

FAIRHAVEN FULL AND BY

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 elicits a feeling of security, comfort and familiarity. The bluff that separates these two venues is a powerful means of reinforcing 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 whether they come by land or by water.

Restoring Fairhaven's Natural Gifts

Fairhaven is blessed with a bay, a wooded estuary, a tidal pond, a beach, a waterfront park and a long, shoreline bluff. These gifts should be returned to their pristine states and appearances as far as possible in order to sustain the natural habitats they shelter and to increase the potential for responsible public enjoyment of their natural beauty and appreciation of their inherent value. Water and soil contamination should be remediated, riprap breakwaters should be softened, storm water runoff should be controlled, native vegetation replanted and the impact of railroad trestles on tidal flows should be reversed

Reinforcing Fairhaven's Two-level Ambiance

Fairhaven needs a gathering space at the shoreline to foster community self identification just as the Village Green does on the upper level. The open area just south of Reid Boiler Works, which the Waterfront Futures Group is recommending as the site for a new park, is ideal for this purpose. This location is one of the few 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 trestle, except for an emergency and pedestrian access way running down the Douglas Ave. right of way and southward along the tracks.

The new park should have a pristine appearance. The "shoreway" proposed for the Bellingham waterfront should be routed through it, a vista point created along the South Bay Trail just above it and a sloping pathway placed along the face of the bluff to connect it with the Village Green. A low enclosure of rustic design incorporating ethnic symbolism should be placed on the site for a shelter, gathering place and venue for ethnic displays and celebrations. A tall, illuminated stabile projecting a pan-ethnic theme should be erected as an icon marking the new park as the focal point of the Fairhaven waterfront.

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. 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, contemplate, picnic, swim, row, paddle and sail all within a short walk from a town center. Few other areas in Bellingham have an equivalent potential.

To ensure public ownership of the new park and maximize its ongoing 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 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.

Several infrastructure adjustments will be required to create the new park. The City must acquire from the Port the land lying between the Douglas Ave. and Gambier Ave. rights of way and also a strip of land on which to build the proposed pedestrian access way between the Village Green and shoreline. The Port must secure State permission to refurbish and reconnect the Log Dump Dock. The City and the Port must arrange with the Burlington Northern/Santa Fe Railway Co. for a safe and secure overpass or under-pass near the Log Dump Dock. Finally, utility lines should be rerouted above the bluff.

Fairhaven also needs an indoor space near the Village Green to extend its seasonal function as a neighborhood forum to a year-round basis.* This space could be part of a larger complex housing retail shops, residential condominiums and shared underground parking. It could feature multi-purposes areas for films, plays, concerts, folk dancing, communal exercise, meetings, lectures, conferences, rallies and celebrations. It could also house an international cafeteria overlooking the Green, a health club, craft workshops, and music practice rooms. It could have a tower visible for several miles and a carillon.

Reclaiming Fairhaven's Historical Roots

Fairhaven has a rich cultural history, rooted in the Indigenous Nations that have occupied the area for thousands of years and the many ethnic groups that have arrived since 1850. Each tradition deserves tangible recognition and frequent celebrations. Fairhaven also has a "working waterfront" of marine-related endeavors. These should be retained and increased. Spaces should be allocated for displaying their history and opportunities created for public observation of their daily operations, either by direct viewing mezzanines, windows or Closed Circuit TV in order to forge a seamless link between the past and present.

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, in Holland, where it unexpectedly produced major financial benefits.

* The importance of creating an all-weather public gathering space in Bellingham was highlighted by Ann Breen and Dick Rigby, Consultants from the Waterfront Center in Washington, D.C., in their report to the Waterfront Futures Group.

Fairhaven also has the potential for rivaling harbors in the San Juan Islands as a destination 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 between the Log Dump and Taylor Ave. Docks. Building # 8 in the Fairhaven Marine Industrial Park could be remodeled to serve as a museum and boating service center. A new launching facility for power boats could be installed next to the Stub Dock near the Cruise Terminal, leaving the existing ramp for hand launched craft and small sailboats.

To provide a dramatic entree for visitors arriving by water, a giant sign could be painted on the west side of the 289' by 26' dry dock at the Bellingham Shipyard. This sign might have "BELLINGHAM" in red letters 10' high and the words for "Welcome" in the languages of our historic ethnic groups in black letters 5' high (see attachment). Public school students could do the research and design work and help to paint the sign. Members of local ethnic groups and

other organizations could offer financial and/or “in kind” contributions. With media support the project could be a regional “happening.”

Relying on Local Resources

Fairhaven’s residents and business owners possess the commitment, leadership, expertise and capital to implement the projects outlined above. A Fairhaven Community Development Corporation could be established by representative stakeholders to make detailed plans and carry them out. A nonprofit organization, also created by a cross section of local stakeholders, may be needed to obtain grants, acquire property and conduct public programs. Utilization of neighborhood volunteers should be maximized. Every effort should be exerted to make both the process and the results experiences of community.

Note: Creating a welcome sign on the dry dock at Fairhaven Shipyard, grading and landscaping the site for the new park south of Douglas Ave., erecting a pavilion on the site and building the pathway between the shoreline and the Village Green are examples of projects which could be started immediately. They should be added to the Waterfront Futures Group’s inventory of “low-hanging fruit”

Note: “Full and by” is an old fashioned nautical term. It describes a vessel sailing close-hauled, with all sails drawing to capacity, while heading as closely as possible into the wind. It is used here to signify Fairhaven mobilizing all of its resources to maximize its potential as a unique and satisfying place to live, learn, work, play, create and recreate in an environmentally sustainable and ethnically and historically rich communal setting.

Submitted to the Waterfront Futures Group June 10, 2004 by Ralph W. Thacker, MPA