

OUR SOUTHSIDE SHORELINE STEWARDSHIP INITIATIVE

A Brief Proposing a
Citizen-based Process
Concerned with the Future of the
Shoreline South of Downtown Bellingham

Presented to
The Waterfront Futures Group
With the Support “in Principle” of
Seven Community Groups

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Our Vision

We commit ourselves to enhancing Fairhaven's unique sense of place through a citizen-based program of stewardship over the elements from which that experience is derived, especially in relationship to the shoreline south of Downtown Bellingham.

Our Venture

- Restoring Fairhaven's Natural Gifts
 - Removing Toxic Waste from both the Land and the Water
 - Replanting Native Vegetation Wherever Possible
 - Recovering the Face of the Bluff South of Boulevard Park
 - Raising the Level of the Beach South of the Taylor Ave. Dock
- Reclaiming Fairhaven's Historical Roots
 - Recognizing Each Segment of Our Ethnic Heritage in Tangible Ways
 - Strengthening Ties with Our Waterfront Enterprises both Past and Present
 - Reusing the Boiler Works Sheds Leaving the Exteriors Virtually Unchanged
- Reinforcing Fairhaven's Two-Level Ambiance
 - Building a Year-round Public Gathering Place Opposite the Village Green
 - Creating a Pedestrian Node on the Shoreline Near the Log Dump Dock
 - Joining the Two Venues by a Direct Visual and Physical Access Corridor
 - Expanding the Boat Moorage and Reconnecting the Log Dump Dock
 - Extending Boulevard Park Southward to the Gambier Ave. Right of Way
 - Maximizing Public Access to the Shoreline, both Physically and Visually
- Revitalizing Fairhaven's Transportation Links
 - Providing a Pedestrian Way Along the Entire Shoreline
 - Filling-in the Missing Sections in the South Bay Trail
 - Increasing the Types and Availability of Mass Transit Service
 - Limiting the Volume of Auto Traffic and the Spread of Surface Parking
- Refueling Fairhaven's Economy
 - Retaining Our Marine-related Businesses and Attracting Others
 - Locating a Marine-related Research Facility on the Former Uniflite Site

Our Vehicles

- Updated Neighborhood Plans

- Revised City Zoning Ordinances and State Shoreline Regulations
- Neighborhood-based Entities to Facilitate the Stewardship Process

THE BASIS OF OUR SOUTHSIDE SHORELINE STEWARDSHIP INITIATIVE

The shoreline is a magic milieu, the arena where the elements of nature engage. The sun warms the land. The heat rising from the land fuels the wind. The wind energizes wave action in the water. The gravitational pull of the moon on the water generates tidal cycles. The waves and tides combine to form currents. The currents create beaches. The activity of wind and water erodes the land to supply sediment for beach-building. The resulting ecosystem offers ideal habitat for innumerable life forms, both plant and animal. In balancing nature's forces, the shoreline maintains its mystique though ever changing.

For human beings the shoreline holds a unique and powerful attraction. It beckons us to reinvigorate our bodies, our minds and our spirits by going near, on or into the water. It promises us stability, sustenance and community by stepping ashore. The shoreline feeds our desire for adventure, inspires our creativity and offers a peaceful retreat amid our stressful lives. We are reluctant to leave it and eager to return. With its incomparable mixture of land, water and air, the shoreline addresses four of our basic human needs: security, challenge, empowerment and serenity.

From the first Native American settlements onward, the local shoreline has been the focus of human recreational, educational and vocational activity, shaping and being shaped by our collective endeavors. As a result, the shoreline has acquired cultural associations to complement its natural attributes. These two characteristics have now become inseparable. Consequently, the shoreline is a major source of our sense of place and of our sense of identity. The shoreline is a unique blend of our natural and cultural heritage, a fragile and priceless gift. It clearly deserves our most careful stewardship.

Sadly, the maxim for Bellingham's treatment of the shoreline has been development rather than stewardship. We have viewed our shoreline as the target for the exploitation of riparian resources and as the venue for processing and transporting raw materials from inland locations. We have acted as competitors for the control and consumption of natural resources rather than as conservators living in harmony with our environment and with each other. Hence, our shoreline has been severely compromised in beauty, accessibility and enjoyment and our experience of community has been seriously restricted.

