

MOVING FAIRHAVEN FORWARD

Mission

Fairhaven enjoys a natural setting and an architectural style that produce a two fold sense of place. The shoreline offers an experience of openness, invigoration and challenge and the Village Green instills a feeling of security, comfort and familiarity. The bluff that separates these two venues is a means of clarifying and strengthening their respective impacts. By a process of community-wide stewardship, these causal elements can be preserved and enhanced to make Fairhaven an even more desirable area in which to live and work and an even more inviting destination for visitors who come by land or by water.

Restoring Fairhaven's Natural Gifts

Fairhaven is blessed with a bay, a lagoon, three tidal ponds, a beach, two waterfront parks and a long, shoreline bluff. These gifts should be returned to their pristine states as far as possible in order to sustain their natural habitats, increase their aesthetic appeal and to expand their availability for public view and access. Water and soil contamination should be remediated, riprap breakwaters should be softened, storm water runoff should be well managed and the impact of railroad trestles on tidal basins should be reversed. Finally, the face of the bluff north of the Village Green should be cleared of overgrowth.

Reclaiming Fairhaven's Historical Roots

Fairhaven has a rich cultural history, generated by the Indigenous Nations and the many ethnic groups that arrived later. Each tradition deserves to be recognized and celebrated in frequent and tangible ways. Fairhaven also has a "working waterfront" with a varied tradition of marine-related endeavors. Spaces should be allocated to collecting and displaying the history of lumber milling, fish canning and ship building and opportunities created for the public to observe their current expressions in order to forge a seamless link between appreciation for past waterfront activities and enjoyment of present ones.

Reorienting Fairhaven's Transportation Pattern

Fairhaven possesses great potential for being predominantly a pedestrian and bicycle locale. Actualizing this potential will require providing more frequent visual focal points, improving our trail system, creating more bike lanes, increasing the type and frequency of mass transit service, including waterborne people-movers, reducing the volume of automotive traffic and meeting the vehicle parking challenge creatively and effectively. The psychological resistance to this change may be mitigated by the experience of a city like Groningen, where it unexpectedly produced major financial benefits.

Fairhaven also has the potential for rivaling harbors in the San Juan Islands as a center for pleasure boating. The former Log Dump Dock could be rebuilt and reconnected and provided with a safe railroad crossing. Additional moorings could be placed near the Log Dump Dock. Building # 8 in the Fairhaven Marine Industrial Park could be remodeled to serve as a small boat museum and service center. A new launching facility for power boats could be installed next to the Stub Dock near the Bellingham Cruise Terminal, leaving the existing ramp for kayaks, canoes, rowboats and small sailing craft.

Reinforcing Fairhaven's Two-level Ambiance

The many points of interest dotting the Fairhaven waterfront should be linked by a pedestrian way along the shoreline from the Taylor Avenue Dock to Chuckanut Bay so that they may be accessed serially without detouring into the uplands. Opportunities should be provided for public viewing of marine-related activities via direct observation or Closed Circuit TV. A pathway should be created along the face of the bluff between the Village Green and the shoreline a point near the Log Dump Dock to afford a direct connection between the two venues.

Retaining a Public Gathering Place on the Shoreline

The open area northeast of the Log Dump Dock should become a park serving as a public gathering place on the shoreline just as the Village Green serves on the upper level. This site is one of the few locations in Bellingham from which a view of the bluff may be enjoyed from both the land and the water. It should be cleared of fill down to the level of the railroad tracks, except for an emergency and pedestrian access way running down the Douglas Avenue right of way and then along the tracks. Native vegetation should be planted along the bluff and on the site to restore the area's natural appearance.

A vista point should be created along the South Bay Trail on the natural spur in the bluff just south of Douglas Avenue. Utility lines should be rerouted above the bluff. A low-profile enclosure of rustic design should be placed on the site to serve as a picnic shelter, a gathering place and a venue for ethnic music and dance, story telling, games and handcrafts. A tall, illuminated stabile depicting a pan-ethnic theme would provide an icon identifying the site as the focal point of the Fairhaven waterfront, marking it as a destination and departure point that is accessible from both the land and the water.

This site has a sandy beach, presently accessible only at low tide, which was formed by natural forces after the rip-rap railroad trestle was constructed. Perhaps those same forces could be assisted in making the beach accessible at high tide as well. (An engineering study could ascertain the feasibility of this idea.) In either case, given a safe means of crossing the railroad tracks, the new park would become a favorite destination for local families to walk, rest, picnic, swim, row, paddle and sail all within a short walk from a town center. Few other areas in Bellingham have an equivalent potential.

Several entitlement and infrastructure measures will be required to create the new park. One is City acquisition from the Port of the land lying between the Douglass Avenue and Gambier Avenue rights of way and of a strip of land on which to build the proposed pedestrian access way between the Village Green and shoreline. Another item is Port negotiation of state permission to refurbish and reconnect the Log Dump Dock. Perhaps the biggest challenge, is City and Port arranging with the Burlington Northern/Santa Fe Railway Co. for a safe means of crossing the tracks near the Log Dump Dock

To ensure public ownership of the new park and maximize its utilization, wide spread community involvement should be elicited both in the process of planning it and in doing much of the physical work of creating it, especially by members of local ethnic groups. The direct pedestrian links between the new park and the other points of interest on the waterfront and between the new park and the Fairhaven Village Green would enable both residents and visitors to readily experience the palpable difference in the sense of place between the expansiveness at the water's edge and the intimacy of uplands.