

Text from Waterfront Vision document

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DRAFT

for public review & comment

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Waterfront Vision

Connecting Bellingham with the Bay

In Coastal Salish languages, Whatcom means
"Where the waters are always noisy."

Our noisy waters are many, from the silent stretch of the bay, to the clash of our bustling shores. These sounds move over water, reflecting our every move and creating a rhythm all their own.

Sometimes the best way to envision a scene
is to close your eyes and listen...
What does our bay say to you?

to our noisy waters!

down at the mouth of the creek, noisy waters from the mountains crash into the bay.
fish leap, splash and smack in the salty spray, eagles circle overhead hushing away
the gulls' noisy chatter.

logs heave, water sloshes, a boom groans. high-pitched strains of shifting steel
synchronize
with the hollow bass of cargo holds and the tenor cries of a lonely heron. fishing
boats reel their nets,
fish still flopping. welding sparks cackle and hiss.

small children squeal in delight at crabs scuttling
along the rocky shore. a kite swishes and swirls in duet
with the boastful calls of a haughty gull. a father harkens
to his daughter in the wake of her twinkling giggle and
flip-flapping feet. nearby ducks quack eagerly looking
for fallen bits of food. a cyclist downshifts, gears ticking
ever more slowly as he pauses, inhales deeply.

eel grasses swish softly, parting as fingerlings slip through.
the low groan of a sea lion disappears underwater. salmon flop heavily upon creek
rocks, seeking higher waters. rain drips down, gurgling, gathering, seeping through
green filters, slowly, cleanly, back to the bay.

a fishing fleet calls in its catch. a ferry heaves away from the dock, headed toward
lummi peninsula, lighted by the excited chatter of diners and campers. a train
whistle echoes – past the quiet ticking of earth-friendly cars poised to silently,

cleanly, change our world.

music erupts, kayak paddles slap, a trumpet riff soars, fireworks sing through the night air. windows fling open, people call out to each other, as they celebrate the fresh waters of life, the new sounds of their water. hear! hear! to our noisy waters!

THE WATERFRONT FUTURES GROUP

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Guiding Principles

The Waterfront Futures Group developed this Vision for the Bellingham Waterfront, and offers the following Principles to guide us toward it:

Reinforce the Inherent Qualities of Each Place on the Waterfront

- Make the waterfront a regular part of the lives of more people
- Respect history, cultures and the arts
- Make the waterfront inviting to people on foot
- Reinforce a unique “sense of place” at different waterfront locations

Restore the Health of Land and Water

- Enhance or reintroduce natural systems
- Create and restore habitat wherever possible
- Remediate upland contamination
- Protect existing natural shorelines
- Seek opportunities to soften existing hardened shorelines
- Tailor environmental cleanup strategies and remediation to planned use
- Manage storm water to enhance estuarine habitats

Improve Waterfront Access

- Develop strong connections between uplands and water
- Provide multiple modes of access to each area of the waterfront
- Create and connect large and small parks and open spaces
- Enhance opportunities for visual access to waterfront areas

Promote a Healthy and Dynamic Waterfront Economy

- Create new mixed-use areas on the waterfront for commercial, industrial, educational, recreational and residential uses
- Support water-dependent activities and uses
- Create an environment attractive to jobs of the future
- Strengthen the tie between local jobs and resources
- Provide public amenities and infrastructure to support development
- Improve permitting processes to achieve the goals and principles of the Waterfront Vision

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Connecting Bellingham with the Bay

In achieving this Vision, we will reinforce the unique character of the six distinctive areas that comprise the Bellingham Waterfront. As a whole, this vision is forward-looking, bringing together aspects of our past, present and future that contribute to this very special place. Working together wisely over time, we can apply our ample resources and opportunities to supporting a healthy environment in a vibrant economy with access and amenities for all to enjoy.

Little Squalicum

long panoramas of delta and sand from the stack on the bluff to the dock on the shore. a long natural beach.

At the northern end of the waterfront, on the route to Old Fort Bellingham, the Nooksack River, and the Lummi Nation and, Little Squalicum is defined by its wild shoreline and bluff. Its connection to the vast landscape of the Nooksack River delta is strengthened by a ribbon of deciduous vegetation. When viewed from the water, the strong profile of cement plant buildings contrasts with the soft, vegetated profile of the bluff. It is an area of connections to the environment, culture, history, jobs and training opportunities.

Habitat and beach restoration will enhance the traditional natural resource values of shellfish beds and fishing. Public access to beaches and trails will continue to expand with improvements that connect existing open spaces and traverse slopes and grade changes emphasizing designs that protect natural systems.

