

POINT WELLS

An aerial photograph showing an industrial facility, likely a water treatment plant, situated on a narrow peninsula. The facility is characterized by numerous large, circular storage tanks of various colors (white, grey, and dark). A long pier extends into the water on the left side. To the right of the industrial site, there is a dense residential neighborhood with houses and trees, separated by a road and a wooded area.

Design Charrette: A Community Visioning Event

August 22, 2009

Sponsored by:

Richmond Beach
Community Association
& City of Shoreline

SUMMARY REPORT

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01

Introduction

Why a Charrette?

The Point Wells Charrette, sponsored jointly by the Richmond Beach Community Association and the City of Shoreline, took place over five hours on August 22nd 2009. The event involved bringing approximately 30 to 40 local residents, officials, and persons of interest together with 10 volunteer design professionals, who led a unique opportunity for non-designers to explore planning alternatives for the lowland portion of the Point Wells property.

Point Wells, an approximately 100 acre peninsula of land jutting into Puget Sound in southwest Snohomish County just north of the King County border, has remained relatively inconspicuous since World War I as an industrial storage and asphalt processing center. It should be no surprise that the status of this relatively quiet and underutilized parcel adjacent to the suburban communities of Woodway in Snohomish County and Richmond Beach in the City of Shoreline, King County, would eventually change given its desirable location and precious adjacency to deep water moorage on the Sound.

The historic challenges to potential redevelopment of the site stem from its isolation, sequestered from regional transportation corridors to the east by affluent, single family neighborhoods. In addition, a significant planning conundrum exists in the fact that the site located in unincorporated Snohomish County, is only accessible by vehicle through Richmond Beach in King County. The stage was therefore set long ago for an inter-jurisdictional challenge given the technical right of Snohomish County to administer redevelopment, while the significant measure of potential impacts will be largely felt in communities outside that jurisdiction. Add to this intrigue that the adjacent communities are well organized and capable of expressing their own interests relative to Point Wells, and one could imagine a spirited dialog about the future of this important site. That is to say, if local effort can enable such dialog.

A property sale in 2005-6 resulted in the lowland portion (approx. 61 acres) of the Point Wells property entering the portfolio of Alon USA. Soon thereafter, the new owner's subsidiary, Paramount of Washington, began exploring the potential to redevelop the property as a mixed use community

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of residential and commercial uses. In February 2008, Paramount submitted an application to Snohomish County for a concurrent comprehensive plan and zoning change for the property from Urban Industrial to Urban Center.¹ In early August 2008, days before the scheduled charrette, the Snohomish County Council voted unanimously to approve the Urban Center designation.

Amid the public expression of concern by Richmond Beach and Shoreline residents at hearings held as part of the Urban Center review process, as well as local meetings conducted by the Richmond Beach Community Association and other citizen led groups to disseminate information about the property, the RBCA Board of Directors considered the merits of sponsoring a public forum where residents could participate in constructive dialog about Point Wells redevelopment. The RBCA Board appointed Point Wells Subcommittee proposed the idea of a public charrette in June, 2009. In discussions with the City of Shoreline that followed, it was made known that the City wished to co-sponsor the charrette to coincide with its efforts to obtain public input as part of the development of a Subarea plan for the site.²

In this context, the need for the charrette was determined to be urgent, and the earliest appropriate date for the event sought. The selected date of August 22, left little time for the charrette planners to prepare, let alone notify the public. The charrette team therefore thanks all public and volunteer professional participants in this project for their willingness to donate valuable time, and on relatively short notice. In addition, we especially appreciate the moral support and efforts by members of the RBCA Board to help with publicity.

What follows is a summary of the output from the event, for which we are proud to provide for the public record.

Introduction

What is a Charrette?

The French word “charrette”, meaning “cart”, refers to a vehicle used in the 19th century to collect student projects for critical review. Over time, the word became associated with the final, intense work effort expended by art and architecture students to meet a project deadline.

Today, we use the term charrette to define an intensive process for creating and evaluating planning alternatives involving all stakeholders. With this method, which usually involves a large group breaking into smaller groups to allow for focus on specific issues, non-designers work with volunteer design professionals who help them describe and test their ideas. The value of this opportunity is that residents come to better understand the implications of planning alternatives, and are enabled to contribute to the thinking and decision-making that will give shape to their community.

A. Materials and Methods

The work of a charrette involves a focused process of individual thought, communication among team members, and presentation of ideas to the larger group. The Point Wells Charrette brought local residents into a room equipped with resources and personnel to enable them to envision alternatives for the site. All were encouraged to familiarize themselves with the tools of the designer’s trade, and embrace this opportunity to work along side professionals, who in turn have much to learn from members of the community.

1. Whiteboards, flip charts, trace paper, and markers: expression through a language of drawings
2. The Challenge of Scale: maps & sketches tell the story.
3. Pin-ups: share your ideas and get feedback.
4. Test it in 3D: the physical model station. A foam-core model portraying the site and hypothetical built objects (see Specific Recommendations Graphics).

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5. Facilitators:

Joe Tovar – Planning Director, City of Shoreline

Mary Lynne Evans - Planning Consultant

Eitan Alon, Architect/Developer, Ariel Development

Chakorn Phisuthikul – Architect, Habitat West, Inc.