Originally, our shoreline was a narrow strip of rocks, gravel and sand stretching along the foot of a Chuckanut Sandstone bluff between Squalicum and Padden Creeks. Beginning in the mid Nineteenth Century, as our commercial and residential areas spread out along the top of the bluff, the shoreline was extended outward from its base by a series of land fills to accommodate industrial expansion. In the process, negligible concern was shown for environmental stewardship. Hence, we typically refer to our shoreline as the "working" waterfront and subordinate its value as an inspirational and recreational destination.

Fortunately, a fresh look (regard: to look again, respect, hold in affection) at our shoreline is being taken by the Waterfront Futures Group, jointly sponsored by the City and the

Port of Bellingham. This thorough and thoughtful undertaking is intended to produce an integrated master plan for our shoreline. To yield beneficial and lasting results, that plan

must raise our consciousness level about the ecological imperatives relating to our shoreline and shift the way we approach it from development to stewardship. This task must affect change in two key areas: our land valuation criteria and our zoning ordinances.

Traditionally, we have valued land in terms of the most financially profitable use the market would bear. Impacts upon the health and appearance of the natural environment and upon public views and access have received little or no consideration. However, our shoreline belongs to everyone, especially since almost all of it is held in public trust by the Port of Bellingham. Therefore, its highest and best use should be determined primarily in terms of environmental preservation and public enjoyment and secondarily on the basis of its potential for economic stimulation and/or direct income generation.

Our natural shoreline is a finite resource. It cannot be recreated, only altered in terms of access, appearance and use. Once surrendered to private development, it cannot be easily recovered for public purposes. Consequently, it should be devoted solely to marine-related uses, that is, uses which maximize the enjoyment of the shoreline by individuals and/or groups accessing it from either the land or the water, within the constraints of ecological responsibility. These uses include all businesses that require waterfront sites in order to deliver their products, services or benefits and also others that may not.

Historically, most of our waterfront businesses were of the first type. Changing transportation patterns have moved some of them into the second category. However, several businesses in the latter group provide our only remaining tangible links with enterprises once vital to our community, e.g., fish processing and boat building. Keeping them in place provides “hands on” contacts with historic waterfront activities and with current ones as well. Hence, they are doubly marine-related. Without their presence on the shoreline, our sense of place and our sense of identity would be decidedly incomplete.

This vital issue is not recognized by the State of Washington’s Shoreline Management Act (SMA), despite its express goal being “to utilize, protect, restore and preserve the shorelines as among the state’s most valuable and fragile natural resources.” In addition, the SMA does not differentiate between natural shoreline areas and artificial ones. It sets building height limits to protect views of the shoreline from the land but ignores protecting views from the water. Finally, it makes no mention of building length, appearance or spacing, three factors which also impact views both from the land and the water.

The Bellingham’s zoning ordinances evidence many of the same deficiencies. Not regarding the bluff that originally defined our shoreline as a primary natural asset, they contain no provisions for restoring or preserving it. In fact, our industrial use zoning ordinance, which applies to many shoreline sites, stipulates no height restrictions whatsoever. Consequently, structures can be erected on the shoreline that will obscure views of the bluff from the water and views of the shoreline from upland trails, streets and residences. Revised City and State entitlements are a must for shoreline stewardship.

Along with its small-city character, Bellingham's unique appeal stems largely from its strategic location that offers ready enjoyment of both the water and the mountains. The most frequent activity to generate that enjoyment is viewing, which yields great physical and spiritual benefits. Preserving and increasing our public view corridors to and from

the shoreline should be high on our list of priorities. Equally important is protecting the private views of our established residents, many of whom have few alternative connections with the shoreline. Otherwise, our priceless quality of life will be diminished.

The following outline presents key elements for exercising stewardship of our shoreline from the Cornwall Landfill to the City's southern boundary. It anticipates a gradual, long range, citizen-based, planning/implementation process that will yield major physical, social and economic benefits. The outline is supported "in principle" by seven Southside citizen groups: the Edgemoor Association, the Fairhaven Neighbors, the Happy Valley, Sehome and South Hill Neighborhood Associations and Citizen View and Save our Shoreline.

As these groups reviewed the document, four additional projects were suggested and a two areas of substantive disagreement emerged. These are listed below.

