



# New Whatcom Master Plan

Public Involvement Program  
2005-2006

**City of Bellingham/Port of Bellingham**  
**New Whatcom Master Plan**  
**Public Involvement Program**

**2005-2006**

**Introduction**

Late 2005 through to Spring 2006 will mark a highly significant time in the redevelopment of Bellingham's waterfront. For the past eighteen months, the Bellingham community has collaborated with the City and Port on a new vision for the community's unparalleled waterfront. Led by the Waterfront Futures Group, this effort resulted in the *Waterfront Vision and Framework Plan* as well as a *Waterfront Action Plan*. These two documents include guiding principles, vision statements, and recommendations for moving forward with comprehensive planning and design for the waterfront. Collectively, the diverse group of stakeholders working on this effort established a vision that calls for redevelopment in some areas, support for enhanced economic development, and preservation of open spaces that will allow substantial public access to, and enjoyment of, the Bellingham Bay waterfront.

The "New Whatcom Master Plan" is the next step in achieving this vision. Beginning in October 2005, a team led by LMN Architects will begin the process of moving from the vision to a concrete plan for renewal of the waterfront. Working closely with elected officials, City and Port staff, and the Bellingham community as a whole, the LMN team will craft a number of design concepts, which will then be refined into a single "preferred design scheme" for waterfront restoration and revitalization. The final design alternative is expected to be adopted by the Bellingham City Council and Bellingham Port Commission by March 2006.

The LMN team includes both architectural and landscape architectural expertise. It also includes experts in civil engineering, transportation, environmental issues, and public involvement. In addition to the design and technical aspects of the concept alternatives, Collins Woerman will provide strategic guidelines that build upon the guiding principles developed by the Waterfront Futures Group. Working with this broad range of disciplines, the LMN team will be able to delineate how each of the various areas of the waterfront can best be designed to meet all of the guiding principles outlined through the visioning process. The final product delivered by the LMN team will include a preferred design, as well as detailed information about transportation infrastructure needs, engineering requirements, and environmental restoration opportunities. The firm of Norton-Arnold & Company (NAC) has the primary responsibility on the team to ensure that the public involvement program is as effective as possible.

The New Whatcom Master Plan cannot succeed over the long-term without the involvement, buy-in, and support of those who live and work in Bellingham. The public involvement program outlined in this document provides a variety of mechanisms for these key stakeholders to learn about, comment on, and contribute to the design schemes being developed by the architect team. The active engagement of all interested parties will ensure that the ideas under consideration fully

benefit from the suggestions and influence of the public. The designs will be substantially strengthened by this public involvement process.

The public involvement program outlined in this document builds on the energy and enthusiasm that has already been generated through the visioning process. It is not a reinvention of the wheel, but an expansion of the tools, techniques, and mechanisms that have already proven to be effective in encouraging public comment and feedback. The ultimate goal of the public involvement effort is to ensure that the Bellingham community can “see their fingerprints” on the final design, knowing that they have shaped and significantly influenced how this revitalization effort is carried out over the long term.

## **Schedule and Coordination**

The New Whatcom Master Plan will unfold in three phases:

- In December 2005, a set of “strategic guidelines” will be adopted by the City Council and Port Commission. These guidelines will frame the “site programming” that will, in turn, drive the design alternatives.
- In January 2006, the LMN team will present a set of 4-6 design concepts for broad public review and comment. During this time, environmental experts on the team will also provide recommendations on the type and level of environmental review that will be required in order for the designs to move forward.
- In February 2006 the team will continue to refine these concepts, narrowing them into a final “preferred design scheme”. After additional public review and comment, this alternative will be adopted by the City Council and Port Commission in March 2006.

Although the public involvement program for the design effort will be coordinated with the Whatcom Waterway cleanup efforts underway, that work is being conducted by a separate entity, the Washington State Department of Ecology. The current schedule calls for a set of draft cleanup options to be ready for public and agency review in 2006. Ecology will then select a final cleanup strategy during 2006. There will be numerous opportunities for public comment on the draft and final cleanup strategies, and those meetings will be held separately from the design workshops and other events that are described in this plan.

