

# NEW WHATCOM PUBLIC MEETING SUMMARY APRIL 4, 2007

## **OVERVIEW**

The Port and City of Bellingham hosted a public meeting for the New Whatcom project on April 4, 2007. Thirty-five members of the community signed in at the meeting. The meeting was designed to provide information on the progress of the project, as well as a preview of upcoming work and public participation opportunities.

After a series of presentations, meeting attendees informally walked around to ask questions and share their comments with City and Port staff and the project's consultant team.

The meeting began with progress reports from Bellingham Mayor Tim Douglas and Port Executive Director Jim Darling. The two described the progress that has been made since the *Draft Framework Plan* was presented to the public in September 2006, as well as the project's 2007 anticipated schedule and key milestones.

Mike Stoner, the Port's Environmental Director, outlined the upcoming Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) process. Tom Schadt, Anchor Environmental, and Arlan Collins, CollinsWoerman, shared their preliminary ideas for shoreline improvements that can both restore salmon habitats and provide public access to Bellingham Bay.

## **SUMMARY**

What follows is a summary of the comments, questions, and ideas heard during the informal "walk around" segment of the meeting.

**General Enthusiasm.** In general, those attending the meeting had a high degree of enthusiasm for the redevelopment of the waterfront. One commented: *this space is like gold and diamonds. It is an unbelievable treasure for the city. It should be developed in a way that is of lasting design; with an old style that has enduring quality.* Another meeting attendee hoped to see some shopping areas and restaurants included in the design plans. Some commented that *private ownership of the land is a good idea*; others expressing enthusiasm said that *the redevelopment will define Bellingham's character.* A recent newcomer to Bellingham said: *I am very impressed with the work that has been done to date.*

**Shoreline/Habitat Restoration.** There was considerable enthusiasm expressed for the possibilities related to shoreline and habitat restoration. A few people had questions about the amount of green space or "buffering" that would be provided between the new development and the water. A representative comment: *It is critical to emphasize the importance of salmon habitat enhancement.* Several attendees expressed strong support for the concept presented by Arlan Collins: *salmon habitat will drive upland development.*

**Economics.** A number of people had questions about the economics of the project. How much is it going to cost? How will it be paid for? What will the role of private development be? Representative comments: *Both the Port and City need to share this information with the*

*public as soon as possible.* The suggestion was made that the economic analysis include a high cost vs. a low cost option, for example, cut and fill earthwork rather than entirely new fill.

**Green/Open Public Space.** As was heard during the project's public meetings in 2006, the amount of space devoted to public parks, greenways, and water access continues to be a high priority for the community. Attendees wondered where the parks would be located, how big they would be, and the types of activities that could take place at those parks. A couple of commenters noted that the drawings depict an integration of green areas for walking, and were supportive of those areas of green space. One commented: *It is better to contain and share green resources than to restrict them to private ownership.*

**Terraquarium.** A few attendees had questions about the proposed Terraquarium associated with the New Whatcom project. One concern was that it would bring in too many tourists, creating traffic and parking problems. *Do the citizens of Bellingham really want to bring Los Angeles and big movie-producer types here for a \$25 million Terraquarium?* The suggestion was made that the Terraquarium be located close to the proposed new WWU facility on the waterfront, since *it will look better there and will provide for shared parking.*

**Marina.** Also similar to community comments heard during 2006, the proposed New Whatcom marina has both supporters and detractors. Some attendees were very eager to see the marina built as quickly as possible, especially in light of the long waiting lists that are currently in place at many other nearby marinas. Others said that there has been too much emphasis on the marina in the redevelopment plan, and that the marina is *catering to the rich.*

**View Corridors.** As was heard during the 2006 public meetings, views continue to be an area of high priority. Meeting attendees said that height restrictions will be critical in order to protect the view corridors from Holly Street, Roeder Avenue, and State Street. There were concerns that the proposed new buildings would be too high. One comment: *viewsheds should be just as important in the project as regional trail networks.*

**Density of Development.** Some attendees were also concerned about the proposed density of the development: *I am opposed to the idea of adding more density; it does not make sense and it will make the area less friendly.* And, *urban density does not belong in the city center.* The residential development on the back of Cornwall Avenue was mentioned as poorly conceived development, with the note that it had affected the view corridor in that area.

**Laurel Street Bridge.** There was some interest in the Laurel Street Bridge project. One attendee pointed out a potential conflict, noting that the end of Laurel Street is also the entrance to the first floor parking garage at the Morse Square Condominiums.

**Environmental Impact Statement.** The suggestion was made that the EIS provide uniform economic and visual analysis across the entire site. Other comments: *in the EIS, the project objectives need to be clearly stated. Publish massing studies, potential views, and build-out scenarios.* And, *the EIS will help to define park sizes.*

### **Other Ideas**

Establish “Volunteer Days” for citizens; use them to keep labor costs down.

The creosote pilings are valuable for the birds. As they are removed, new bird habitat should be added to the shoreline.

The collection and treatment of stormwater is critical in order to keep pollution out of the Bay.

Bellingham could be a center for the environment and the arts. A performing arts center would be a valuable addition to this development.

The Parks & Recreation Department could provide an environmental education component related to wastewater treatment and marine stewardship. An educational facility should be added to the space.

Bellingham needs a dry and lit space for recreation throughout the year, perhaps a collapsible tent for “Raising of the Tent” celebrations.

Use ideas from other cities – Bilbao, Spain, for example. It does not have any signs and it is easily walkable.

Would it be possible to add a water taxi service or a chartered boat dock?

The pathways should be designed with new, permeable materials – like those used for the sculpture park in Seattle.

Bellingham needs a new iconic symbol. The end of the marina pier is an ideal site for that; currently it is a walkway to nowhere.

### **Waterfront Planning Academy**

Over the summer, a “Waterfront Planning Academy” will be offered that will provide the community with information about a wide variety of topics related to the New Whatcom redevelopment. At the April 4 meeting, attendees shared their ideas for topics that should be included in the Academy:

- ✓ Financing the redevelopment. What funding opportunities are available?
- ✓ Habitat issues.
- ✓ How all of the the current and ongoing master plans for Bellingham are connected; vision for a unified master plan.
- ✓ How this project relates to the Governor’s Puget Sound Clean-up Plan.