

Environmental Charrette Findings

INTRODUCTION

What should the future hold for Bellingham's waterfront? The RE Sources Charrette Working Group (charrette group) asked itself that question on June 7th, 2003 in the form of an environmental charrette. With many opinions at the table, with much discussion and much rewriting, there evolved this document, "Environmental Charrette Findings".

The opinions represented at the table were from those who prescribed to an environmental ethic. For Habitat and Wildlife Connectivity:

- 1) Habitat should be restored to the fullest extent practicable.
- 2) Connectivity of upland (to the extent we can address), nearshore, and marine corridors for wildlife should exist, be enhanced, and maintained.
- 3) Contamination of Bellingham Bay should be cleaned up in the most environmentally sound manner as possible.

For Public Access:

- 4) Public access to the water and shoreline by kayak, bike, and foot is a priority and must be enhanced, and be community and habitat friendly.

For Business and Development:

- 5) Businesses and community gathering places should emphasize, wherever possible and appropriate, sustainable business practices and enhancement of the natural environment.

Those at the table came with specific interests. They were students, working, and retired people drawn from neighborhood and environmental groups.

Included in this report is the following:

Overview

Policy View on Redevelopment, Contamination, and Habitat

General Recommendations

Specific Geographic Recommendations

Maps

Appendix A: Charrette Introduction and Description Letter

Appendix B: Attendee List

OVERVIEW

The closure of Georgia-Pacific's pulp and chemical operation signals the end of a heavy industrial era on Bellingham Bay. The city now has the opportunity to develop a cohesive waterfront plan that integrates ecosystem function with economic viability and aesthetic enjoyment. Simply bringing such a vision into focus presents a daunting task. Translating these ideas into physical reality will be a huge challenge. We recognize this work will need to include the entire community and continue for the long term – perhaps a hundred years and more.

In the short term, specific sites should be identified that can deliver a high reward for minimal input when the costs and benefits to habitat, public access and the economy have all been considered. Healthy ecosystems should provide the essential basis for a vital economy as well as a high quality of life under this long-term plan. Therefore, in this presentation of ideas, the preservation and restoration of ecosystem functions are not simple rhetoric; they are central to the success of any plan for the sustainable development and stewardship of our waterfront.

REDEVELOPMENT

Speculation about the redevelopment of the waterfront has led to a stream of ideas rich with ways to invigorate the economy as well as the environment, from park land to corporate office space, from houseboats to amphitheaters. As within a healthy ecosystem, diversity within the economic base of a community allows resiliency as well as stability. The charrette group agreed that they did not want the waterfront to become an area that was solely a paved commercial enterprise. Public access and habitat uses must be integrated into the planning of not only public land, but also private areas designated as residential or commercial. Multiple-use redevelopment and small-scale building could yield results beneficial to all interests if the healthy functioning of natural processes is used as the definitive baseline for planning.

Numerous “anchor” proposals have been expressed - from Park or Public Facility to a maritime exploration center to a big ship harbor. The choice of the anchor needs to be made with the appreciation of the diversity of Bellingham, and keeping the health of the environment foremost in consideration.

CONTAMINATION

Although Bellingham Bay historically supported a diverse array of species, it, like other urban areas has been contaminated. Contamination affects the life that healthy water and sediment quality support, and the economic and recreation interests that rely on them. To recover a healthful Bay we must also address present, on-going contamination that exists. The present contamination must be removed in the most ecologically sound manner possible, and ongoing pollution must be minimized to the greatest extent possible. To these ends, we ask for the following items:

- 1) Redevelopment of an area should be disallowed until it is clear of contamination.
- 2) Rezones allowing redevelopment of properties held by parties responsible for pollution, including, but not limited to the Port, City and Georgia- Pacific, should be disallowed until plans for addressing contamination are in place, and until designated monies for remediation are set-aside.
- 3) The City and Port should ask that there be no discharge of persistent pollutants, and that AKART or “All Known And Reasonable Technology” be applied for all pollution discharges, granted by the Department of Ecology where the discharge flows into Bellingham Bay.

4) Stormwater from facilities and municipal roadways should be monitored and treated in accordance with BMP's (Best Management Practices) and AKART.

We find that business cannot be practiced as it has been in the past, where the cost of doing business was subsidized by environmental degradation and other externalized costs to the community. To this end, we ask that those responsible for the contamination pay for its clean-up and that stiffer regulations be enforced to prevent further contamination from industrial discharges and from polluted stormwater.

