

NewWhatcom Master Plan Concept

Independent Design Concept for Blethen, Christensen & Friends Revised 10/28/08

To: Waterfront Advisory Group, Bellingham, WA

Thank you for this opportunity. I will attempt to condense 30 years of professional experience and 7 years of specific Bellingham waterfront planning experience into 15 minutes.

I have been intimately involved with this project, every step of the way, since it started. I am a member of AIA R/UDAT, and we have met every Tuesday morning to discuss the plans in detail.

I helped the WFG boil all of the thousands of hours and zillions of documents into a way-to-brief, set of Outline Principles. There is a lot of detail behind these strategies.

The Port and the City have hired very competent Planners and have come up with interesting plans that all have a lot of merit. I was patiently waiting for a compromise to happen...but it appears that I can wait no longer.

Why does there appear to be a conflict between the Port and the City master plans? They seem to have lost track of some simple design program issues. The general public does not seem to be excited about the results in either case. I facilitate design charrettes to find the middle ground that makes everyone happy. It also has to solve the program issues.

Besides all of the environmental issues, what does this plan need to do?

1. Maintain the connections to existing Downtown Street grid alignments.
2. Maintain Block/Alley/Lot sizes that are compatible to exiting street grid and scale.
3. Preserve Historic buildings as much as possible.
4. Orient street grid on site to a North/South orientation to allow direct westerly views and pedestrian connectivity to the waterfront edge & best solar orientation.
5. Create value at the interior of the property with proximity/connectivity to waterfront and/or open spaces.
6. Provide maximum flexibility for future connections, as site develops.
Let me say this again. Design in flexibility. Bridges, landfill, it doesn't matter if the connections align.
7. Create a plan with a WOW! Factor that everyone can be excited about!

This plan does meet all of these issues, and uses the best of the Port and City plans.

This plan concept is an attempt to meld the best of the latest Port of Bellingham Plans and the City of Bellingham's Plan. Both plans have strong design concepts, but the public has failed to embrace either plan with overwhelming enthusiasm. This master plan incorporates 7 years of public comments, the AIA DAT study, The Waterfront Future Group and numerous staff and consultant issues to date, involving the key issues of the \

Triple Bottom Line: Environmental, Social and Financial. It needs to work economically for the City, port and future Developers.

Speaking of economics, I want to have a quick word about density. Typical zoning may not be appropriate here. Techniques such as Form-Based Zoning, Floor-Area-Ratios, etc. may be more applicable. However, all of the Plans need to have the same assumptions.

Can a 200' deep block fill up with solid residential or office spaces? No. A double-loaded residential building may only be 60'-70' deep at the most. Not 200'! So, what is realistic density? If both plans don't have a consistent street grid and block size, they are comparing apples to bananas. Should there be alleys for trash/service and parking garage access? What about block depths? Port and City have different answers.

Proposed Key Elements of the best-of-both-worlds Plan:

1. Street alignment with existing City Grid near site is maintained.
2. Building Blocks match existing street and alley dimensions. (This allows parking garage and service access off street.)
3. Existing city street grid aligns for future potential use of existing historic industrial buildings.
4. Some existing buildings are maintained, for potential future uses. This also maintains early development building context and creation of public spaces and vertical height precedence. Demolition of reusable buildings preempts this possibility in future.
5. Street Grid aligns to the Westerly Bay views as soon as possible after the historic connections area with downtown. This alignment is best to allow shared views to most of the site to Bellingham Bay.
6. An area of at least 6-8 acres is created for WWU, including some of the reusable existing buildings.
7. 200' ROW "Park Streets" (Per Port Plan) are created to allow for bay view access to properties on the eastern edge of development, and creating increased property value amenity at back of site. Both park streets are aligned to avoid view impacts at ground level from existing Warehouses. The westerly ends of these parks could have iconic sculpture campaniles, as mentioned many times in public testimony. These areas can also utilize the latest in water reuse and low impact development strategies.

8. Cornwall Avenue is maintained as main waterfront Access and widening to 100' ROW with landscaped parkway boulevard design.
9. Land use along Cornwall and against eastern hillside, near railroad is intended for light Industrial Office/Retail/assembly uses and job creation.
10. Road grid and building block Development on site is a combination of open road access areas and building development adjacent to the open space areas. This allows for a combination of uses and access to take best advantage of locations. The buildings on the waterside of the road will be lower in scale/height.
11. Pedestrian green space connectivity around the bay was a very key desire of the public. The 50-100' green space connection between the log pond and the Cornwall landfill area is maintained. To provide continuous open space connection around bay from Fairhaven.
12. The Deep Water Ship Canal area is maintained as an approximate 7-acre development area. Maintaining deep-water ship access was important, but not industrial uses, as reported by numerous industry experts for future demands. Potential NOAA area only requires approximately 1.5 acres of upland development.
13. Access to the site down Bay Street from Chestnut. Street. This creates an arterial loop through site around to Cornwall and back to town.
14. No additional auto bridge access is shown to the waterfront area, besides a potential pedestrian steps on Commercial street. This is meant to depict a more economical development plan, by maintaining the site near it's existing elevation to avoid costs of infrastructure connections, while maintaining lay line alignments from downtown streets. The alignments allow future connections to streets if warranted.
15. On north side of Whatcom waterway, the boat ramp is maintaining inside to breakwater for safety, and the stormwater outfall is maintained near existing location.
16. A potential Alternate road access aligned with Maple Street across Whatcom waterway is planned for in case density in old town and waterfront need relief.
17. Roadway alignments at Deepwater allow for extension of access to future commercial Development and public access if warranted in future.
18. The Terraquarium proponents apparently prefer the location of the 2nd warehouse near

the Shipping terminal, if available. Be flexible.

19. Each Street end has an exciting Campanile design element that helps make this site unique. It will pass the John Norquist (Former Mayor of Milwaukee and current president of the Congress for New Urbanism) "Picture-Postcard" test.

The Waterfront Advisory group needs to Advise.

You need to take a leadership position and strongly recommend that the port and the City blend these lines as soon as possible. Time is of the essence. This has taken too long. People have forgotten what was in the original Guiding Principles (And the information behind it).

This incredible opportunity we all talk about, is at risk, and the whole world is watching. Including Funding Agencies!

These plans were a volunteer effort, even though it is my profession. But, it is my community, and I owe a debt of gratitude to John Blethen, the R/UDAT Group and many other representatives and concerned citizens who encouraged me to do this. More analysis is needed to blend appropriately. This is not intended as a new plan, but a direction to blend the existing plans, so that we can utilize data in the EIS.

Lastly, I sent this plan to Dan Burden, of Walkable Communities, to get his input. Here is an excerpt of what he said;

"...Very exciting stuff, Dave, and a great blended compromise. If you pulled this together over a weekend the same amount of time Walt Disney's architect had to create the magic kingdom, by the way, think what you could have done if you had an entire week and a million bucks to boot.

...I am also very impressed with your illustrated drawing quite on point...."

*Dan Burden
Walkable Communities, Inc.*

Thanks for listening. Act now.

Sincerely,

Dave

David E. Christensen AIA LEED AP
Architect and Planner
For John Blethen and friends...