

Seattle's Shorelines Today and Tomorrow: Updating Seattle's Shoreline Master Program

Vision Report

April 2008





The City of Seattle is currently in the process of updating its Shoreline Master Program. The Shoreline Master Program establishes policies and regulations governing land use along marine and freshwater shorelines. As part of this process, the city's Department of Planning and Development has undertaken a community visioning process to develop an overall vision for Seattle shorelines and to establish the intent of future policy work. This Vision Report identifies a range of visions and views for the city as a whole, as well as each of six shoreline sub-regions (Elliott Bay, Duwamish River, Lake Union/Ship Canal, Lake Washington, Puget Sound and Green Lake). The Vision Report will inform the development of goals, policies and regulations that form the Shoreline Master Program.

The City of Seattle, along with other local governments in the state, is required by the Washington Shoreline Management Act to develop, adopt, and periodically update a Shoreline Master Program including goals, policies, and regulations consistent with state guidelines. The Act establishes three major policy goals for Shoreline Master Programs:

- Preferred Shoreline Uses: The Act establishes a preference for uses that are water-oriented and that are appropriate for the environmental context of the shoreline. Single family residences are also identified as a priority use under the Act when developed in a manner consistent with protection of the natural environment.
- Environmental Protection: The Act requires protections for shoreline natural resources, including "...the land and its vegetation and wildlife, and the water of the state and their aquatic life..." to ensure no net loss of ecological function.
- Public Access: The Act promotes public access to the water by mandating inclusion of a public access element in local Shoreline Master Programs and requiring provisions to ensure that new development maintains public access features.

Seattle's Shoreline Master Program was last updated in 1987. This Vision Report will inform the current Shoreline Master Program Update which is anticipated to be complete by 2010.

The community visioning process consisted of: 1) a telephone survey conducted by Elway Research, Inc.; 2) a series of seven visioning workshops in the shoreline sub-regions attended by 117 participants; and 3) comments provided online via the city's Shoreline Master Program Update web site (<http://www.seattle.gov/dpd/Planning/ShorelineMasterProgramUpdate>) and via e-mail.

The telephone survey was designed to quantify general public opinion about Seattle's shorelines. 400 randomly selected Seattle residents were asked fourteen questions. The results of the survey are statistically valid, with a 95% probability that the results are within 5% of what would have been obtained by interviewing all city residents.

The community visioning workshops were designed to generate more in-depth conversation about shorelines and competing values. Workshops were structured around the following questions:

- What do we want our shorelines to be like in the future?
- What are the different visions for shoreline management that exist within each community?
- How well are competing uses being balanced?
- What unique conditions exist in each section of shoreline?

This report provides only a summary of the rich and diverse input provided through this visioning process. All input provided as part of the telephone survey, the visioning workshops, and via the online comment form is available on the city’s Shoreline Master Program Update web site.

Vision for the Future

Citizens of Seattle view the shoreline as a valuable resource and feel strongly about how the shoreline should be used. Approximately three quarters of telephone survey respondents say that they visit the shoreline at least once a month (Figure 1).

