

**Paul L. Rosetter**  
**3686 South Bay Drive, Lake Whatcom**  
**Sedro-Woolley, WA 98284**

November 12, 2003

Waterfront Futures  
P. O. Box 1677  
Bellingham, WA 98277

Re: Comments on Waterfront Plan

Dear Task Force Members:

I viewed with interest the presentations of the Waterfront Center and the AIA Waterfront Design Team last week. Thank you for having these public presentations. I was impressed with the ideas and the extent of public interest.

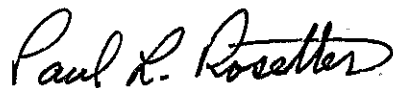
I have several "visioning" suggestions for your consideration.

1. Please preserve an ample rail transportation corridor.
2. Please consider the feasibility of an appropriately scaled convention center near the waterfront.
3. Please consider providing a large, nicely paved open space for the gathering of large crowds.

The attached pages discuss my arguments for each of these suggestions.

Thanks for letting me comment on this planning process. I would be happy to discuss the above ideas in more detail, if you want. You can call me a (360) 595-1083 or write to me at the above address.

Sincerely,



Paul L. Rosetter

**Suitable space needs to be preserved for future rail transportation needs.**

Whatcom County can expect to have a significant population increase over the next 50 years. As the nation's economy relies less upon geographically anchored jobs and more upon free-floating "cottage industries" and telecommuters, the effect of resident and visitor amenities such as a well designed waterfront will have a greater effect on where people locate. In other words, as the nation's population has greater flexibility in choosing where to live and as communities in this area move away from extractive industries and improve their resident and visitor amenities, more and more people will be attracted to such places as Bellingham, Ferndale, Birch Bay and Blaine. We may find that growth projections based upon past trends and traditional relocation factors are grossly underestimated. Given the Puget Sound's amenities and the presence of two large cities near either end of it, the long-term development of an urban corridor between Seattle and Vancouver seems likely if not inevitable. Much as we may want to shun growth, as long as the nation's population increases, the county's population will grow. Urban growth boundaries can only meter and direct growth - not stop it and there will be pressure to expand these boundaries. Despite the best efforts of planners to promote "smart growth", only a small portion of this population will live within walking distance of their frequented destinations. If the transportation needs of this population were met by rubber-on-pavement systems, few of us would like the queue-and-crawl result or the disruptive bird's nest of freeways. With air travel increasingly inconvenient, time-consuming, costly and scary, we'd not want Vancouver-Seattle traffic plugging local freeway sections. No one can accurately predict long-range population growth, location and travel needs but it is important to recognize some possible long-range needs and avoid precluding their appropriate accommodation.

Rail systems can quickly and comfortably move a great number of travelers with a minimum of space and environmental impact. The Vancouver-Seattle rail corridor is already mentioned by rail advocates and transportation experts as one of the top candidates for high-speed rail service. A high-speed train could take one from Seattle to Vancouver in less time than the pre-departure time allowance at the airport. Interurban and local light rail can connect large and local airports directly to Bellingham visitor destinations such as to the waterfront convention center suggested below.

In addition to interurban trains, commuter trains would be necessary to avoid urban and freeway sprawl. Operation on city streets inevitably slows progress of light rail coaches, but their operation on exclusive rights-of-way would out-perform buses on clogged freeways. Any such line would have to join the shoreline corridor before reaching downtown. Light rail isn't normally designed to run on interurban tracks so it is important to allow space for their own tracks within the shoreline rail corridor.

Rail is less sensitive to budget cutting than are buses. Reduced budgets can remove whole bus routes, but are not likely to remove tracks.

What could remove or at least preclude tracks is development that doesn't allow adequate space for them. High speed rail service serving a significantly larger population along its route in the distant future would likely require dual tracks, a project that would be daunting and expensive but we'd not want to preclude or heighten its expense by over building its only corridor. Unless trains were to bypass Bellingham altogether, the shoreline is the only practical rail corridor. Even the highways are squeezed by the Lake Samish bottleneck.

