

Waterfront Action Plan

CONNECTING BELLINGHAM WITH THE BAY

DRAFT

FOR PUBLIC REVIEW & COMMENT

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WATERFRONT FUTURES GROUP

What do you think?

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Introduction

The Waterfront Futures Group has created a Vision, Framework Plan and Action Plan entitled “Connecting Bellingham with the Bay”. The 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 public review, Planning Commission review and recommendation, Port Commission review and adoption and City Council review and adoption processes should take the remainder of 2004 to complete. The following actions are anticipated to occur between 2005 and 2008.

Waterfront Coordinating Group

A fundamental recommendation of the Waterfront Futures Group is to create an entity that will help the community realize its vision for the Bellingham Waterfront. Like the Waterfront Futures Group, this new entity should be composed of members that can 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 members and the Group should receive an annual budget from each, with which to hire a staff and to conduct their responsibilities. The Group should be advisory to both the Port and the City and should be regularly accountable to each body.

The Waterfront Coordinating Group would be the stewards of the waterfront and 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 either the City or the Port, but would seek to coordinate the use of those authorities toward the realization of the vision.

The Waterfront Coordinating Group responsibilities could include:

- ♦ Formulating processes and scopes of work for accomplishing waterfront recommendations, including tentative assignment of responsibilities, budgets and timeframes
- ♦ 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 redevelopment of the waterfront

Waterfront Renewal Authority

The redevelopment of the City Center portion of the waterfront will most likely require the creation of a “Waterfront Renewal Authority” (the Authority). The Authority would guide all activities and decisions about public and private investment within a designated “City Center Waterfront Renewal Area,” generally defined as the entire waterfront between the I & J Waterway and the south end of the Cornwall Avenue landfill.

The composition and structure of this Authority 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). This option would establish an organizational framework through which waterfront redevelopment could occur. Guided by an appointed Board, the Authority would direct the preparation of a Waterfront Renewal Master Plan, which would then be adopted by the City Council. City and Port policies and plans would then be modified to be consistent with the Plan and to enable its implementation.

Members of the Board for the Authority could be appointed by the City and the Port. Most likely, the Authority would be a legal entity of the City, but it could be organized to be jointly accountable to both the City and the Port. This structure would have special authority over the redevelopment of the Georgia Pacific site while allowing enough flexibility for innovation, with a high level of public visibility and accountability.

Initiate Public Review & Adoption Process

Initiate the review and adoption processes at the Port and City to consider the recommendations of the Waterfront Futures Group. Adopt the Waterfront Vision and Framework Plan including the Guiding Principles and Recommendations.

Initiate Policy Alignment

Initiate actions to bring City and Port Plans and Policies into alignment with the adopted Waterfront Vision and Framework Plan. Identify priorities for:

- ◆ 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
- ◆ Identify changes to incorporate as part of the current update of the City of Bellingham Shoreline Master Program

Identify, Prioritize & Implement Regulatory Changes

Focus on changes needed before appropriate development or redevelopment can occur 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.

Reinforce the Inherent Qualities of Each Place on the Waterfront

Conduct a study of historically & culturally significant sites

The “Waterfront Coordinating Group” should initiate a process to create a dialog amongst all interested parties including the Lummi Nation and Nooksack Tribe. A group should be appointed to oversee a process of engagement, a study to identify significant locations and development of an interpretative program for waterfront sites.

Identify clear & definitive design guidelines

The City should bring forward specific design and development guidelines for each segment of the waterfront. Using the descriptions for each area provided in the Framework Plan, highlight unique qualities to be conserved and enhanced. Identify significant physical features including topographic changes, structures and landscape that should be respected in any new development.

Inventory visual access opportunities, both present & future

Conduct 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. Locate and describe visual connections by establishing lines of sight and view corridors to and from the water. Incorporate existing and future landmarks as focal points for view corridors and visual connections. Outline potential design guidelines for community discussion and formal consideration of ways to maintain views.

Facilitate adaptive reuse of landmark structures & other buildings in areas of substantial use change

As part of any and all redevelopment planning, analyze the reuse potential of all existing structures, particularly those with unique character or landmark qualities. These could include former G-P pulp and paper mill-related facilities.

Develop an inventory of character-defining attributes for each waterfront area

The “Waterfront Coordinating Group” should oversee a process to identify and document the attributes, which define the unique character of each of the six waterfront areas. This process should involve stakeholders and inform the development of design guidelines appropriate to each area.