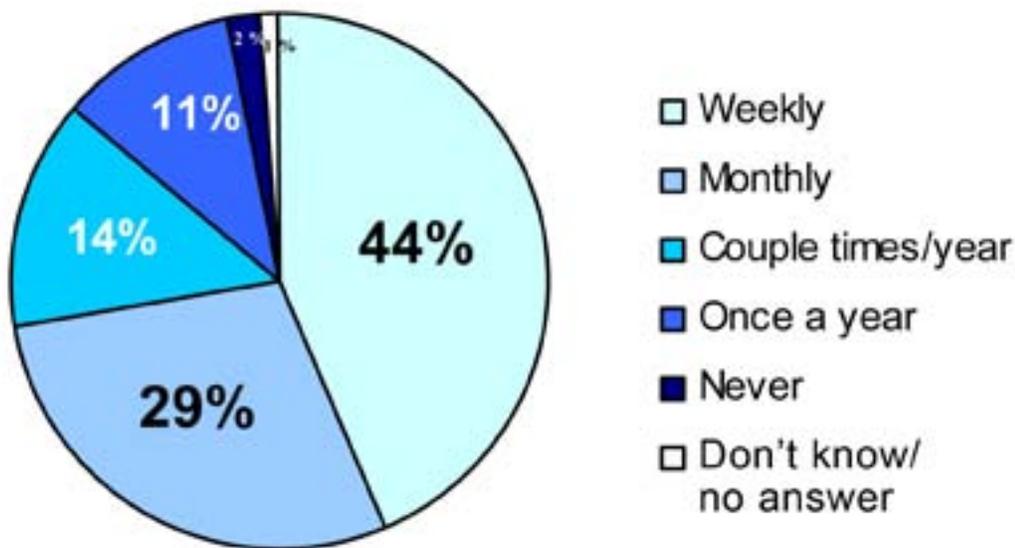


Figure 1: How often do you visit one of Seattle’s Shorelines?

When asked what sort of shoreline they want to see in the future, the majority of survey respondents envision a shoreline that balances the three priorities established in Washington State’s Shoreline Management Act:

- Protecting water-dependent businesses and uses;
- Maintaining and improving public access to the water;
- Protecting environmental health, including water quality and fish and wildlife habitat.

The community visioning process demonstrated that many Seattle citizens would like to see improvements in the protection of the shoreline’s natural resources. Some of the signs they anticipate of a healthier environment include:

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- An increase in salmon populations and an increase in wildlife including eagles, great blue herons, orcas and otters.
- Softer, more natural shorelines that feature native plants
- More trees will exist in more locations.
- Stream, nearshore, and marine habitats will be healthier.
- Water quality will be improved because of reduced pollution from industrial and non-industrial sources, reduced pesticide or herbicide use on shoreline property, improved stormwater management, and completion of the Superfund clean-up in the Duwamish River.
- Noxious weeds will be controlled.
- Based on monitoring and research, people will have a better understanding of the impact of policy and land use changes on environmental health.



Seattle residents report taking advantage of the full spectrum of public access opportunities available along the shoreline.

The parks along Lake Washington and Puget Sound are especially popular, and people also frequent Green Lake, Myrtle Edwards Park on Elliott Bay, paths and parks along Lake Union and the Ship Canal, and street ends and parks along the Duwamish River. Popular shoreline activities include walking, running, biking, playing, and enjoying the view. Some people swim, kayak, launch their boats, fish and participate in other activities.

Key themes expressed as part of the vision for public access included:

- Existing public access will be well-maintained and more shoreline areas will be developed for public access.
- Green spaces will be connected and will have good pedestrian and bicycle corridors.
- Future public access will include areas for quiet enjoyment and areas for more active uses such as music.
- There will be a variety of recreational motorized and non-motorized crafts on the water, with improved access points for human-powered crafts and an increase in short-term moorage and launching areas for human-powered crafts.
- Views of the water and the mountains will be maintained.
- Public transit will serve the shoreline public access areas and parking will be adequate.



Many participants also describe a vision for a strong water-oriented business community along the shoreline. Some of the signs of this vision include:

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- Existing water-dependent industrial and commercial uses will be valued and will thrive.
- Business and other uses along the shoreline will be predominately water-dependent.
- Upland uses will not conflict with shoreline water-dependent businesses. Residential uses, in particular, will not be located where they may conflict with water-dependent industrial businesses.
- Seattle's maritime history will be reflected in educational opportunities and in present-day, water-dependent business and other uses.

For residential and commercial property owners, a key component of their vision includes shoreline regulations that are clear, reasonable, and consistently applied. They also want to see better coordination among agencies.

Balance of Uses

The sometimes competing nature of shoreline uses can lead to tough land use decisions. In both the survey and visioning workshops, many citizens think that the uses on Seattle's shoreline are somewhat out of balance, but no clear consensus emerged from the visioning process about what would constitute a more appropriate balance.

In the City's telephone survey, 34% of respondents said that the three major policy goals (protection of water-dependent businesses, public access, and environmental protection) are well balanced; while 37% said that they are slightly out of balance, 19% said unbalanced, and the remaining 10% didn't know. Respondents were also asked to consider which values were emphasized too much or too little. The results of these questions are shown in Figure 2.