Industrial uses will remain and expand in the area. Industrial property on the bluff will be the location for a master planned campus with light industrial, research or institutional uses, taking advantage of its the site's convenient access to the airport, freeway and railroad. New facilities on this site will be designed and operated as models of sustainability, with uses linked to technical institutions, training for new forms of employment and an ability to extend and expand upon existing industry and commerce.

Squalicum

a harbor for boats, a harbor to the bay
fishermen, mills and white tablecloth dining, our port to the bay.

A center for marine activity and marine related recreation and commerce, Squalicum is a place that supports working boats and pleasure craft along with places to walk, sit and enjoy water views. The area nurtures a diversity of water dependent activities by including a mixture of light industrial, commercial and residential uses. Water

related industrial activity clusters around the Squalicum Creek Waterway with recreational, boating and commercial activity throughout the balance of the area. Fishing fleet accommodations and associated activities remain, contributing to the area's character and increasing the public's connection to the working waterfront. Visitors can buy a fish from the people who caught it, take an evening ride on the bay or hop a boat to the Islands for the weekend. The expanded fleet of charter and marine transit options supports hotel, restaurant and retail activities.

Maritime activities find support throughout the Squalicum area while marine habitat is restored and recreated at the mouth of Squalicum Creek. Softened edges of existing breakwaters create protective habitat for juvenile salmon. Essential connections to upland neighborhoods exist both visually and physically. The Broadway overlook provides a visual gateway and vista of the waterfront below. From its site on the bluff, a pedestrian connection extends over the railroad tracks and Roeder Avenue providing access to and from the waterfront for the adjacent neighbors and passers-by.

City Center

full of people, full of life! down to the water,
up to the town! living, working, gathering here!

City Center is the place of "coming together." It provides a key to our industrial past and a restored link between our waterfront and downtown. City Center recaptures its role as a water entrance to Bellingham. From the water's edge, Central Avenue, the Whatcom Waterway, Maritime Heritage Park and the Hillclimb/Amphitheater provide a "processional" connection to the cultural center of the City. In this confluence of the City's cultural Center and the Whatcom Creek corridor, our energies merge and emerge in a new way showing respect for our history, while looking ahead.

City Center provides the greatest opportunity for change with increased waterfront access and new business development. It includes space for new employers, offices and institutional users, support services, retail activities and housing. Extensions of the downtown street grid provide visual and physical links between the waterfront and downtown. Expansion of Western Washington University onto the City Center waterfront will contribute a new presence combining educational and research facilities with spin-off benefits for the economy, the community and the environment.

The City Center waterfront provides public access to marine transportation with public docks while maintaining deep-water moorage for commercial and institutional vessels. Marine related commerce and working waterfront activities will continue along the I & J Waterway and the Whatcom Creek Waterway. When the Georgia Pacific tissue plant operation closes, public uses will include citywide and neighborhood gathering places, community facilities, sites for dry stack boat storage and support facilities for a new marina at the former site of a wastewater treatment

lagoon. A connection to the old railroad station will link new facilities to Old Town and provide a gateway to the waterfront area.

Redevelopment of the Cornwall Avenue landfill will include housing in combination with open space, habitat restoration, public facilities and an over water pathway to Boulevard Park.

South Hill & Boulevard

long strands of park. stretching, connecting,
people in the sun, people in the rain
from village to town.

Active and passive recreation areas with water access at Boulevard Park build on existing open spaces and trails. South Hill and Boulevard lie at the base of a series of terraced residential streets. From Bellingham Bay, the area appears to be part of a woodland backdrop that extends from the water's edge to Sehome Arboretum. Woodland vegetation on the slopes of the Sehome Arboretum and South Hill and Sehome neighborhoods helps to camouflage open spaces on the level areas, creating the illusion of forested continuity down to the water. It offers strong linkages between the neighborhoods on the bluff and the water while also connecting Fairhaven and the Downtown with waterfront and hillside trails. Boardwalks, improved beaches, softened shorelines, and an over water pathway connects the south end of Boulevard Park to the Taylor Street Dock.

Fairhaven

the original village. bricks, books and the
village green. kayaks, trains and ferries passing.
connecting islands up to the town!

Pedestrian scale, historic brick buildings and a rich mixture of activities provide a village atmosphere. Fairhaven retains its working waterfront including ship and boat repair, fish processing and other marine related activities. Major transportation facilities connect the community with other parts of the region using passenger rail, interstate bus and marine transportation to the islands and Alaska. Railroad tracks separate water-oriented activities from the rest of Fairhaven.

Opportunities exist to develop better connections between the Fairhaven village and the shore of Padden Lagoon and Bellingham Bay. Those connections may extend through and around the existing marine industrial area as it transitions to pedestrian oriented commercial and retail development. This area benefits from its proximity to Fairhaven village, waterfront location and connection to the South Hill trails.