Restore the Health of Land & Water

Create an Integrated Parks, Open Space & Natural System Plan

The “Waterfront Coordinating Group” should initiate and coordinate a process, in conjunction with Whatcom County, cities, the Port and other local governments, 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

Draw on existing published resources such as those produced by the Bellingham Bay Pilot Demonstration Project and Environmental Workshop Report. Add to the inventory as new information becomes available through supplemental publications such as the Shoreline Master Program Update.

Clarify the nature of contamination including in water & upland sites & identify opportunities & 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 & disposal of storm water out of the near shore areas

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

Improve Waterfront Access

Develop a Master Mobility Plan

The “Waterfront Coordinating Group” should initiate and coordinate the development of a master mobility plan for the waterfront that incorporates all agency strategic plans. Encourage WTA to investigate and adopt the transit recommendations. Investigate integration of land use and transportation functions in the City to improve coordination.

Create a pedestrian mobility plan by conducting a study to inform the plan about the feasibility of making the waterfront accessible to pedestrians. Coordinate with the recommended Integrated Parks, Open Space and Natural System Plan.

Identify, illustrate & describe land & water access systems

The Waterfront Coordinating Group should 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. Coordinate connections to other transportation modes and ways to overcome railroad barriers.

Create an overall infrastructure plan for the City Center waterfront area

The “City Center Waterfront Renewal Authority” should prepare an overall infrastructure plan as part of their Waterfront Renewal Master Plan. This plan should establish the infrastructure necessary to support the Renewal Plan, and identify responsibilities for implementation and methods for public funding of necessary infrastructure.

Complete a traffic analysis & transportation plan

The “Waterfront Coordinating Group” should initiate and coordinate the development of a plan to improve vehicular and transit connections between the waterfront and other areas of the City and I-5. Use the development of transportation infrastructure as a tool in directing growth. Include alternative transportation modes such as the water jitney and boat service to the islands.

Encourage Whatcom Transportation Authority to look into alternate means of transportation, including planning for the water jitney and how it could work with the bus system, and considering the use of smaller more flexible vehicles that could provide frequent transit loop service to waterfront areas.

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

The “Waterfront Coordinating Group” should work with the City, Port and “Waterfront Renewal Authority” 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.

Designate responsibility for way-finding improvement projects as part of every transportation plan & project

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

The Waterfront Coordinating Group” should establish priorities for action and designate lead and participant agencies. Explore the options for moving the railroad tracks against the bluff or capping them. Explore the possibility of future location of a multimodal rail station in the center of the city.

Promote a Healthy & Dynamic Waterfront Economy

Purchase property currently owned by Georgia Pacific in the City Center portion of the waterfront

The “Waterfront Renewal Authority” should manage the redevelopment of the entire City Center waterfront consistent with adopted community plans and policies. The Authority should develop a Waterfront Renewal Master Plan, complete an environmental impact statement (EIS) for the entire plan, and develop an expedited permitting process for projects consistent with the plan.

Develop over time

The “Waterfront Renewal Authority” should be allowed to “meter out” property over time and to permit development in response to appropriate market demand. The Authority should have the flexibility to encourage an appropriate pace of development that will encourage a range of quality design and construction, plus adaptive reuse that will create a diverse and dynamic new area.

Be sensitive to existing uses & work on ways to transition to desired future

In the redevelopment of waterfront areas, all responsible agencies should recognize the need to gradually transition existing uses and work to build in compatible uses. Design guidelines should include principles that guide the development of mixed use to assure adjacent uses are complementary.

Develop a marketing plan

The “Waterfront Coordinating Group” should work with the Economic Development Council to create a marketing plan to target desired new development.

Research & evaluate progress in jobs & the economy

The “Waterfront Coordinating Group” should annually evaluate how the City and region are doing in meeting the workforce needs, and the role of educational institutions in meeting those needs.

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

“The Waterfront Coordinating Group” and the “Waterfront Renewal Authority” should engage in a process with WWU to identify opportunities for university facilities to be located in the City Center Waterfront and included as part of the redevelopment process on the G-P site. Look for chances to tie the university to private research and development. Look at all education and training institutions to educate for jobs of the future. Include analysis for apprenticeship programs.

Support proactive infrastructure development

Identify a list of priorities for design and development of public amenities and infrastructure needed to support desired development, including work on a Community Renewal Plan for the City Center waterfront area.

Identify areas where job diversity & designated land use are interdependent

Clarify areas for water-dependent or water-related uses, for start-up businesses, and for small and large-scale economic opportunities. Representatives from the City, Port, Economic Development Council and educational institutions should participate in this process.

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

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