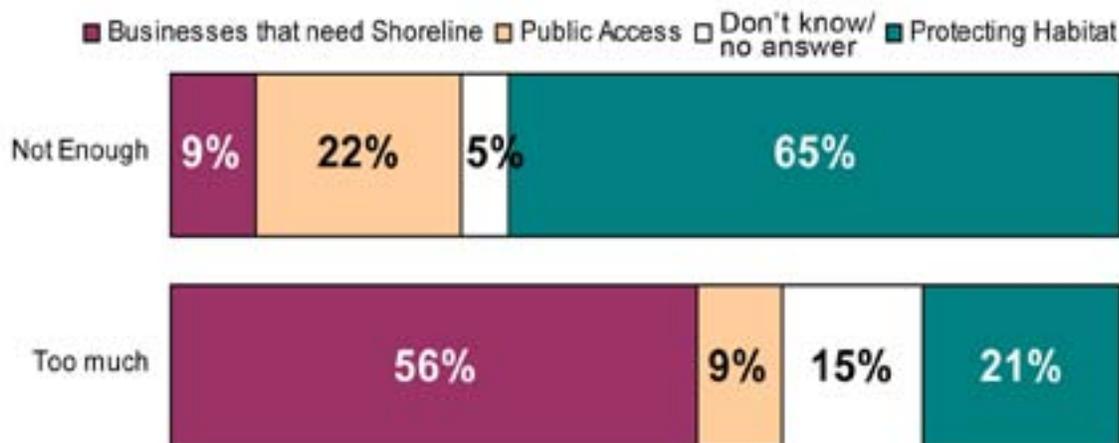


Figure 2: How well are uses balanced?



These results indicate a strong public sentiment for more emphasis on protecting habitat with 65% of respondents saying there is not enough emphasis on habitat. Public access appears to be a secondary priority with 22% of respondents saying there is not enough emphasis on this value.

Qualitative input from the visioning workshops, however, generated a more nuanced spectrum of viewpoints. Preservation of water-oriented business communities remained a priority, even where participants felt that increased habitat protection was important. This view was especially prevalent on Lake Union, the Ship Canal and the Duwamish River where strong existing water-oriented business communities exist along the shoreline. These messages suggest that workshop participants support the protection of

the existing water-oriented business communities in a manner that still allows for improvement of ecological protection and avoiding impacts in areas that contain high environmental function.

Some participants also noted that the location and types of public access allowed in different sections of the city should be appropriate to local conditions in order to prevent conflicts with water-dependent businesses or wildlife habitat. For example, some concern was expressed that the city must ensure that public access does not lead to waste dumping or light pollution, which can negatively impact habitat. There was also concern about boat access leading to fuel leakage. In the industrial areas, concern was raised over public access leading to public safety and liability issues. While there was still strong support for expanding public access where appropriate, this input suggests that it will be critical to consider the impact of new public access opportunities on ecological function and water-oriented uses.

Workshop participants with differing perspectives on how to achieve balance of shoreline uses do tend to agree that non-water-dependent uses such as offices or grocery stores should be limited on the shoreline, particularly in industrial areas where land conversion pressure is an issue.



Key Themes by Sub-Region

In addition to the vision of Seattle’s shorelines as a whole, described above, participants provided their opinions and insights for the particular part of the city’s shoreline where they work, live or recreate. Key themes from the community visioning process specific to each sub-region are summarized below.

Duwamish River

The shoreline in the Duwamish sub-region has been heavily industrialized. There is now a great deal of interest in improving environmental health and providing public access, but in a way that is compatible with maintaining the area’s strong industrial and commercial core.

Key themes regarding environmental health include a desire to clean up contaminated sediments, improve water quality by managing stormwater runoff, and improve diverse habitats for salmon and other wildlife.

Key themes regarding public access include improving pedestrian and bicycle connections to the water, particularly in relation to the Duwamish River Trail and the Mountains to Sound Trail. There is also interest in adding a hand-carry boat launch. However, there was also a concern raised about the conflict between recreational boating and bicycling near a heavily industrial area.

Many participants in the Duwamish visioning workshop spoke about the importance of shipping and docking along the river and emphasized the role of the Duwamish in protecting shipping and manufacturing jobs in south Seattle. Participants agree that new residential uses and parking areas are not ideal uses of this sub-region’s shoreline but there is sometimes a need for parking in the shoreline for water-oriented industries.

