

CONNECTING BELLINGHAM TO THE BAY:

Stewardship to Enhance Our Sense of Place

Some Brief Reflections on
Refining and Marketing
Our Vision for the
Bellingham Waterfront

Presented to
The Waterfront Futures Group

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CONNECTING BELLINGHAM TO THE BAY:

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CONNECTING BELLINGHAM TO THE BAY:

Refining the Vision for Enhancing Our Sense of Place

Native Americans have inhabited the area around Bellingham Bay for 5,000 years with little impact on its abundant natural resources and rare beauty. Sadly, 150 years of Caucasian settlement have depleted coal deposits, old growth forests and fishing stocks and defaced the landscape. In Bellingham, extensive land fills have transformed the six-mile stretch of shoreline between Squalicum Creek and Poe's Point into an eight-mile industrial waterfront and reduced the bluff that originally defined the shoreline to a line of demarcation between the "harder" and the "softer" land uses.

Through the visioning efforts of the Waterfront Futures Project, Bellingham is beginning to address the exciting challenge of enhancing our sense of place by recovering some of the original shoreline, diversifying land uses along the waterfront and facilitating public views and access to and from both. That access will feature a network of linkages each with a distinctive destination or "gathering place" at either end. The link between destinations will facilitate making a conscious transition between venues, heightening the respective sense of place, especially in the case of the linkages that will traverse the bluff.

The greater the contrast between any two destinations and the more conscious the transition from one to the other, the more profound and memorable will be the respective sense of place. Contrasts will include shifting between higher and lower, open and enclosed and observing and participating and also moving between home and shopping, work and recreation and study and entertainment. Consequently, each sense of place experience will combine enjoyment of the natural setting, of any architectural additions, of the activity underway and of the transition made from one destination to another.

The bi-nodal network will crisscross a pedestrian shoreway along the entire waterfront providing a frame within which existing facilities will be upgraded and new ones created. The portions of the network already in place will be quickly extended to offer greater public access to and from the water. Frequent visits to the sites of proposed projects will help keep the waterfront vision alive. Architecture will enhance the natural setting, adapt form to function and reflect the two-level ambiance, being more open, refreshing and adventuresome below the bluff and more intimate, warm and familiar above it.

Ultimately, enhancing our sense of place depends as much on enriching our life style as on making physical improvements. Welcoming members of the various ethnic groups represented here, especially our Native American communities, as full participants in the design and implementation of our waterfront renewal program and incorporating their cultural contributions will add authenticity, diversity and interest to our life style and thus heighten our sense of place. Quintessentially, our vision is for nurturing a proactive, broadly based, enthusiastically supported, ongoing endeavor in which both the process and the outcome are expressions and experiences of community. "Connecting Bellingham to the Bay" can be a metaphor for bringing all of us much closer together.

Note: Changing the banner to "Connecting Bellingham With The Bay" seems appropri-

ate, since “with” signifies an interactive process, while “to” implies movement in one direction only.

CONNECTING BELLINGHAM TO THE BAY:

Marketing the Vision as Achieving Satisfying Experiences¹

- Physical Orientation: Clearly defined, spatially connected and inherently different venues, each with a human scale and a distinctive sense of place
- Emotional Balance: A feeling of openness, invigoration, freedom and adventure below the bluff and of intimacy, warmth, familiarity and security above it.
- Experiential Diversity: A mix of complimentary and contrasting exposures and activities on both levels of our waterfront that broaden awareness, stimulate growth, enrich interaction and foster lasting memories.
- Conscious Transitioning: Multiple opportunities to anticipate experiencing the pleasurable feelings identified with a selected destination point (“gathering place”) and gradually realizing the expectation by moving toward that destination, especially by traversing up or down along the bluff. The experience of transitioning common to all movement along our waterfront, whether vertical or horizontal, will infuse it with a powerful, intangible, unifying force.
- Cultural Enrichment: Daily opportunities to enjoy the culinary, musical and artistic expressions of the ethnic groups which have molded the life style of Bellingham, from our Native American communities onward.
- Creative Expression: Public venues offering frequent opportunities for all residents to share individual and group artistic expressions.
- Community Involvement: Full participation in all aspects of the waterfront stewardship process by our public and private institutions, our informal organizations and all segments of the Greater Bellingham population.
- Architectural Integrity: Structures that capture and amplify the distinctive elements of Bellingham’s two level natural setting, that conserve the character of the past without being replicative and that create a new coherence for the future.²
- Economic Opportunity: Encouragement for local businesses, especially those that are marine related. Attraction of new marine related business. A challenge to

