

George Farkas

A White Paper

A Proposal for Bellingham's Waterfront.

The Most Important Design Element of the Waterfront:

The water. The entire layout of the waterfront including all walkways, buildings, seating areas and other elements, should be designed to maximize being near, seeing and interacting with Bellingham Bay.

A Proposed Desired State for the Waterfront:

A friendly, lively village-on-the-waterfront with families and a broad spectrum of ages mixing, strolling, shopping, eating, working and living. A quilt of uses: public fish and fresh food markets, shops, sidewalk café's, fine dining, areas of park and green, small boat harbors, offices, and medium density housing. A safe and inviting place for everyone including the very young and very old.

All of this threaded together with pedestrian walkways, with parking areas broken into dozens of small lots to avoid huge parking lagoons. A good example is Granville Island, though the element it lacks is a residential component.

In addition to being an enormous addition to Bellingham's quality of life, it will have huge economic benefits to the community. It will revitalize and sustain downtown.

A Test for Proposed Elements, Businesses and the Design Overall:

Is it family friendly? Does it encourage local families to visit? Does it encourage families to interact with the water? Using families as a primary tool to judge the worth of individual components and the layout as a whole will create an environment that encourages community and a healthy economy and discourages crime.

Key Elements and Examples – Things to do on the water and on land:

Mini-ferries shuttling people back and forth between Downtown, Fairhaven and other points along the waterfront. Granville Island in Vancouver has great examples – the boats are less than 20 feet long. The ferries are largely an excuse for people to "go for a ride on the water" and provide the easiest way for them to directly interact with the water. They also spread the visitor traffic (and economic assistance) to several areas.

Mini-ferries can also be a very effective way to spread out the parking. People can park at distant lots and areas and ride the ferries into the heart of the waterfront village. The ferry ride is part of the total experience.

Several small boat harbors and boat storage areas to encourage families to interact with the water and provide a lively scene on the water. Places to rent kayaks and small boats.

Boardwalks along the water with sidewalk café's and shops.

Fishermen's and farmer's markets, bookstores, artists and antiques.

Breakfast places for fishermen. Daytime food for families (such as fish and chips stands). Pubs and fine dining for later in the evening.

Stretches of park with waterside pathways linking the whole length of the waterfront – Squalicum Creek to Fairhaven. Areas to nap in the sun, or play.

Apartments and Condominiums to provide 24-hour life to the area. Two and three story developments are ideal and don't take up too much room or block views from downtown.

A two or three story required height for most structures in the village areas. Workspace, shops and restaurants below and living and office space for small businesses above.

Small delights: public art, fountains, sea life tanks or pools, whimsical architecture and design elements.

Locating much of the parking a few blocks towards and into downtown will encourage people to find and patronize downtown businesses. Using many small lots located near busy areas will discourage crime and enhance accessibility.

What shouldn't be there:

Huge, out of scale elements that are purely for tourists. Large attractions that have no day-to-day use for residents and that demand sprawling parking lagoons. These elements loom over and ruin the human-scale village streetscape of the waterfront.

Such non-desirable elements include: giant aquariums (dolphin shows, etc.), large concert or sports arenas, movie complexes, parking or docks for huge cruise ships, etc. Other non-desirable elements: seedy, run down, bars, "adult" entertainment and loud nightclubs.

In Summary:

An ideal state would be a family friendly, village-on-the-water with lively walkways and waterways. It would be a two or three story seaside town that appears to have been there for a hundred years. Docks and small boats would be everywhere.

Thank you for your consideration and congratulations on the remarkable opportunity.

Respectfully submitted,

George Farkas
Bellingham
March 1, 2003

References:

The Next American Metropolis, by Peter Calthorpe
A Pattern Language, by Christopher Alexander