



New Whatcom Project Summary of Public Comments on Design Concepts February 13, 2006

Public meetings related to the four initial design concepts prepared for the New Whatcom Project were held on January 24, January 31, and February 1, 2006. These meetings were attended by approximately 410 people. In addition to the oral comments attendees provided at the meetings, they were given the opportunity to fill out written comment forms, and 94 of these comment sheets were turned in at the meetings. As of February 8, another 17 people had opted to mail in their comment sheets to the City of Bellingham. And, as of February 13, fourteen people have provided their comments via email.

Each of the meetings is described in much more detail in a written meeting summary; these are available through the project website. By and large, the written comments submitted echoed the sentiments expressed at the public meetings. The design team has received all of these comments; members are reviewing them prior to making any additional refinements to the design concepts. This summary is meant to serve as a very brief overview of the themes and issues expressed throughout this public comment period.

What do people like?

- The Green Fingers design concept. This was the most popular design at all three meetings, and was also viewed favorably by those submitting written comments.
- Regardless of which design concept people favored, however, it is clear that the Bellingham community places a very high priority on green spaces, parks, access to the water, and contiguous space along the waterfront. Comments favoring more green space are, by far, the largest percentage of all design comments received. Green Fingers was popular because it had the most green space, and, as they reviewed the other design concepts they were quick to point out where green space was lacking. A number of people wanted to borrow from the various concepts to create the maximum amount of public space possible.
- Street grid angling, and strong street connections to the downtown and other neighborhoods are a high priority. Many people distinguished between the concepts that seemed to provide a “seamless” connection, and those concepts that did not provide this connection. Many commenters borrowed ideas from one theme or another to ensure that the connections were as solid as possible. Several commenters wanted the streets and the overall site grid to be angled in a way that would take maximum advantage of the views and the natural light in the area.
- The idea of retaining some of the old GP buildings has a great deal of appeal for many people. They like the possibility that these buildings could be reused; these commenters appreciated what other cities had done in this regard, and urged that this possibility be explored further for Bellingham.
- The Oak Street flyover is a popular concept that has strong support. Again, this would provide a stronger connection between the site itself and the neighboring area.

- Where to concentrate the green and open spaces? Many people favored the addition of green space in the area next to the deep water port off of Pine Street. A number of commenters urged that this idea be taken from the “Pearl Parks” concept and incorporated into the final design. Similarly, many people liked the idea of maximum green space at the foot of Cornwall. A number of commenters suggested that this would serve as a spectacular public space for Bellingham’s citizens, noting the serenity it would provide, the views possible from this vantage point, and the potential link to the trail and other parks in the area. In this regard, the potential for a new Cornwall roundabout received mixed reviews. Some felt this would enhance this section of the site, while numerous others wanted to ensure that the foot of Cornwall is designed to be as open and free of cars as possible.

Where are there some reservations?

- The idea of a footbridge causes brows to furrow. For many people this is a popular concept. They are supportive of providing a strong connection between two separate areas of the site. A number of people are excited about the possibility of a strong architectural statement that a bridge could provide. About an equal number of people, however, are concerned about the exact location and design of the bridge. Will it restrict boat passage? Will it block views? Will it detract from the downtown area by providing a connection that leads away from downtown?

Where are the areas of greatest concern?

- Cars along the waterfront. While some people favor the idea of a waterfront boulevard that can accommodate cars, most people are opposed to this idea. They favor a more serene shoreline experience. Likewise, the notion of building a bridge that could also accommodate cars is held in disfavor by the majority of commenters.
- Specific land uses. While these were not addressed in this initial round of design work, the community as a whole has a number of questions about how the New Whatcom space will be used. There are concerns, for example, about building heights and densities. There are a number of questions about how the “small blocks” identified in the design concepts will be developed. And there are questions about the type of economic development that will be sought for the area. For many people, sustained, high-paying jobs are a particularly high priority for waterfront redevelopment.