¹ Building on Christopher Alexander’s directive, we will create places that “invite us to be what we are,” that “allow us to be what we are” and that empower us to be what we are in community.

² See Alexander’s analysis of fifteen “transformations” that create “living structures” in the natural world and in holistic architecture in Books One and Two of *The Nature of Order*.

shape the local economy toward making Bellingham a proactive influence in the Seattle-Vancouver corridor, toward preventing massive urban sprawl between Bellingham and these two major cities and toward making Bellingham a global model of waterfront stewardship and regional planning.

CONNECTING BELLINGHAM TO THE BAY:

Some Strategic Questions

Q1. What do we mean by “Bellingham?”

A1. We mean the population and the public and private institutions within the Bellingham City Limits and the Native American communities of Whatcom County, to the extent that they respond to invitations for involvement.

or

A2. We mean all of the permanent and temporary residents of Whatcom County (including our Native American Communities) and the public and private institutions established to serve and support them.

Q2. What do we mean by “the bay”?

A1. We mean only that stretch of shoreline between the northern and southern City Limits of Bellingham.

or

A2. We mean the whole ecosystem, encompassing the entire shoreline around the bay and the streams and watershed that support it.

Q3. What do we mean by “connecting?”

A1. We mean substantially increasing both visual and physical access to the bay by Bellingham’s residents and visitors, supporting the water dependent businesses presently operating along the Bellingham waterfront and developing new and more extensive, ecologically responsible and economically viable waterfront land uses.

or

A2. We mean substantially increasing both visual and physical access to and from the bay by Bellingham’s residents and visitors, expanding the number and variety of marine related experiences available to the public along our shoreline, supporting the marine related businesses presently operating on our waterfront and attracting new, ecologically responsible and economically viable marine related activities to locate there.

Q4. What do we mean by “water dependent” and “marine related?”

1A. The term “water dependent” refers to those land uses that must be located on the waterfront in order to function. The term “marine related” describes those land uses that may once have been water dependent and now no longer need to be located on the waterfront in order to operate.

or

2A. The term “water dependent” refers to those land uses that must be located on the waterfront in order to function. The term “marine related” includes any ecologically responsible activity that facilitates public access to and enjoyment of the shoreline, including, but not limited to those that are water dependent.

Q5. What do we mean by “citizen participation?”

1A. We mean the process of soliciting public input of ideas and suggestions within a predetermined frame of reference and seeking public comment on the semi-final and final visioning proposals.

or

2A. We mean the process of full citizen involvement in identifying values, determining goals, defining strategies, developing plans and preparing proposals and in the implementation of the approved plans.

Q6. What is the difference between “development” and “stewardship?”

1A. “Development” refers to gradual creation of change without reference to the origin of the responsibility required to perform the intended action, the ownership or treatment of the resources involved or the beneficiary of the results. It tends to focus on achievement more than accountability, on individual initiative more than collective enterprise, on ends more than means, on the tangible more than the intangible and on expediency more than values.

and

2A. “Stewardship” refers to fiduciary management of resources, both tangible and intangible, in accordance with the values and goals established by the owner(s)

of the respective resources. It is based on trust and accountability, on serving the common good and on accomplishing the ends by cherishing the means.

Q7. What Planning Model Shall We Adopt?