Suggestions for Additional Projects

1. Create a beach, small boat launching facility, picnic area and concert venue at the north end of Boulevard Park, as outlined in a letter from Rick Black to Patricia Decker on April 11, 2003.
2. Restore the shoreline area between Boulevard Park and the Taylor Avenue Dock to its former state with native vegetation, a natural beach and two or three access trails.
3. Upgrade the marine habitat along the entire shoreline, paying special attention to eel grass, smelt, etc.
4. Work with the BNSF Railroad to relieve the silting action caused by its trestle that has turned the lagoon at the foot of Willow Rd. into a mud flat.

Substantive Disagreements

1. One South Hill resident feels that the proposal for reuse of the Reid Boiler Works buildings should be deleted because it relates to private property. (See 2A, 10B, 1C.)
2. Strong feelings were expressed by both residents and business owners in the Fairhaven Marine Industrial Park against forcing any of the present waterfront businesses to move to other locations, even if they are not marine-related under the broad definition of that term which is advocated in this document. (See 2A, 14B.)

THE ELEMENTS OF OUR SOUTHSIDE SHORELINE STEWARDSHIP INITIATIVE

1A. Our Values

1B. Maximizing the Environmental Quality of Our Shoreline

- 1C. Restore all natural sites and systems as far as possible.
- 2C. Encourage projects that enhance the beauty and use of shoreline sites.
- 3C. Remove toxic waste from contaminated land and water areas.
- 4C. Reduce noise and visual pollution.
- 5C. Replace selected hard surfaced areas with green infill.
- 6C. Soften the edges of the shoreline to replace or conceal rip rap.
- 7C. Employ green building practices.
- 8C. Separate people from vehicles, including bicycles.
- 9C. Separate the use of small, wind and hand propelled boats from power craft.
- 10C. Mitigate the presence of the railroad.

2B. Meeting Our Psychological Needs

- 1C. Design to a human scale.
- 2C. Emphasize our two unique venues: the shoreline and the Village Green.
- 3C. Facilitate direct and meaningful transitions between the two venues.
- 4C. Provide scattered public gathering spaces of different sizes and shapes.
- 5C. Provide randomly placed “pausing places.”

3B. Celebrating Our Cultural Heritage

- 1C. Identify and mark local sites of historic and cultural importance.
- 2C. Achieve architectural and historical continuity.
- 3C. Make the ethnic contributions to our local history much more visible.
- 4C. Make the economic contributions to our local history much more visible.
- 5C. Attract businesses with ethnic orientations drawn from our local history.
- 6C. Schedule frequent events to affirm and enjoy our various ethnic traditions.

4B. Facilitating Expanded Public Access to and from Our Shoreline

- 1C. Respond to the needs and desires of local residents first.
- 2C. Increase visual and physical contacts from both the water and from the land.
- 3C. Provide continuous public space along the water’s edge by greenways

and/or trails.

- 4C. Create frequent “braids” between the shoreline and upland trails.
- 5C. Provide spaces and facilities for children to enjoy being on or near the water.
- 6C. Increase and integrate interpretative information.
- 7C. Maximize the utilization of the Alaska Ferry parking lots.
- 8C. Integrate public and private spaces and infrastructures.
- 9C. Nurture an ambiance that is welcoming to all, both residents and visitors.

5B. Preserving and Expanding the Marine-Related Uses of Our Shoreline

- 1C. Retain and increase jobs that produce living wages and adequate benefits.
- 2C. Provide opportunities for marine-related educational experiences.
- 3C. Promote ties with educational and research institutions.
- 4C. Make local services needed by visiting boaters easily accessible.

6B. Planning for Controlled Residential Development

- 1C. Provide a diversity of housing types and densities.
- 2C. Cover a range of cost levels.
- 3C. Limit housing development to upland sites.
- 4C. Respect the views from existing residential structures.

7B. Stimulating an Open, Transparent, Interactive, Ongoing Public Process

- 1C. Involve property owners, business proprietors and residents.
- 2C. Stimulate imaginative thinking.
- 3C. Encourage experimentation and risk-taking.
- 4C. Welcome multiple alternatives.
- 5C. Cultivate a sense of ownership and pride.
- 6C. Create neighborhood-based planning/implementation vehicles

2A. Our Venture

1B. Creating a Design Concept for Our Shoreline from the Cornwall Landfill South

- 1C. Restore its natural setting as far as possible.
- 2C. Balance its natural, cultural, recreational, educational and vocational uses.
- 3C. Emphasize our two distinct venues: the shoreline and the bluff-top.
- 4C. Strengthen our quaint, low impact, human scale ambiance.
- 5C. Make our shoreline and adjacent areas a major destination point for local residents and visitors, whether they come by land or by water.