## **Public Involvement Goal**

This public involvement program has been created to broadly share as much information as possible about the New Whatcom design process. The ultimate goal of the program is to ensure that all of the very diverse stakeholders in the Bellingham area have the opportunity to share their ideas about the future of the waterfront, and to creatively collaborate – and significantly influence – the design and development of this highly-treasured resource.

## **What is most important to know about the New Whatcom Master Plan?**

Key messages to remember about New Whatcom include:

**1) It will continue to be based on strong community involvement.**

The Bellingham community has thoroughly demonstrated its commitment to, and enthusiasm for, an improved waterfront. Throughout the visioning process, meeting attendance and levels of participation were maintained at a high level. This same commitment to a transparent, community-influenced process will continue throughout design development.

**2) Now is the time for tangible progress.**

While enthusiasm has been high throughout the visioning effort, the Bellingham community recognizes that it is now time to transform those initial broad goals into tangible development ideas. The guiding principles created through the Waterfront Visioning effort remain a cornerstone of future development. Now those initial concepts will be further refined into concrete, long-term redevelopment options that are fully grounded in good design, realistic economic projections, and environmental restoration.

**3) New Whatcom will accommodate a broad range of land uses that balance economic development with environmental responsibility and public open space.**

The level of community involvement during the visioning process demonstrated the need to be as responsive as possible to a broad diversity of perspectives and needs. As embodied by the final visioning guidelines, New Whatcom will blend the potential for commercial activity, housing, and public access and use of the waterfront. The project team is highly skilled in designing projects that balance this broad spectrum of needs.

## **How the Public will Influence the New Whatcom Master Plan?**

The Bellingham community will influence the project at several key points:

1) The first point of public influence will occur with the development of the strategic guidelines, which will be presented for public review and comment prior to being adopted by the City Council and Port Commission.

2) The community will shape the early design concepts by: a) contributing creative ideas for how the concepts might be formulated; and b) reviewing, commenting on, and reconfiguring the 4-6 design concepts generated by the LMN team.

3) There will be public review and comment on the final preferred design scheme prior to its adoption by the Port Commission and City Council.

## **Public Outreach Strategies**

### **1) Creation of Mailers & Design Elements**

As New Whatcom moves forward, the materials used to communicate about the project need to be formatted with a consistent look so that it is quickly and clearly evident that each piece, whether it be a newsletter, flyer, or invitation to a public meeting, is conveying important information about the project. A project logo/design layout will be created, and will be used for all electronic and published informational pieces.

Three informational mailers will also be distributed throughout the design process. These brief “newsletter/fact sheets” will include project information, advertise opportunities to comment, and encourage public feedback through a variety of mechanisms. They will be distributed to the project’s mailing list, as well as made available on the project’s website.

**Schedule for Completion:** The logo will be completed by October 14, 2005. The three mailers will be distributed in late October 2005, mid-January 2006, and mid-February 2007.

### **2) Waterfront Advisory Group Meetings**

The Waterfront Advisory Group (WAG) is made up of ten community members who have been appointed by the City Council and Port Commission. The WAG has a number of important roles to play in the New Whatcom Project, one of which is to serve as the primary conduit for public involvement. All WAG meetings are open to the general public and include time on the agenda for the public to address the Group. In addition to these regular monthly opportunities, the WAG will conduct two extended “workshop” sessions to encourage public feedback. A schedule for these events follows:

#### **2005 Meetings**

**October 12:** The WAG will discuss and fine-tune this public involvement plan at its regularly-scheduled noon meeting.

**November 16:** The WAG will host an evening meeting to discuss and take public comment on the Strategic Guidelines, which are due out in draft form on approximately October 27.

**December 8:** The WAG will host an evening “meet the design team” workshop; participants will be invited to share their creative ideas for how the strategic guidelines can best be carried out. These very early ideas will be used to shape the design concepts.

#### **2006 Meetings**

**January 12:** The LMN team will present the design concepts to the WAG at its regularly-scheduled noon meeting. While there will be limited public comment at this meeting, the WAG will host two public workshops later in the month to hear from, and benefit by the community’s ideas for the concepts.

