

Waterfront Action Plan 2004-2007

Connecting Bellingham with the Bay

INTRODUCING the ACTION PLAN

The Waterfront Futures Group has created a Waterfront Vision and Framework Plan and Waterfront Action Plan entitled "Connecting Bellingham with the Bay." This Action Plan describes the steps that need to occur in the first three years in order to move forward on the recommendations of the Waterfront Futures Group. The actions outlined here should be completed in the next three years.

INITIATE PUBLIC REVIEW AND ADOPTION PROCESS

The City and Port should review the recommendations of the Waterfront Futures Group with the goal of adopting the Waterfront Vision and Framework Plan including the Guiding Principles and Recommendations in 2005. These recommendations should also be incorporated into the update of the City's Comprehensive Plan.

INITIATE POLICY ALIGNMENT

The City and Port should take action to bring City and Port plans and policies into alignment with the adopted Waterfront Vision and Framework Plan. Priority documents for consideration include:

- Amendments to the City of Bellingham Comprehensive Plan
- Amendments to the Port of Bellingham Comprehensive Scheme of Harbor Improvements and to its Corporate Strategic Plan
- Changes to be incorporated into the update of the City of Bellingham Shoreline Master Program

IDENTIFY, PRIORITIZE AND IMPLEMENT REGULATORY CHANGES

The City should focus on changes needed to accommodate waterfront redevelopment, including mixed-use zoning districts tailored to waterfront segments and sub areas, building and site design guidelines tied to specific waterfront areas and changes to regulatory requirements such as marina parking requirements.

APPOINT WATERFRONT FUTURES "ADVISORS"

The City and the Port should appoint a group to be responsible for oversight and coordination of the vision for the Bellingham waterfront. Like the Waterfront Futures Group, the Waterfront Futures Advisors should be composed of members that represent the diverse interests and stakeholders of the Bellingham waterfront, while keeping in mind long-term community benefit. The City and the Port should appoint the members, and the group should receive an annual budget from each, with which to hire staff and to conduct their responsibilities. In addition to the appointed members, the group could include representatives from organizations or agencies with direct responsibility for some aspect of the Bellingham Bay waterfront, such as the Port, the City, the Lummi Nation, or the County. The group should be advisory to both the Port and the City and should be regularly accountable to each body.

The members of this group would be the stewards of the waterfront and the keepers of the vision. They would serve as advocates for all manner of waterfront improvement and

redevelopment. They would not usurp the existing authority of the City or the Port or of other agencies but would seek to coordinate the use of those authorities toward the realization of the vision. Their responsibilities could include oversight of the following areas:

- Formulating processes and scopes of work for accomplishing waterfront recommendations, work with existing agencies to determine responsibilities, budgets and timelines
- Organizing and convening interagency work groups to undertake multi-jurisdictional tasks
- Planning and hosting public forums on waterfront related topics
- Assessing waterfront improvement projects progress and recommending changes as appropriate
- Regular reporting to the City Council and Port Commission on the progress of waterfront improvement
- Actively seeking funding mechanisms, grants, rebates and tax options that could be applied to waterfront redevelopment

ESTABLISH A WATERFRONT "ACTION ENTITY"

The City and Port should establish a Waterfront "Action Entity" (or Entities) to undertake the redevelopment of the City Center portion of the waterfront. The Action Entity would guide activities and decisions about public and private investment within a designated "City Center Waterfront between the I & J Waterway and the south end of the Cornwall Avenue landfill. The Action Entity should be in place by the end of 2005, with dedication of resources by the City and Port and a budget adequate to perform its responsibilities in an expedited manner.

The composition and structure of the Action Entity will require additional investigation. However, the Waterfront Futures Group sees promise in the possibilities embodied in the State of Washington's "Community Renewal Act" (RCW 35.81) as an organizational framework through which waterfront redevelopment could occur.

The City and the Port could appoint board members. Most likely, the Action Entity would be a legal entity of the City, but it could be organized to be jointly accountable to both the City and the Port. The board should be small enough (5 to 7 members) to be able to act quickly and efficiently, and to maintain a high degree of flexibility and adaptability. This structure would provide a high level of public visibility and accountability, while exercising special authority over the redevelopment in the City Center Waterfront Renewal Area.