Lake Washington

Public access and environmental health are important issues for the Lake Washington sub-region. Workshop participants suggested many improvements for Magnuson Park, including additional boat launches and a designated area for distance swimming. Participants also suggested connecting street ends to existing public access and ensuring public safety at street ends.

Participants appreciate the public access and habitat restoration work at Seward Park and along the southern stretch of Lake Washington. Strong support was expressed for the city to continue this work, restoring more of the shoreline along the waterfront trail. Some participants also asked that handicap access be maintained and that adequate parking and public transit service be provided at Seward Park. Protecting existing natural areas around Foster Island and Union Bay was also stated as an important goal.

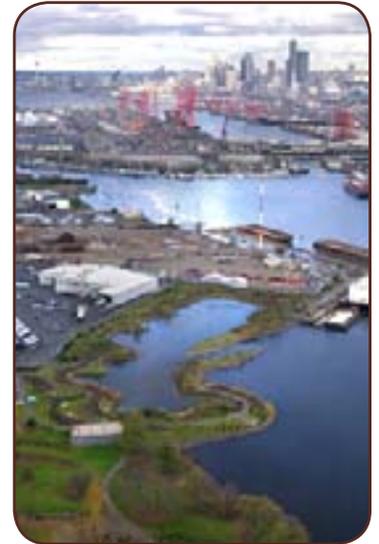


Photo by: ASLA



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Many participants are interested in making the design of bulkheads more compatible with natural processes like wildlife habitat. There is interest in keeping parking lots and activity fields, such as athletic fields and play fields, out of the shoreline. Finally, this is one of three sub-regions (alongside Puget Sound and Elliott Bay) where some participants asked that new or additional ferry service be considered.

Lake Union/Ship Canal



Workshop participants strongly desire to maintain and enhance the working waterfront and prioritize water-dependent uses in the Lake Union/Ship Canal sub-region. There is also interest in reducing pollution from combined sewer overflows and stormwater runoff, and controlling invasive plant and wildlife species.

Participants support improving maintenance of existing public access, but perspectives differ as to whether to increase public access in the sub-region or to prioritize water-dependent business and uses.

While participants are generally interested in ensuring safe passage for salmon through the sub-region, some question how effective restoration efforts will be in such an altered shoreline environment. Beavers are a species of interest, but opinions are mixed about whether they should be protected or controlled.

Puget Sound

Similar to Lake Washington, public access and environmental health are key issues in the Puget Sound sub-region. Workshop participants would like public access to be better-marked and many suggested additional parking for public access to be provided in certain locations. Participants provided specific suggestions for creating additional educational opportunities and protecting views.

Participants encourage the city to take a comprehensive view of environmental health. They see protecting and improving native vegetation, habitat, wildlife and a natural shoreline as high priorities. Controlling combined sewer overflows and improving citizen awareness of stormwater pollution are also important.

Elliott Bay

Workshop participants support a thriving Elliott Bay waterfront, where a busy seaport, spectacular views, recreational opportunities, appealing retail, and areas of natural shoreline create a dynamic attraction for residents and tourists. Participants believe that the redevelopment of Alaska Way will open the Central Waterfront to exciting new improvements.

Participants envision a broader range of uses along the Central Waterfront than in other sub-regions. More businesses and other uses that are not strictly water-dependent are of interest here. However, workshop participants object to parking lots, car rental lots, and general office space within the shoreline.



Green Lake

Because the Seattle Department of Parks and Recreation manages the entirety of the Green Lake shoreline and has no plans for substantially changing the use or function of this area, no visioning workshop was held in this shoreline sub-region. However, conversations in other regions revealed substantial support for the Department of Parks and Recreation's vision of maintaining Green Lake as a city-owned park with substantial public access and recreational opportunities, while continuing to improve ecological functions of that water body and its shoreline.

Conclusion:

Shorelines are an integral part of Seattle. They play an important role in how we work and recreate, and they are one of the features that make Seattle a world-class city. The public survey and visioning process have made clear that citizens of Seattle place a high value on shorelines and that water-dependent businesses, public access, and environmental protection are all priorities for the future. The public's stated priorities will help the Department of Planning and Development review and update the city's Shoreline Master Program.

For more information about Seattle shorelines or the Shoreline Master Program, please visit <http://www.seattle.gov/dpd/Planning/ShorelineMasterProgramUpdate/Overview>.



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