2B. Undertaking Preliminary Projects to Dramatize our Vision and Design Concept

- 1C. Paint a sign on the west side of the Fairhaven Shipyard dry dock welcoming

- seaborne visitors to Bellingham in each of our historic languages.
 - 2C. Paint a mural on the east side of the dry dock inviting people on shore to enjoy venturing out on to the water.
 - 3C. Paint murals in strategic locations on the sides of selected FMIP buildings to create visual continuity between the Village Green and the shoreline.
- 3B. Instituting an Ongoing Effort to Restore Padden Lagoon and Chuckanut Bay
- 1C. Remove toxic wastes from the lagoon and the neighboring land fills.
 - 2C. Work with BNSF to relieve tidal restrictions caused by the railroad.
- 4B. Filling-in the Gaps in the Southside Trail System and Adding More Links to the Water
- 1C. Provide a sidewalk and bike lane on 10th St. between Adams and Douglas Streets.
 - 2C. Create a major green node at 10th and Douglas Streets (See also 4A, 8B below).
 - 3C. Create braids between the shoreline and both 10th St. and the South Bay Trail.
 - 4C. Link the end of the South Bay Trail opposite the Village Green with the trail heads on Harris St. and at the intersection of 10th St. and Donovan Ave. visually and/or physically. Possibly add a bike line.
- 5B. Restoring the Impact of the Bluff between Boulevard Park and Mill Avenue
- 1C. Identify the original line of the bluff.
 - 2C. Remove fill and vegetation to expose the natural face of the bluff.
 - 3C. Prohibit the building of non park-related structures below the bluff.
- 6B. Expanding the Use of the Beach South of the Taylor Avenue Dock
- 1C. Provide an access to the beach from the dock west of the tracks.
 - 2C. Provide a gated crossing over the tracks near the former Log Dump Dock.
 - 3C. Study the feasibility of raising the surface of the beach above the high tide level.
 - 4C. Implement the recommendations of the study if they are positive.
- 7B. Expanding the Use of Our Small Boat Moorage
- 1C. Rehabilitate, reconnect and extend the former Log Dump Dock.
 - 2C. Provide vehicle and pedestrian access to the renewed dock.
 - 3C. Provide additional moorings for visiting boats.
 - 4C. Provide additional parking and dry-storage against the bluff.
 - 5C. Encourage local boaters to dry-store boats when not in use.
 - 6C. Include a floating dinghy dock at the Taylor Ave. Dock.
 - 7C. Create a kayak and dinghy launching ramp at Boulevard Park.
- 8B. Developing the Open Site South of Reid Boiler Works to Support the Moorage.
- 1C. Resolve the Gambier vacation issue amicably with the City holding title.

- 2C. Add the site to the City Park System.
- 3C. Remove the fill down to the level of the railroad tracks to restore views of the bluff.
- 4C. Create a viewpoint on the spur in the bluff at the center of the site's east boundary.
- 5C. Retain an emergency and pedestrian access down the Douglas St. right of way.
- 6C. Landscape the site and the adjacent rights of way and plant native vegetation.
- 7C. Erect small pavilions on the site patterned after traditional Lummi dwellings for rest stops and picnic shelters, refreshment stands and a bike rental concession.
- 8C. Erect a giant, illuminated Lummi totem pole that will be visible from all directions just east of the tracks near the former Log Dump Dock.
- 9C. Renovate Building No. 8 in the Fairhaven Marine Industrial Park to house services for local and visiting boaters.

9B. Establishing a Major Connection between the Village Green and the Shoreline

- 1C. Create a direct, public view and access corridor from 10th St. and Mill Ave to the shoreline in the vicinity of the former Log Dump Dock.
- 2C. Erect an icon near the Village Green visible from the shoreline and downtown.

10B. Addressing the West Side of 10th St. Between the Chrysalis and Douglas St.

- 1C. Create twin restaurants at Reid Boiler Works, one for adults in the original structure and one for minors in the newer one, separated by a common entry, kitchen, restrooms and bandstand, while leaving the exterior as is.
- 2C. Extend Boulevard Park southward from the Chrysalis to Reid Boiler Works. with underground parking to serve the Taylor Ave. Dock and the restaurants in the Reid Boiler Works buildings.

11B. Strengthening the Ties between Our Historic and Current Shoreline Activities.