PREPARE A CITY CENTER WATERFRONT DEVELOPMENT PLAN

One of the first responsibilities of the Waterfront "Action Entity" will be to prepare a City Center Waterfront Development Plan (the Plan) consistent with adopted community plans and policies. Guided by an appointed board, the Action Entity would direct the preparation of the Plan, including an environmental impact statement (EIS) for the entire plan. City and Port review of the plan would include extensive opportunities for public review and input and submission through formal public review and adoption processes. City and Port policies and plans would be modified as needed consistent with the approved plan to enable plan implementation.

The City Center Waterfront Development Plan will include:

- An overall infrastructure plan, including responsibility for implementation and funding;
- Priorities for design and development of roads, utilities and public amenities needed to support desired development;
- Mixed use areas designed for water-dependent and water-related uses as well as areas for small and large scale economic development and job diversity;
- Opportunities for building reuse and redevelopment and for a variety of housing and support services;
- Opportunities for education and training facilities and for cultural facilities and services;
- Phased development to allow the Authority to "meter out" property over time.

Pacing of property development will respond to market demand, infrastructure financing and timing and the efficiency of permitting processes. The Action Entity will oversee development of the City Center Waterfront Renewal Plan and the pacing of development so as to encourage innovation, diversity and quality design and construction and assist in the creation of a complex urban waterfront neighborhood.

INITIATE EARLY ACTION PROJECTS

The Waterfront Futures Group provided a list of ideas for early consideration as part of the Waterfront Action Plan. These ideas are recommended for early and visible implementation of the Waterfront Vision and Framework Plan.

Reinforce the Inherent Qualities of Each Place on the Waterfront

Create design guidelines and establish visual access opportunities

The City should bring forward specific design and development guidelines for community discussion.

In the development of these design and development guidelines, the City and Port should use the descriptions for each area provided in the [Waterfront Vision and Framework Plan](#) to highlight unique qualities to be conserved and enhanced in each segment of the waterfront. They should identify significant physical features including topographic changes, structures and landscape that should be respected in any new development.

This process should also include a photographic inventory of visual access opportunities, including views to and from the water, to and from community landmarks, and of waterfront activity areas and sites. The inventory should locate and describe visual connections by establishing lines of sight and view corridors to and from the water while incorporating existing and future landmarks as focal points for view corridors and visual connections.

Conduct a study of historically and culturally significant sites

The Waterfront Futures Advisors should initiate a dialog amongst all interested parties including the Lummi Nation and Nooksack Tribe. A group should be appointed to oversee a collaborative process to identify significant locations and develop an interpretative program for waterfront sites.

Facilitate adaptive reuse of landmark structures and other buildings

As part of all redevelopment planning, analyze the reuse potential of all existing structures, particularly those with unique character or landmark qualities.

Create a new City Center waterfront neighborhood

Encourage the City to create a new neighborhood that encompasses the area from the I & J Waterway to the south end of the Cornwall Avenue Landfill.

Restore the Health of Land and Water

Update existing parks and open space plans

The City should update its Parks & Recreation Master Plan as needed to reflect the Waterfront Vision and Framework Plan. The Port should update its planning documents to reflect the parks, open space and natural systems identified in the Waterfront Vision and Framework Plan.

Create an integrated parks, open space and natural systems plan

The Waterfront Futures Advisors should initiate a process in conjunction with Whatcom County, cities, the Port, tribes and appropriate state and federal agencies in developing a plan that encompasses the larger system from Chuckanut Bay to the Nooksack River and Ferndale, including the Lummi Peninsula and Lummi Island. Develop a plan to preserve and extend parks, open spaces and natural systems that considers land, water and their integration. Develop a plan for shoreline trails that places them in the context of a larger system.

Create an inventory of environmental resources and opportunities for each of the designated areas

Draw on existing published resources such as those produced by the Bellingham Bay Pilot Demonstration Project and the Environmental Workshop Report: Opportunities and Ideas for Habitat Restoration and Water Access on Urban Bellingham Bay. Add to the inventory as new information becomes available through supplemental publications such as the Shoreline Master Program Update.