Granted the above scenario is a long term one, but quality buildings have a useful life of over a hundred years. **Development along the shoreline rail corridor should avoid building high value structures or uses that would interfere with the affordable development of future rail infrastructure.**

## CONVENTION CENTER

Paul Rosetter

**An appropriately scaled and carefully located convention center should be considered for the waterfront plan.**

I understand that the feasibility of developing a convention center in Bellingham was considered in the past but rejected for lack of marketability. It should be reconsidered in the context of future changes brought about by implementation of the waterfront plan.

Convention venues need a location that is attractive on its own. This is true for the specific location of the convention facility but even more so for the city and region containing the facility. Good convention cities are those where people look for an excuse to visit.

At present Bellingham may not have an attractive specific location for a convention facility but Bellingham's waterfront developed in the right way holds the potential for an exceptional specific location. In the recent presentations and workshops I heard repeatedly how people are naturally drawn to water. Public facilities along a shoreline are usually successful even when not well thought out. Such a facility that is well positioned and designed and surrounded by attractive development would be an instant winner.

As clearly recognized by last week's presenters, Bellingham already has a good visitor draw. With a well designed, vibrant waterfront and businesses developed to support conventions and other visitors, the Bellingham area will certainly be an attraction in its own right. I needn't reiterate the draw of the islands, Vancouver, Victoria and the mountains. Further, local amenities would develop in anticipation of and along with the convention center. The area may not be as attractive to visitors in the winter but then the facility could be used by locals for a "winter garden", holiday arts and crafts shows or community gatherings.

The convention center would have to be appropriately scaled both to fit into the waterfront and to fit the scale of the Bellingham community. The center would not be expected to compete with the large Seattle center or expect a national convention. It would have to find a convention and trade show niche somewhere between the conference centers provided by hotels and resorts and the full sized convention centers of major cities. A feasibility study would be needed to discover what conventions fit the scale that Bellingham can handle. Perhaps Bellingham will create a new convention type for smaller groups and industries that haven't come together for a convention before.

A convention center would enhance economic opportunities in the community. A wide variety of businesses would be needed to provide facility maintenance, equipment transportation, lodging, entertainment, recreation, shopping and food for its visitors both at the facility and in the community where conventioners fan out to spend their vacation money. Water taxis and island ferries could board right at the center.

The facility itself may already be framed out. If Georgia-Pacific someday decides that it no longer needs its large warehouse, it might be possible to convert the warehouse to a convention center. It has easy access to both the downtown and to the water. However, other locations should not be ruled out.

When asked to suggest uses for newly available land, members of the public usually nominate open space in the form of parks, wetlands and wildlife refuges first and primarily. Residential use and a minor amount of retail are also popular favorites. These are very appropriate and the waterfront plan should provide for them. However, the waterfront should also provide uses that are open to the public and are a strong economic asset, not only for the property owner but for the rest of the community. A convention center needs an uncommonly welcoming location whereas residential use can be nicely provided in many locations. A convention center is more open to the public than residential use and can both benefit from and enhance open space.

## COMMUNITY PLAZA

Paul Rosetter

**A large, nicely paved open space should be located in the central portion of the waterfront.**

An open space near downtown, suitable for crowds and heavy foot traffic could be an effective economic and community-building asset. It could be used for an open air farmer's market, an arts and crafts market or a flea market. Especially if located adjacent to a waterfront convention center, it can be a venue for trade shows involving autos, boats or other "outdoor" or large equipment. It can be a venue for carnivals and fairs. It can incorporate a stage for concerts or trade show presentations. It can be the main venue for viewing fireworks or water craft races and for community celebrations.

I remember the day after the San Francisco 49ers had won Superbowl XVI. I climbed the stairs out of the Bay Area Rapid Transit system's Civic Center station to see huge red and gold balloons hanging above the dome of city hall. That noon thousands of people filled Civic Center plaza in front of city hall for a joyous rally. I also remember a sad occasion that brought its citizens there to hear Joan Baez sing a solemn version of "Amazing Grace" after the murder of our mayor. Civic spaces are for occasions such as this: where those who believe in community, who want to be a part of something whether happy or sad can come together and share their joy or sorrow. It's the kind of space that can't be found in newspapers or television or relegated to the parking lot of some freeway mall. Every city and town needs a town green or a plaza where the actual people of the community can come face to face and be a community that celebrates itself! If Bellingham carries off the development of its waterfront like many creative and enthusiastic people have envisioned, it will need a large plaza where its citizens can gather just to say "Well done Bellingham!!"