A1. The traditional model has been “Predict and Provide.” This approach attempts to quantify the future impacts of perceived trends and to change current conditions to accommodate those impacts. It is characterized by an automatic resignation to inevitability. It is essentially a reactive *modus operandi* of crisis and response. It is the model commonly adopted by individuals who champion the developmental approach. It emphasizes quantity more than quality, defining progress primarily in material terms.

or

A2. The *au courant* model is “Debate and Decide.” It envisions a future that will embody its dreams and mounts actions to direct current natural and social processes toward the realization of the desired ends. It is characterized by a value oriented challenge to inevitability and a belief that change can be effectively managed. It is a proactive *modus vivendi*, measuring progress by cultural standards. It is the model typically selected by individuals who espouse the stewardship approach, emphasizing quality more than quantity.

Q8. Who are “we?”

A1. “We” are the board members and staff of a taskforce appointed and supported by the City and the Port of Bellingham, and/or one of more implementation vehicles established by the same co-sponsors, plus outside consultants, working to increase public access to and mixed land uses on our waterfront.

or

A2. “We” are the people of Whatcom County, working through our elected and appointed public servants in the City, Port and County, our business community and private institutions and our neighborhood and civic groups, and with outside consultants, to exercise more responsible stewardship of our shoreline.

A GLOSSARY OF BASIC TERMS

Connecting, [L. connectere: *con*, with and *nectere*, to bind.] to bind together to join one thing with another; to fasten, link or couple.

Bellingham, a small, coastal City in Northwest Washington formed in 1904 from four Caucasian settlements founded in the early 1850's within the area inhabited for some 5,000 years by Native Americans whose descendents are known as the Coastal Salish.

To, [ME., AS. *to*, *to*, toward.] moving toward a destination before arrival, e.g., "We are going to town" and moving toward a destination and reaching it, as in "We went *to* town."

The, [ME., AS. indeclinable definite article based on the notion of being previously recognized, noticed, or encountered in contrast to the indefinite *a* or *an*.] that which is present, close, or nearby as distinguished from all others that are considered remote.

Bay, [ME. *bai*, Fr. *baie*; LL. *baia*, LL. *badare*, to gape.] an indentation in the shoreline of a sea or lake, often applied to large areas of water around which the land forms a curve.

Shore, [ME. *schore*, a point of division.] land at the edge of a body of water, especially a large body; land as opposed to water.

Line, [L. *linea*, linen or flax] a thread, string, cord, rope or cable; a thin line drawn or inferred; a division between conditions, qualities or classes; limit; demarcation.

Waterfront, the part of a city or town built on land at the edge of a river, harbor or bay; structures built along or over the water to facilitate moving water-borne cargo or to gain direct access to the water, e.g., wharves, docks and piers.

Dependent, [L. *dependere* from *de*, down and *pendere*, to hang.] state of being influenced or determined by something else; to be contingent upon.

Related, [L. from *re*, back and *latum*, to bear or carry.] associated; connected; allied.

Highest, [ME. *hie*; AS. *heh*, lofty; tall.] superlative degree of high: above all others in class, rank or position; superior; excellent; extreme extent; ultimate quantity.

Best, [AS. *betest*, best.] superlative degree of good: most suitable, favorable, desirable, productive, efficient or profitable; extreme value; ultimate quality.

Sense, [L. *sensus*, awareness, perception, feeling] feeling, impression, perception or recognition derived through the nervous system and/or the intellect; awareness.

Place, [L. *platea*; Gr. *plateia*, street, from *platys*, broad] area; space; location; particular spot.




Development, [L. *de* from and *volvere*, to roll] to cause to grow gradually; to expand.

Stewardship, [AS. *stigu*, sty and weard, a ward or keeper] management of property on behalf of others; trusteeship; fiduciary charge.

CONNECTING BELLINGHAM TO THE BAY:

Map of Bi-Nodal Network and Shoreway

Color Code:

-  Original Shoreline (Bluff)
-  Present Waterfront
-  Bi-Nodal Network

Nodes:

1. BCT to Little Squalicum Beach
2. BCT to Mouth of Squalicum Creek
3. Foot of Broadway to Waterfront
4. Marine Heritage Park to Waterfront
5. WWU to Waterfront
6. Taylor Ave. Dock to Beach
7. Fairhaven Green to Waterfront