Clarify the nature of contamination for in-water and upland sites and identify opportunities and strategies for cleanup

Charge the Port of Bellingham and City of Bellingham with gathering, consolidating and publishing existing and newly developing information about contamination in the waterfront area. Continue the role of the Bellingham Bay Pilot Demonstration Project in identifying appropriate cleanup strategies and options. Incorporate cleanup opportunities as part of public and private redevelopment activities. Identify opportunities for environmental mitigation and mitigation banking preceding and during the project review and approval processes.

Improve treatment and disposal of storm water coming into and out of the near shore areas

Identify areas where environmental resource protection should be the overriding consideration in designing access and development

Improve Waterfront Access

Identify, prioritize and acquire sites for waterfront parks and open space

The Waterfront Advisors will work with the City, Port and City Center Waterfront "Action Entity" to identify and prioritize sites for waterfront parks and open space.

- As part of this process, responsibility for acquisition and development of these sites should be determined.
- Support initiation of a 2005 planning effort for renewal of a Community Greenways and Shoreways levy with a levy vote by 2006.

Establish a comprehensive inventory of opportunities related to rail access and railroad facilities

The Waterfront Advisors should establish priorities for action and designate lead and participant agencies.

- Explore options for moving or covering portions of the railroad tracks
- Explore future location of a multimodal rail station in the center of the city
- Evaluate options for improving railroad operation and safety
- Evaluate approaches to mitigate railroad impacts
- Preserve the revised railroad corridor for future transportation needs

Develop a Master Circulation, Parking & Mobility Plan

The Waterfront Advisors will be an advocate for development of a master circulation, parking & mobility plan that incorporates all agency strategic plans; coordinates with the Integrated Parks, Open Space and Natural System Plan; and with the updated strategic plan for the Whatcom Transportation Authority (WTA). The master circulation, parking and mobility plan will identify improved vehicular, transit and alternative transportation connections between the waterfront and other areas of the City and will create a pedestrian friendly waterfront environment.

- Identify, illustrate and describe land and water access systems
- Initiate planning for land and water connections in each waterfront area, including walking and biking facilities and water access facilities such as hand carry boats and other private or public vessels
- Improve coordination between land use and transportation functions in the City
- Designate responsibility for way-finding improvements as part of every transportation plan and development project
- Identify and implement ways to overcome railroad barriers
- Work with WTA to expand and integrate transit with water jitney services and to add transit loops to waterfront areas using smaller, flexible vehicles
- Use the development of transportation infrastructure as a tool in directing growth
- Identify opportunities for innovative transportation facilities and services to reduce auto use and parking

Promote a Healthy & Dynamic Waterfront Economy

Transitions to desired future uses

In the redevelopment of waterfront areas, the City and Port will identify and implement ways to provide transition between existing uses and new development. Implementation of design guidelines will include ways to guide development of mixed use areas while addressing compatibility with adjacent uses.

Develop a marketing plan

The Waterfront Advisors will work with the Port and the Economic Development Council to create a marketing plan to target desired new development.

Bring Western Washington University and other institutions of higher learning to the waterfront

The City, the Port and the Waterfront "Action Entity", will work with WWU to identify opportunities for expansion of university facilities in the City Center Waterfront. Assist private research and development groups to identify ties to the university and other educational institutions. Identify opportunities for education and training in new forms of employment and apprenticeships for jobs of the future.

Identify and promote job diversity and opportunities for a revitalized waterfront economy

Identify areas for water-dependent or water-related uses, start-up businesses, and small and large-scale economic opportunities. Representatives from the City, Port, Economic Development Council and educational institutions should coordinate implementation of infrastructure to support new uses and technology.

Develop specific strategies for diversifying the waterfront economy and supporting jobs of the future

Plan for coordinated job-training, technology development and installation of infrastructure to support new uses

Early Action Projects

This list of early action ideas is recommended as part of the Waterfront Action Plan. These items have been identified by the Waterfront Futures Group as those items capable of being implemented in one to three years that are most likely to provide visible evidence of progress in implementing the Waterfront Vision and Framework Plan. In some cases ideas are consistent with existing plans and policies and can be readily implemented. In other cases, policy or plan adoption or legislative action will be needed. In many cases, implementation will require regulatory review and approval and allocation of staff time or capital/operating budget approval.