- 1C. Establish a museum in the old PAF blacksmith shop on Harris St. to house artifacts from PAF, the lumber, furniture and plywood mills and Uniflite, starting with the private collection Gordon Tweit has willed to the WMHA.
- 2C. Facilitate direct and/or indirect public viewing opportunities of present industrial operations coordinated by the museum.
- 3C. Move the PAF tender, "Karluk," from Squalicum Harbor to Fairhaven and offer onboard visits and cruises as "hands on" links to our marine heritage.

12B. Creating Facilities on the Shoreline for Our Children

- 1C. Create a lagoon for rowing, paddling and model boat racing by installing a breakwater on the pilings of the new Taylor Ave. Dock that extends down only to the low tide line, leaving space for tidal changes and access for fish.
- 2C. Establish a nature preserve around the tidal ponds south of Marine Park.

13B. Constructing an All-weather Public Gathering Place on Mill Ave. Facing the Green

as the Centerpiece of a Complex Ringed by Retail Spaces and Condominiums

- 1C. Include a small auditorium for movies, plays, concerts, lectures and rallies.
- 2C. Feature an international cafeteria and lounge overlooking the Green.
- 3C. Provide meeting rooms for small business and professional conferences.
- 4C. Provide shops for woodworking, metalworking, ceramics and painting.
- 5C. Incorporate a community health club with an indoor pool.
- 6C. Share underground parking with other uses.
- 7C. Continue activities that now take place on the Green only in the summertime.
- 8C. Add a carillon to provide an audible focal point.

14B. Retaining and Increasing Marine-related Industrial Uses

- 1C. Seek to move non marine-related businesses to inland locations.
- 2C. Utilize vacated spaces for existing and/or new marine-related activities.
- 3C. Work with existing marine-related businesses over time to relocate west of Padden Lagoon on either side of Harris St. as they need to expand, to upgrade their technology or as the buildings they occupy become obsolete.

15B. Establishing a Regional Research and Training Center for Oceanography and/or Meteorology on the Former Uniflite Site

- 1C. Investigate the need for and requirements of such a facility.
- 2C. Identify the potential funding sources.
- 3C. Approach WWU, the State Government, the Federal Government and private organizations.
- 4C. Landscape the area to produce a campus-like setting to support the transition between the shoreline and the Fairhaven Green.
- 5C. Begin a phased program utilizing the existing buildings as they become available.
- 6C. Construct new and replacement structures and facilities as needed.

3A. Our Vehicles

- 1B. Updated Plans for the Chuckanut, Fairhaven and South Hill Neighborhoods Featuring Zoning Ordinances to Control Design, Height, Style and Density
- 2B. A Special Development District Created from Boulevard Park to the Tidal Pools South of Marine Park, Including All of the Open Land Bordering on 10th St.
- 3B. A Consortium of Neighborhood Experts to Create Plans for the Special District
- 4B. A Neighborhood Development Corporation to Implement the Plans
- 5B. A Non-profit Means of Subsidizing Key Property Acquisitions
- 6B. A Banking Syndicate to Provide Customized Financing

4A. Our Vital Resources

- 1B. Personal

- 1C. Accountants
- 2C. Architects
- 3C. Artists
- 4C. Bankers
- 5C. Business Managers
- 6C. Community Organizers
- 7C. Contractors
- 8C. Ecologists

- 9C. Engineers
- 10C. Historic Preservationists
- 11C. Investors
- 12C. Lawyers
- 13C. Planners
- 14C. Real Estate Developers
- 15C. Real Estate Managers
- 16C. Shoreline Geologists

2B. Institutional

- 1C. Western Washington University
- 2C. Kulshan Community Land Trust

- 3C. The Whatcom Land Trust
- 4C. Old Fairhaven Association

ADDENDUM TO
OUR SOUTHSIDE SHORELINE STEWARDSHIP INITIATIVE

After this proposal was delivered to the Waterfront Futures Group on January 22nd, three additional citizen organizations agreed to support its submission “in principle.” The three groups are: the Edgemoor Association, Fairhaven Neighbors and the Happy Valley Neighborhood Association. This brings the total number of supporting citizen groups to seven. Also, two more project suggestions were offered, bringing the total number to six. No further objections were raised.

Additional Projects

5. Add a height restriction to our industrial zoning ordinances.
6. Maintain a balance of housing types, sizes and prices in each neighborhood so families with modest incomes may continue to live in Bellingham despite its anticipated growth.