**February 15:** The WAG will again host an extended two-hour session to hear from the community on the final preferred design scheme. Members of the LMN team will present the

preferred design alternative, including information on how the public has shaped and influenced this final design. Participants at this session will be encouraged to provide their thoughts on this final alternative before it is reviewed and adopted by the Port Commission and City Council. It is hoped that this meeting can serve as a “community validation” session: *we’ve heard you, we’ve responded, and here is the final preferred design scheme.* .

**Schedule for Completion:** As noted above.

### **3) Discussion Sessions with Stakeholder Groups**

A wide variety of various stakeholders has been, and will continue to be, interested and involved in this design process. Beginning in October 2005 through to March 2006, these groups will be communicated with on a regular basis. This may include sit-down work sessions, presentations from the design team, or discussions on project design and direction. A partial list of the key stakeholders who indicated an interest during the visioning process includes downtown business owners, Western Washington University, maritime interests, tribal representatives, environmental interests, housing advocates, and the neighborhoods in close proximity to the waterfront. Every effort will be made to continue a strong communication link with these organized groups.

Two special meetings with the Central Business, South Hill, Columbia, and Lettered Streets neighborhoods have been scheduled; one on November 15, 2005 and the other on January 11, 2006.

**Schedule for Completion:** Depending on group interest, availability, and topics to be addressed.

### **4) Community Workshops**

Two community workshops will be scheduled throughout the design process. They will be held on Tuesday, January 24 and Tuesday, January 31, 2006. The content of both workshops will be the same, but they will be held on different nights and in different locations to make it as easy for as many people to attend as possible.

The January workshops will focus on the presentation of the design concepts. Members of the LMN team will present the concepts, including the rationale behind them and how each might function over the long term. After this presentation, participants will have an active, walk-around opportunity to discuss their opinions directly with the LMN team: *Which ideas work the best for the community as a whole? Is there one concept that is preferred over the others? Are there ways to mix and match the ideas in the various concepts?*

After these workshops, the LMN team will assemble all of the comments that have been received, balancing them with the feedback that has been obtained through other meetings and forums. These ideas will then be used to shape the final design alternative.

**Schedule for Completion:** January 24 and 31, 2006.

## 5) Media Outreach

The local media has been keenly interested in the New Whatcom project, and will continue to serve as an important information link. City/Port staff will continue to meet with reporters and editors on a regular basis, as well as provide them with press releases, project information, and feature story opportunities.

All key public meetings and events related to New Whatcom will be videotaped and aired in a timely manner on BTV 10, the City's government and educational access channel.

**Schedule for Completion:** Based on public workshops and other community events.

## 6) Project Website

A New Whatcom website will be designed, posted and updated regularly. The website will provide information about the project, as well as an opportunity to comment at each phase of the design. For example, the strategic guidelines, design concepts, and final preferred design scheme will be posted on the website so that those who cannot attend the public workshops will be able to electronically review and comment on each of these important project milestones.

**Schedule for Completion:** The website will be maintained throughout the design process, but is likely to be most active in early November 2005, as well as in January and February 2006.

## 7) City Council/Port Commission Meetings

As noted earlier in this document, Bellingham's Port Commission and City Council have important approval roles at key stages in the New Whatcom project. Between November 2005 and March 2006, for example, these two elected bodies will approve the strategic guidelines, participate in discussions related to the design concepts, and approve the final preferred design scheme. In recognition of the Port/City Interlocal Agreement that serves as the foundation for the New Whatcom project, the City Council and Port Commission are meeting jointly on several occasions to review and discuss key project milestones. A schedule for these meetings, all of which include time on the agenda for public comment, follows:

### 2005 Meetings

October 7: Work session to review and discuss this public involvement program.

November 29: Work session to review the draft strategic guidelines.

December 7: Strategic guidelines will be voted on for approval in a joint session.

### 2006 Meetings

March 7: Work session to review and discuss the preferred design scheme.

March 21: Preferred design scheme will be voted on for approval in a joint session.

All key public meetings and events related to New Whatcom will be videotaped and aired in a timely manner on BTV 10, the City's government and educational access channel.

**Schedule for Completion:** As noted above.