's vision of itself."

"The way it's been working," he said, "we actually become a third party facilitator, an arbitrator of sorts, providing people with a process that brings everyone to the same page, i.e., a vision everyone can agree on. Our approach is working very, very well."

Cost for Nicholls and company? About \$12,000 – a fraction of what it would cost to hire an architectural firm to produce conceptual drawings

say, for what Roslyn wants its main street to look like.

**First Day in Roslyn**  
Friday, Apr. 3, Nicholls and his crew appeared in Roslyn, at Pennsylvania Avenue's Northwest Improvement Building, for the first of four sessions designed to sort out the town's vision of itself, a task ultimately made possible, as Nicholls explained, by UW's suite of hi-tech hardware and software.

"We can take photographs of the downtown area, for example," he said, "and overlay improvements to show what it would look like."

Asked if he and his team costs out those improvements as part of the package, Nicholls said, "Not in detail, but we've done that for some communities. We do study a town's economy and try to design within what we estimate to be feasible. I've done this for so many years, I'm getting good at delivering realistic plans. With local partnerships and grants, most communities can get started with what resources they have available."

Friday's meeting offered residents of any standing in Roslyn a chance to describe their visions. Nicholls and his students simply listened.

The uninitiated may wonder why some speakers, as you will see below, focused on

people-talk, past and present, rather than building-and-street-talk. That's because Nicholls believes design brands a community, and design must always reflect the character and the dream – of the people in the community.

**A Vision of Their Town**  
Here below are excerpts from some of the presentations heard Friday night.

**Mayor Jeri Porter** was first to speak. She read from a prepared statement empha-

sizing what she thought was the head and heart of Roslyn: industry. "The people who built this town were rough and tough. Coal miners and loggers. They played hard and they worked hard."

**Connie Wanechek**, representing Roslyn's Cemetery Commission, painted Roslyn as a classic American melting pot.

**Andy Januskiewicz**, Vice-Chair of the Historic Roslyn Planning Commission listed a litany of assets he felt Roslyn possesses: a diverse

population touting an inventory of unique skill sets, vacant lots for infilling, architectural diversity harmonized by common features, and a pedestrian friendly downtown.

Januskiewicz also pointed out what he thought Roslyn needed: a consolidated vision, a solution for mixed-use zoning, a way to win over and "get along" with the captains of development, a plan to remodel with historical accuracy, and a strategy to deal with franchise

See STOREFRONT STUDIO... pg A7

# STOREFRONT STUDIO...

CONTINUED FROM PAGE A1

...businesses when they come knocking at Roslyn's door.

Real Estate Agent **Mare Rich** wondered how the town might compete with Suncadia when it builds out, without sacrificing Roslyn's flavor. He also pointed out the importance of branding in the marketing formula Roslyn chooses.

"In Bali," he said, "it took them exactly one generation to let the world know their country was home to the most beautiful people. They set out to image themselves that way with an effective branding tactic, and that's exactly what they accomplished – in one generation."

Roslyn Revitalization president **Jennifer Basterrechea** presented her comments in the form of questions she wanted Nicholls and his group to consider.

"What signage and signage codes will work in Roslyn?" she began. "What pedestrian-related safety issues should we entertain? The Coal Mines Trail disappears in Roslyn – how can we address that?"



ANDY JANUSKIEWICZ detailed a healthy list of the challenges he feels Roslyn faces, and an equally healthy list of the town's assets. Jim Fossett photo



UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON PROFESSOR of Architecture Jim Nicholls (second from right) shown with a group who call themselves Storefront Studio, seemingly an unusual and creative name for an unusual and creative team. Jim Fossett photo



JENNIFER BASTERRECHEA targeted signage as one of several issues she felt Roslyn should address. Jim Fossett photo

Resident **Bob Hornbein** said, "When you're in Roslyn, you get the sense you're going back 50 years. Not many communities possess that quality. So, how do we adapt to change without being overtaken by change?"

**Kanashibushan** presented herself to the group dressed in period garb, complete with a bonnet, to deliver a slide show highlighting Roslyn's Afro-American heritage. Kanashibushan, considered by many as one of the town's most informed tradition bearers, displayed an uncanny memory for stories about people long passed, evoking smiles and laughter from the audience.

"Whatever you do to Roslyn," she winked, directing her comments to Nicholls, "do it like you're doing it for your grandmother. Do it with respect and love."

**Nuts and Bolts: Will It Work?**

Storefront is only one meeting into the project, but will it work? Will the investment of time and energy produce results, especially at a juncture in this

state's history when money is so tight? "Over the last six years we've been running Storefront," Nicholls said, "we've seen results in several communities, including University Way in Seattle, Kent, and Des Moines. Smart combinations of grant work and developing local business partnerships produce results."

"We've already applied for two grants," Basterrechea said. "It's money the county is allocating from a pot the state set aside for historical preservation. One of those grants will allow us to help local businesses improve their facades, a project that can grow from the work we're doing with Storefront."

For more information on the Storefront Studio Project in Roslyn contact Roslyn Revitalization at [roslynrevitalization.org](http://roslynrevitalization.org) or 509-649-3650.