A new mixed-use area on formerly vacant lands west along Harris Avenue provides pedestrian linkages to the marine and railroad terminals and to the shoreline and regional trail system.

Chuckanut & Edgemoor

still wild still green.
here we bow down to the water. a train whistle blows.

This conservation area is isolated. It provides a retreat to nature along its rugged shoreline and expansive tidelands remaining accessible only by water or on foot. The bay, the mountain and creek define Chuckanut. Edgemoor neighborhood's meandering residential streets and gently rolling topography lead to the craggy outcrop of Clark's Point.

Woodstock Farm will preserve the area's heritage while offering public access to the restored natural bay north of the railroad causeway. A shoreline trail from Fairhaven will connect to the Coast Millennium trail at Woodstock Farm while a few kayak landings, including Poe's Point (Post) give access to boaters along the waterfront.

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Framing the Vision

During recent years, Bellingham's waterfront area has become a focal point for redevelopment potential and opportunity. With extensive clean-up efforts at sites such as the Cornwall Avenue landfill and the recent consolidation of Georgia Pacific's operations, significant portions of the waterfront will open up for the first time in decades.

Such an opportunity is rare and the City and Port agreed that a separate planning effort was needed to address the waterfront and its many complexities. In December 2002, the City and Port appointed 11 citizens to the new Waterfront Futures Group and asked them to take a fresh, independent look at Bellingham's waterfront. The group's mission: create a compelling vision for current and future generations and identify the steps to get us there.

The Process

This Vision of Connecting Bellingham to the Bay is the first of a three-step process. It's a brush-stroke view of what Bellingham's waterfront could become during the next several decades. It's our attempt to "think big and take the long view." It envisions, illustrates and expresses the elements we want to see in our future waterfront.

Next, WFG members will develop a Framework Plan, a kind of blueprint for achieving the Vision. Lastly, an Action Plan will be developed to provide a detailed guide for moving forward.

The Context

These three documents are crafted and developed against a backdrop of constant change. Many conditions that seemed certain to last for another decade have already changed and changes are happening every day that impact our city and our waterfront.

- Our local, national and international economy is changing - mirroring changes at national and international levels yet still affected by our location, our local entrepreneurs, our population and its education, our physical setting and our values;
- Our governing bodies and institutions are changing - their ability to identify common goals, recognize different missions, and our ability to work together ...or not;
- Our knowledge of the environment is changing - the impacts our activities have, the potential for doing a better job of protecting our environmental assets and for cleaning up and repairing our environmental liabilities;
- Our understanding of other people is changing - our knowledge of differing histories and traditions, our differing views and images of the world and the potential for increasing shared knowledge.

Our goal is not only to create a Vision that is compelling to us and reflects our ideas and hopes, but those of the community as well. We appreciate and encourage the ongoing dialogue and participation of interested community members. Let us know your thoughts and ideas for Connecting Bellingham to the Bay!

WFG Members

Art Anderson, Chair, engineer and fourth-generation Whatcom County native, considers Bellingham Bay and the waterfront a valuable treasure.

Lydia Bennett, Vice-Chair, Lummi Island native, has 15 years of experience with commercial real estate, and is dedicated to the happiness of Bellingham and its residents.

John Blethen, Bellingham business owner and dedicated steward of environmental issues, considers himself an advocate for balancing people and the environment.

Jay Bornstein, dedicated to the local and global fishing sector and its cultural heritage, maintains a long-standing connection to the Bellingham community.

Bob Edie, with 30 years as a Washington resident, brings extensive knowledge of government and education funding, and served as vice president of external affairs for Western Washington University.

Darrell Hillaire, Chair of the Lummi Nation and the Lummi Indian Business Council, is focused on his ancestor's interest in clean waterways, traditional practices, and maintaining the Lummi's relationship to the water.

Steve Koch, dedicated to the labor heritage that has shaped waterfront activities, and is able to represent the perspective of the labor community.

John Macpherson, long-time resident and employer in Bellingham, brings enthusiasm and open-mindedness to helping shape the future of the Bellingham waterfront.

Ted Mischaikov, life-long resident of Bellingham, has a passion for civic involvement and the integration of social and environmental values into economic development.

Ray Trzynka, 20-year resident of Bellingham, has particular interest in developing exciting amenities for Whatcom County, and the infrastructure needed to access and enjoy the waterfront.

Craig Cole, former Waterfront Futures member, 2003

Planning Commissioner Liaisons

Chris Morgan, a self-proclaimed "Bellinghamster" and advocate of sustainable architecture, envisions the waterfront as intensely urban and environmentally healthy.

Doug Starcher, organizer for community watch programs and advocate of strong, identifiable neighborhoods, would like to the plan for the waterfront to extend beyond 50 to 100 years.

What do you think?

Please visit our website at www.waterfrontfutures.org

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