The list is not complete. Additional short-term actions can be identified as part of an annual update to the Waterfront Action Plan. Other project ideas may be identified by the community and carried out as community projects without making it onto a formal list.

Identified projects may be annotated to indicate lead agencies or agencies that need to be involved such as City, Port, City & Port or Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railroad (BNSF). Suggestions concerning timing and potential financing are also included. Recognizing the three-year duration of this first Waterfront Action Plan, ideas likely to be implemented after 2007 are annotated with Date tbd (to be determined). Potential project funding sources include: BBP - Bellingham Bay Pilot implementation; P - Portfields; CGS - a new Community Greenways and Shoreways levy; and TIP - Transportation Improvement Program.

Early Action Recommendations for All Areas of the Waterfront

- Remove old and unused pilings (City & Port, project-based funding)
- Address railroad safety crossings (City & Port and BNSF)
- Develop incentive program for remediating in-water and upland contamination, mitigation credits and mitigation banking (City & Port, State and federal agencies, BBP & P, 2005)

Early Action Recommendations for Little Squalicum

- Finalize a Port/City interlocal agreement regarding annexation of properties related to little Squalicum Park (City, 2005-6)
- Complete master planning of Little Squalicum Park and develop interim upland parking (City, 2005-6)
- Remove wood chip debris (BBP & P, City, Port and state agencies)
- Improve upland parking for Little Squalicum Park (City, 2006)

Early Action Recommendations for Squalicum

- Develop a hand launch small boat site (Port, BBP & P)
- Modify the Squalicum Creek entrance and create an enhanced estuarine area

Early Action Recommendations for City Center

- Schedule design and implementation of Chestnut Street two-way between Cornwall Avenue and Ellis Street (City TIP, 2005 - 2010)
- Create/expand/enhance beach at the base of Cornwall Avenue and west toward the shipping terminal area - see Environmental Workshop Report (City and Port, CGS, BBP & P 2007)
- Develop a hand launch boat access area (Port, BBP & P, 2005)
- Create opportunities for the community to safely experience portions of the City Center waterfront including guided walks, festivals and other community events (City and Port)

Early Action Recommendations for South Hill/Boulevard

- Fund a float at Taylor Avenue Dock (City, CGS 2006)
- Naturalize the Boulevard Park beach (CGS 2007)
- Establish a hand launch area in Boulevard Park (City, 2005, 2007 if tied to beach enhancement)
- Implement plans for upland park area at Taylor Avenue Dock (2005)

Early Action Recommendations for Fairhaven

- Improve power boat launch, add boat-trailer parking area (Port, Date tbd)
- Provide hand carry boat launch at Marine Park (Port, 2005)
- Protect and enlarge the lagoon at Post Point (City, CGS tbd)
- Exclude dogs from the estuary and provide additional space and possible dog pond to the SE side of the Post Point Treatment Plant and consider putting a pond there for the dogs (City & community process)
- Protect the Post Point heron rookery and add to the wetland/marsh below the wooded slope, pursue City acquisition (City , CGS 2006)
- Avoid building 8th Street south of Harris Avenue adjacent to Padden Creek. Reserve the 8th Street right-of-way for native vegetation and transition to adjacent development
- Remove the fill on McKenzie Street corridor at Padden Creek and replace with a footbridge to improve fish passage and restore the riparian corridor (CGS 2007)
- Naturalize the east side of Padden Lagoon and develop a trail connector from the South Bay Trail to the lower Padden Trail (CGS 2007)
- Naturalize the shoreline area between the launch ramp and the cruise terminal
- Develop a master plan for access from the Village Green to the Port-owned industrial area (CGS 2006)
- Support the painting of a 'Welcome to Bellingham' sign on the Fairhaven dry dock

Early Action Recommendations for Chuckanut/Edgemoor

- Develop master plan for Inspiration Point (City, 2005-6)
- Re-establish access over the railroad tunnel to Chuckanut beaches with parking on city right-of-way (City, CGS tbd)
- Work with the Jones family to create an upland trail corridor and conservancy area above Chuckanut Bay (City, 2005-6)
- Work with the railroad regarding access to the waterfront in general including opening of the Chuckanut railroad causeway and potential trail access along Edgemoor (City & Port, BNSF)