

To: The Waterfront Futures Group
From: The Northwest Discovery Project
Re: TerraQuarium Northwest
Date: 27 January 2004

The Northwest Discovery Project hereby submits this proposal for the consideration and endorsement of the Waterfront Futures Group:

We request that the Waterfront Futures Group recommend that a world-class education, tourist, and research facility--a true regional center--be located within Bellingham's central waterfront.

Such a facility, to be called **TerraQuarium Northwest**, will feature exhibits, hands-on displays, aquariums and recreated natural habitats related to the Pacific Northwest. These exhibits will focus on the island environments of the San Juans, marine ecosystems, river systems, their estuaries and surrounding valleys and flatlands, alpine regions including Mount Baker and the North Cascades, Native American culture, and finally, the urban areas (and their history) of this region.

The TerraQuarium will:

- Serve as a valued community resource, providing education and recreation for families throughout the area. Exhibits, reference center, educational programs, and research will help residents and visitors appreciate, understand, and work to sustain the varied natural environments of the Pacific Northwest.

- Act as an excellent neighbor for a mixture of uses, from industrial to residential. It will complement a potential expansion of Western Washington University, a relocated Whatcom Children's Museum, art-education and other proposed cultural amenities, and serve as an incubator for the growing eco-tourism and environmental industries in the region.

- Serve as a year-round destination attraction throughout the region and beyond. The locally-owned non-profit TerraQuarium will provide jobs and stimulate the local economy. It will provide links to recreational activities and adventures (whale watching, kayak trips, ski trips, stream restoration, etc.) sponsored by for-profit and non-profit organizations.

- Reflect and enhance Bellingham's relationship to both Mount Baker and the San Juan Islands, both major components of our sense of place. The Bellingham/ Whatcom County Convention and Visitors Bureau has elected to underline the connection between Bellingham and Mt. Baker in promotional literature and new logo. No state in the continental United States has such an expansive island system as the San Juan Islands, and Bellingham is a clear mainland link to these treasures. The TerraQuarium on Bellingham's waterfront would reinforce Bellingham's status as the all-season "basecamp" for explorations of our unique region stretching from "Ski to Sea."

Although there are other aquariums, museums, zoos, and cultural centers in the Northwest, none focuses on the rich local natural environment and its history. More than an aquarium, the TerraQuarium will complement--but not duplicate--the aquariums in Seattle and Vancouver, and will create its own niche in the Northwest marketplace. Bellingham is in an excellent location for the development of such a facility. Despite Bellingham's relatively small size, the region is fully capable of supporting a world-class facility of this type: no other city north of San Francisco (including Seattle and Vancouver) has as many people within 90 miles of it as Bellingham.

The TerraQuarium will not detract from existing cultural attractions in Bellingham, such as the Whatcom Museum of History and Art, the Whatcom Children's Museum, The American Museum of Radio, Mindport, and more. Instead, the TerraQuarium will act as an international draw for visitors who, rather than spending three hours visiting one attraction, will choose to spend a weekend or even an entire vacation in Bellingham and Whatcom County, visiting several local attractions, sleeping in local hotels, eating at local restaurants, and shopping in local shops.

The time is right for the development of the TerraQuarium, which could be one of the first components of the redevelopment of Bellingham's waterfront and a catalyst for further quality development. The Northwest tourist industry is one of the fastest growing in the United States. Continued concerns over foreign travel have translated into an increase in domestic travel, and the resurgent Canadian dollar will spur increased visits by British Columbians. Year-round cultural and educational centers have been shown to act as excellent anchors for new development. Cleveland, Vancouver, Monterey, San Antonio, Baltimore, and other cities have reaped the rewards on investment in such centers.

The TerraQuarium concept has received broad support from prominent businesspeople, educators, elected officials, and other members of the community, and the aquarium concept has been recommended by the Bellingham Design Assistance Team, which recognized its excellent potential for synergy with Huxley College of Environmental Sciences, which they recommended could expand to the waterfront.

The redevelopment of Bellingham's waterfront will be one of the most important projects in the city's history, and the specific projects themselves should reflect that importance. Development on the waterfront should be special, unique, and distinctly "Bellingham." We believe that the Northwest TerraQuarium will be an excellent component of that redevelopment, and we urge you to include it in your recommendations.

Thank you.

Dr. Michael Burnett

-and the Board of Directors of the Northwest Discovery Project:

Bob Goodwin, Dave Green, Susie Burnett, Jim Miller, Dr. Brad Smith, Jon Soine, John Stewart, Bernie Thomas, Jerry Eklund, and Dr. Bert Webber.

