

To: Patricia Decker
Waterfront Futures Group

From: Gary W. Armstrong
3155 Black Jack Trail
Whatcom County
Sedro Woolley WA 98284
H. 595-2213
email <garyjo@fidalgo.net>

I have an interest in contributing to the planning for the waterfront property that will result from the GP closure. As yet I have found no background information available regarding the exact property involved, and so I am only able to make some generalized comments and suggestions regarding this development. But first a little background about myself.

In 1987-88, I organized and promoted a motorsports event known as The Bellingham Grand Prix on the city streets between City Hall and the Flatiron Building. This was a time trial sports car event that was organized in concert with City Center Development Authority and Mothers Against Drunk Driving. I had a personal interest in seeing it happen, being involved in that type of competition myself, but I also have a great love for my adopted city, and was on a mission to do my part to combat the effects of the Bellis Fair Mall opening. I wanted to help put an exciting face on downtown Bellingham, and during the year plus that I spent in preparation for the event I started to develop a vision of what this town could be. Back then, I voiced an opinion to the then Director of CCDA Pamela Cushing that an important element of downtown revitalization was to get more people living downtown in order to make the city a more vital place, and to attract all the elements that are necessary to life downtown. I still believe this, and I was very disappointed to see the closure of the Safeway store on Cornwall Street. From a human perspective, downtown began a backwards slide.

With the opening up of the waterfront of Bellingham, a truly unique opportunity has fallen into all our laps, and it is imperative that those who determine the future of this waterfront area choose the right course in order to realize the full potential of the opportunity.

Herewith are my preliminary thoughts, in no particular order.

A. This process must occur with a minimum of committee work. The most creative solutions are always the result of the good works of a small group of motivated, dedicated, creative people. This is as true with human planning as it is with technology. A committee generates paper work; a small group generates ideas.

B. The public can not be counted on to give much in the way of a direction, as most individuals have very singular wants. On the other hand, the public is valuable when shown some alternative plans. With a framework to think within, they will then come up with the ideas you would never have thought of, from perspectives you might not imagine.

C. There seems to be a consensus among those who have spoken about this proposed project, that the waterfront be connected to the central downtown area. This can only work if the first efforts include the access routes to the waterfront, and the manner in which they cross Roeder Avenue and the railroad tracks. I see crossings working well at Cornwall avenue and Bay Street with bridges over the tracks. Central Avenue is the other prime access route, but I'm not clear how that would work. Another pedestrian bridge seems a necessity, and given a little time I think an elegant solution could be found.

D. The development of this waterfront is in the interest of all of the residents of the city, and

every effort should be made to offer the opportunity to any group or individual who is interested, the chance to participate. Artworks from the art community; local architects doing design work; local builders and suppliers getting the contracts to do the work; local people being used to do the grunt work. This development has the chance to create an enormous amount of civic pride. Obviously the University, Tech school, Community College, and every other school in the county could make a contribution to our new waterfront.

In the same context, every effort should be made to be inclusive of all income levels of the Bellingham community. It would be a travesty to create high end development, exclusive to tourism.

E. My personal Grand Scheme would look something like this:

The new waterfront could become a microcosm of the entire city, and should rightly be a new neighborhood all it's own. This means some heavy industry, light manufacturing, small business, restaurants, small movie theatre, residences (both multi family and individual), park space ("Central Park", off of Central Avenue) with a trail that connects to the existing trail around the bay and includes an exercise trail that circles this new waterfront area, an outdoor performance stage, a central city food store (finally), a real citizens dock with fresh catch of the day and small restaurants & shops. An old fashioned waterfront community. There is no reason why Fairhaven gets to have ALL the charm! In a perfect world, there would be a minimum of streets, with a few strategically located parking areas.

F. A building and facilities oversight group would be desirable to manage the shape, color and texture of the new development. The character of the area should be decided before the land rush begins so there is some coherence to the project. This is an area where the input of the public should be listened to most carefully.

G. There has been much said about the tax revenue lost because of the GP downsize/closure. What is that revenue base, and what is it balanced by the costs of having GP there? I mean the costs in terms of pollution, noise, water usage etc. Then there will be something that the new development can be judged against, and will make some sense to the citizenry. How many \$100,000 homes does it take to generate the same tax amount? How many Mom & Pop stores; how many small businesses; how much light industry or manufacturing? How many hotels?

H. Before any real planning can go forward, a serious inventory and analysis of the property in question must be made. Will GP still be around for awhile making tissue? For how long? What buildings will they be vacating, and which need to be re-used. Which need to be torn down? Who actually owns the property in question right now, and what are the boundaries of it?

I. There may be some confusion in my own mind as to the extent of the area that the Waterfront Futures Group is overseeing. At times I hear it is the GP property only, while at others it is much more, ranging from Squalicum Creek to Chuckanut Bay. Until more details are forthcoming, it will be difficult to even discuss this topic properly.

In my opinion, the next step to take should be to form a small working group of three or four people to begin answering questions and formulating alternative scenarios. These people should work full time on this project under Patricia Decker, and all should be self motivated visionaries prepared to commit to a long term of service in the pursuit of this project. I will state for the record that I would like to be one of these people. I would appreciate the opportunity to discuss in more detail my suitability to do so.

Thank you for considering these ideas.



3/1/2003