

***Waterfront Futures Group
“Talking up the Waterfront - Southside” Summary of Comments
October 15, 2003***

The last of three community work sessions sponsored by the Waterfront Futures Group was held at the Bellingham Cruise Terminal in Fairhaven and was attended by over 100 community members. In total, 590 individual comments, recommendations, and questions were submitted.

Fairhaven, one of three original settlements on Bellingham Bay, was once expected to be one of the major urban areas in Puget Sound. After a series of depressions throughout the 20th Century, the district embraced a historic theme in the early 1990's and was awarded an exclusive contract as the southern terminus for the Alaska Ferry. In the past decade, Fairhaven has experienced a rebirth of sorts as residents and tourists have flocked to the historic district. Further development worries many residents, who feel that Fairhaven has finally “gotten it right.”

What follows is a brief summary of these comments. For a complete list, see the minutes summary.

Character, Uses and Design

Following the pattern established by the two previous meetings, the Character, Uses and Design category received the most comments by far. Unlike the first two meetings, Southside participants were less willing to accept significant future development. Any development should protect the existing features of the Southside area, particularly Fairhaven. Specifically, the “village” feel of Fairhaven should be preserved and development should enhance it through attractive mixed-use buildings that combine residential, commercial, and in some places, light industrial/ manufacturing. Views of and from the waterfront should be protected, and natural areas and greenways should be enhanced.

- Buildings should not exceed 3-5 stories in height and should fit with the architectural theme of Fairhaven – design criteria should be developed
- Granville Island is an excellent model
- “Signature” development should be built on Bellingham’s waterfront – aquarium, farmers market, maritime history museum, environmental education center, etc.
- Waterfront development should be restricted to marine-related uses
- Waterfront development should include “vital” places for people to interact, relax, be entertained
- Trails should link Fairhaven with other parts of the city
- A trolley system should link Fairhaven with the rest of the city, including WWU
- Single Occupancy Vehicle use should be minimized
- Heavy industry no belongs in Fairhaven
- Residential development should be mixed with other uses – “condo districts” are not acceptable
- Temporary or permanent boat moorage for visitors in Fairhaven
- Clark’s Point should be preserved as a natural area
- Increased density in Fairhaven is not necessarily a popular goal
- Development, including residential development, should be affordable

Jobs/ Economic Development

The Fairhaven district has experienced dramatic changes to its economy in the last quarter century, as marine-related manufacturing jobs have evolved into service jobs, and many non-working residents (retirees, students) have moved in. The working group attempted to find ways to blend service industries with manufacturing and professional jobs while retaining the unique look and feel of Fairhaven and the South Side.

- As a result of noise and pollution concerns, large, new heavy industry is no longer welcome on the Southside
- Marine industrial zoning should be preserved – working waterfront should remain
- Professional jobs should be blended with service jobs
- The natural environment can act as a draw for businesses to locate in the area
- Fish markets, restaurants, and authentic tourist attractions should be encouraged
- Development should be diverse, existing businesses should be preserved
- Fairhaven should remain a commercial center
- A “clean” business such as NOAA is preferred
- Increased ties to WWU, other education institutions can lure more business
- Extend transportation options at Fairhaven Station and include support facilities

Access

Access for Southside residents remained an important topic. Although the area has experienced significant trail development in the past two decades, many believed that new development was encroaching on public space and limiting physical and visual access to the waterfront. While the Squalicum and City Center work groups viewed waterfront development as a catalyst for improving waterfront access and views, the Southside group was concerned that future waterfront development would limit it.

- Develop a public promenade or walkway along the entire shoreline
- Railroad is a major obstacle to access
- Waterfront should be public-oriented
- Access should include not only physical but visual and economic access as well
- Private ownership and industrial use on the shore restricts access
- Waterfront should be ADA accessible
- Street ends and abandoned right of ways are opportunity areas
- Some natural areas should have restricted access
- Access should be treated as a privilege – reduce abuse (fires, litter, etc.)
- Access should include easy transportation between CBD, WWU, Squalicum, etc.
- Small “pocket” parks along waterfront should be linked by trails
- Access from I-5 should be improved to encourage economic development
- Increase visiting moorage, access from the water and water vessels
- Trail corridors should be wide – not limited by development

Environmental Quality

Although the Southside and Fairhaven are unquestionably urban areas, they are linked with natural areas – deer and other wildlife are frequently spotted throughout the district,

and undeveloped natural areas on Sehome Hill and along the Chuckanut Range are nearby.

- Natural spaces should remain natural and open space should be reclaimed
- Corridors for wildlife and salmon should be created or enhanced
- Environmental damage must be cleaned up, new industries should not increase environmental damage, and old industries should be held accountable
- There should be no net loss of environmental systems
- Beaches should be restored to their natural state
- Environmental education should occur on the waterfront
- Chuckanut Bay and Clark's Point should be preserved and protected
- Shorelines should be softened/ rip rap should be removed
- Invasive species should be removed

Public Process

The last of the three waterfront meetings was the best-attended, due in part to active community involvement, organized community groups, and recent reaction to development proposals. The groups' reaction to the Waterfront Futures Group was generally positive, though some expressed concern that the process would take too long. "Fairhaven will be built up before the Futures Group announces their recommendations," was a frequent worry. Others felt that the recommendations of the Futures Group should immediately become waterfront policy.

- Channel 10, emails, bulletins at community centers, media coverage, direct mailings, and the website are effective ways of distributing information/ notices
- The website must be improved and updated – there are too many dead ends and the content is often out of date or incomplete
- Future meetings should be publicized
- The media has not focused on the Waterfront Futures Group enough
- White papers, public comments, meeting summaries and other information should be made more publicly available
- The Waterfront Futures Group is on the right track – the most comprehensive task force so far
- Development that is funded by tax hikes will not be as popular
- The recommendations of the Waterfront Futures Group must not be wasted
- The community should be asked to help – volunteers, work groups, etc.
- Ongoing development/ process/ situation should be publicized – what is polluted? Who is developing G-P, what is the WFG timeline, who will pay for development, etc.