HABITAT

Habitat must be restored in order to provide connectivity and support for the flora and fauna that live in the upland, shoreline and nearshore areas. Habitats in urban environments cannot be ignored as they provide linkages upstream and downstream of the urban area. In the case of our native salmon, this urban area is their home by birthright. During this current round of redevelopment we have the awareness of the importance of fish and wildlife habitat, and we can no longer ignore this priority in both economic and environmental terms. For these reasons, the charrette group maintains that wherever possible, nearshore habitat must be restored or enhanced. These actions include pulling back the shoreline and/or filling and grading where possible to restore nearshore habitat. All hard shore armoring should be replaced with soft shore protection and no new shoreline armoring should be allowed without it both being necessary and providing mitigation for environmental impacts.

Additionally, the charrette group concurs with the recommendations advanced by the Habitat Action Team of the Bellingham Bay Pilot, as outlined in the Bellingham Bay Comprehensive Strategy, Final Environmental Impact Statement, WA DOE, 10/2000.

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS:

Habitat And Access

- 1) There should be a **marine corridor** offshore along the whole length of Bellingham.
- 2) **Upland Connectivity**/ Corridors should be addressed and enhanced at all estuary/ creek sites: Little Squalicum, Squalicum, Whatcom, Padden, and Chuckanut.
- 3) High Priorities for habitat restoration are along the riparian zone and low banks along the nearshore.
- 4) Attention should be paid to the benefit that a healthy ecosystem provides to the community, in terms of jobs, increased quality of life, and in making ecotourism possible. Specifically, the opportunity to view marine mammals and birds in an aesthetically and environmentally- pleasing habitat has the potential to draw numerous visitors and tourists who will provide an economic benefit to the City.
- 5) Trails are one of the wonderful attributes of the City of Bellingham. These can and should function as wildlife corridors and provide connectivity throughout the area. In order that trails function for our benefit as well as for the benefit of the environment, they need to meet the following requirements:
 - Set back from the waters edge to provide a buffer for habitat protection.
 - Use native plants as landscaping to help keep people on the trails.
 - Use native plants to provide forage and refuge habitat for native flora and fauna.
 - Trails must be the most permeable possible given the overall use for the trail.
 - There should generally be no use of impervious material
 - There should be no pesticide or herbicide use as a matter of course, and use of Integrated Pest Management strategies when necessary.
 - Where there is a large natural area, trails should be near the edges of the area, to enhance habitat value, and to reduce fragmentation.
- 6) There should be a system of habitat-friendly **parks with connecting trails**.

- 7) There should be a priority of connecting bike / pedestrian facilities for “**continuous access**” (for example, frequent links to the Coast Millennium Trail, and an overpass at Broadway to provide access to the Harbor Area, over the railroad tracks and Roeder Avenue).
- 8) **Small boat access** should be enhanced with an adequate number of no-fee sites for hand launching

Commercial and Residential

- 1) We support **mixed-use** developments integrating living, working, public access, and transit friendly spaces. This will provide a more diverse and vibrant waterfront and downtown. For example, apartments can be placed over businesses, and small docks could be integrated with bayside restaurants.
- 2) We support making **transit** an integral part of the waterfront for several reasons. Transit will make the waterfront accessible to more people, will limit the number of polluting cars on the waterfront, and will reduce use of waterfront land for parking lots.
- 3) We support making the waterfront **affordable**. Affordable waterfront housing may be possible through live aboards / houseboats.
- 4) To preserve our **community character**, and to preserve our jobs and economy, we support local and sustainable businesses. We do not want national and international large businesses on the waterfront, and we want to limit the size of buildings to prevent big box developments. We support building these stipulations into City regulations.
- 5) We support the **fishing industry**. Thus, we want to maintain the “support businesses” for the fishing community, including sport fishing.
- 6) **Toxic discharges** from industrial uses should be phased out, but existing businesses should be maintained and encouraged to adopt sustainable practices where appropriate.
- 7) **Low Impact Development (LID)** standards need to be defined and enforced for all waterfront redevelopment.
- 8) Whenever areas are upzoned, transfer of development rights (TDR’s) should be used, such that we minimize building in the Lake Whatcom Watershed and better protect our drinking water source.
- 9) We support the use of city and county regulations, as well as incentives to help protect the environment and the character of the City of Bellingham in a manner that is more protective than what is provided for under current government regulations.
- 10) Further discussion is needed on the subject of additional marinas. The charrette group recognized that marinas take away valuable habitat, and boats and boatyards are sources of heavy metal contamination. The charrette group also recognizes that some in the community would welcome more marina space. Any discussion surrounding an additional marina should include representatives from the stakeholder groups of the environmental, boating, public access, and neighborhood communities.

Not yet available:

SPECIFIC GEOGRAPHIC RECOMMENDATIONS
MAPS