

Patricia Decker
Director, Waterfront Futures Group
Port of Bellingham
1801 Roeder
Bellingham, WA 98225

March 14, 2003

Dear Ms. Decker and Members of the Waterfront Futures Group,

Thank you for soliciting comments on the scope of the Waterfront Futures Project. The rethinking and redevelopment of the Bellingham waterfront is essential for the longevity of our community and I applaud your efforts.

It is the belief of RE Sources and the North Sound Baykeeper that long-term vitality and economic health can only be realized if redevelopment occurs around an environmentally healthy and productive bay. A healthy and productive bay will support the interests of the fishing industry as well as the ecotourism industry, and will not exclude the interests of other industries. In addition, a healthy and productive bay will support and sustain the long-term benefits of a healthy ecosystem, and will not preclude uses associated with a healthy bay, in the future.

The environmental health of the Bay and its inhabitants must be considered the cornerstone and the framework around which redevelopment occurs. A healthy ecosystem is composed of an underlying fabric and network of processes, interrelated structures and functions, flora and fauna. The health and resilience of an ecosystem is supported by its interconnectivity. Overlaying a functioning ecosystem on top of other desired development structures and functions is nearly impossible, and would be very costly. Sensible and sensitive development, however, can be overlain on top of a functioning ecosystem, with minimal harm to the ecosystem, if proper care is taken. For these reasons, RE Sources and the North Sound Baykeeper respectfully request that the condition of the ecosystem and possible habitat enhancements be considered the framework upon which further development takes place.

The contamination in Bellingham Bay and its current status as a mandatory clean-up site do not preclude it from regaining its value as a habitat. In fact, the Bay habitat is an integral component to the health of many species. Several local groups knowledgeable about fisheries, birds, and toxics have developed habitat plans for Bellingham Bay. These plans are in various stages of implementation, and deserve full consideration and incorporation into the overall redevelopment plan. Among these groups are the Habitat Action Team of the Bellingham Bay Demonstration Pilot Work Group, the Whatcom County Marine Resources Committee, and The Nooksack Salmon Enhancement Association. Prior to scoping, the Waterfront Futures Group has been given information on City planning and has been given a bus tour of the area, but has been given very little information on the contamination present, and no information on ongoing habitat work. It seems essential that the Waterfront Futures Group needs a firm grounding in the obstacles, i.e. the contamination, and the promise, i.e. habitat, before any scope can be decided upon.

RE Sources is not submitting any detailed recommendations at this time. We do, however, submit the following items as part of the scope to be considered at this time. More detailed recommendations will follow.

Habitat Restoration and Preservation:

- Juvenile salmon migration corridor
- Squalicum, Padden, Whatcom, and Little Squalicum Creek restoration
- Restoration of select wetlands and uplands to provide connective habitat
- Animal migration corridor
- Re-establish a soft-shore at Boulevard park to provide forage fish habitat and beach areas
- Habitat Action Team/ Bellingham Bay projects
- Nooksack Salmon Enhancement Association projects
- Marine Resources Committee projects
- Enhancement of shellfishery in Chuckanut Bay
- Protection of forage fish habitat (beach areas and eelgrass)
- Replanting of eelgrass where appropriate

Ecotourism and Education: Birds

- “Birders Hub”
- Connection to other birding adventures on San Juan Islands/ Eastern Washington/ Lummi and Skagit Flats/ British Columbia and Reiffel Island
- Promoted by Audubon’s Great Washington Birding trail
- Upgrade to Syre Bird Museum
- Facility for bird rehabilitation
- Bird viewing areas
- Wetland boardwalks

Ecotourism and Education: Kayaking and other boating

- Network with Washington Water Trails to become more of a kayak/ small boat destination
- Launching point for kayak trips to San Juan Islands— provide maps and possible routes for different length trips

Ecotourism and Education: Hiking

- Promote/ Use/ Enhance Coast Millenium Trail
- Boardwalks accentuating natural areas
- Enhance trails from the waterfront to the Chuckanuts- possibly provide camping opportunities.

Ecotourism and Education: Museums

- Natural History museum, accentuating marine birds and fish, and Native American history
- Expand Maritime Heritage Area- to be more of a destination— expand uses

- Upgrade to Syre Bird Museum

Fishing / Ecotourism and Education: Fish

- Enhance fish viewing areas
- Expand Maritime Heritage Area- to be more of a destination— expand uses
- Provide amenities for recreational and sustenance fishers/ boaters
- Provide amenities to increase responsible boating/ fishing/ other water related activities
- Fishing Docks

Waterfront/ Neighborhood Access Points to Water and to Waterfront

- Pedestrian, bicycle and bus transport to and from the waterfront.
- Trails linking to neighborhoods within the city, and to specific destinations
- Integration with existing neighborhoods and neighborhood plans
- Enhance abilities of tourists to use mass transit instead of automobiles.

The listed possibilities paint a picture of a place where the natural gifts and beauty of the area can, in large part, sustain an economy built upon a healthy and functioning ecosystem. Incorporating provisions for a healthy ecosystem will not exclude clean or responsible industries and commercial endeavors.

I look forward to submitting more detailed recommendations and to working with the Waterfront Futures Group.

Sincerely,

Wendy S. Steffensen
North Sound Baykeeper
RE Sources