Jerry Fleet – Architect, Lance Mueller & Associates

Kevin Reeves - Intern Architect, Eggleston Farkas Architects

Nicole Reeves - Intern Architect, The Miller|Hull Partnership

Heidi Oien – Architect, The Miller|Hull Partnership

Andy Rasmussen – Landscape Architect, Weisman Design Group

Nicole Mecum – Civil Engineer, J3 Mecum Engineering, Inc.

Jennifer Ting – Transportation Engineer, TENW, LLC

B. Goals for the Charrette

1. Discovery: learning from residents how they see Point Wells relative to their own communities, as a physical and social context.
2. Proposal: creating planning concepts from which recommendations for future work can be made.
3. Resolution: constructive criticism to synthesize ideas – what are the ‘gems’ that can become our priorities in communication with decision-makers?

Introduction

Point Wells: A Short History³

- Archeological evidence indicates the area was a frequent stop for members of the Duamish Native American tribe.
- The boon for a series of extraction industries including whaling, timbering, and gravel mining, led to the early settlement of Richmond Beach just south of Point Wells in the mid-1800's. The Burlington Northern rail line & Mosquito Fleet ferries later opened up the coast to development.
- By World War I, the Point Wells peninsula was owned and operated as a petroleum depot by Shell Oil.
- The Inter-war period brought the first residences built in the Town of Woodway, immediately east of Point Wells.
- The site has been in continuous use as an industrial processing and storage site, under the ownership of numerous petroleum product and logistics enterprises. As a result, the soils on site are known to be contaminated, and will require environmental remediation for any use other than industrial.
- The subject property of approx. 61 acres was sold to Paramount of Washington by Chevron in 2005. Paramount is owned as a subsidiary of Alon USA, an international petroleum product and real estate concern.

The Planning Context

- Multiple times since the early 1970's, the Point Wells site has been considered for mixed-use redevelopment, or as a suitable site for a waste treatment facility to meet the needs of the growing North King County / South Snohomish County Area. The Brightwater treatment facility, ultimately sited in Bothell, is currently being completed with an outfall near Point Wells.
- The site is currently in unincorporated Snohomish County, and has been designated for use as 'urban industrial' according to the county comprehensive plan. The site is bounded by the Town of Woodway to the north & east, the City of Shoreline to the south, Puget Sound to the west, and the City of Edmonds has expressed an interest in the existing commercial pier serving the property.
- The Point Wells site has the unique distinction of a location wholly within Snohomish County, yet is only accessed from an arterial running through the Richmond Beach neighborhood of Shoreline in King County. Though a B&N rail line bisects the property and supports Sounder traffic, Sound Transit has not anticipated a station in or near this site in its 20-year plan.
- Earlier in the decade a perceived conflict between the comprehensive plans of the Town of Woodway in Snohomish County and the City of Shoreline in King County, both of which designated Point Wells as a potential annexation area, was settled in the courts – it was determined there was no conflict with the GMA.
- The owners of Point Wells, Paramount of Washington, have proposed to Snohomish County a change to the comp plan designation for the site from 'urban industrial' to 'urban center', accommodating mixed-use development at urban densities. The proposal with amendments was approved by the County Council earlier this month. No project specifics have yet been proposed.

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Discovery

Site Inventory by Large Group

After the presentation providing background for the event, the charrette participants began the work with a review of the site through an “inventory” of existing conditions. The group was asked to consider site character as delineated by attributes such as geography, natural resources, adjacencies and access, and infrastructure to understand the property as it sits today (see Figure 1). The product of this discussion was summarized according to the methods of “SWOT” analysis, an acronym for “Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats”; derived from a management theory for evaluation of alternatives toward achieving an objective.⁴

A. SWOT Analysis Findings.

1. Strengths

- a. Unique and compelling site for a variety of public and private uses.
- b. Potential to renew important natural riparian (wetland) and shoreline habitats.
- c. Opportunity for public access to undeveloped beachfront on the Sound.
- d. Existing Burlington Northern rail line through the site.

2. Weaknesses

- a. Only existing auto traffic access is Richmond Beach Rd., with limited potential for other routes of travel.
- b. Evidence of contaminated soils.
- c. Lack of gravity for waste disposal – waste would have to be pumped to reach existing utilities up hill.
- d. No stormwater infiltration potential with high water table.
- e. No existing public transit access or other public services.

3. Opportunities

- a. Limited vehicle access may encourage pedestrian, bike, and public transportation.
- b. It is believed two historic stream drainages from the uplands have been directed by culvert across the site. These streams could be “day-lighted” providing additional amenities/resources.
- c. System integration: soil remediation, waste, and storm water treatment taking advantage of the latest “low impact” techniques.
- d. Unique built form scale relative to bluff.
- e. Removal of industrial use at the site.

4. Threats

- a. From cul-de-sac to thoroughfare: dramatic change envisioned to sense of place in Richmond Beach.
- b. Significant potential traffic impacts to the Richmond Beach Road corridor.
- c. Existing soil contamination and release into the

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Proposal

Design Alternative by Small Group

Based on the investigation of the site existing conditions, the charrette agenda moved into initial exploration of design alternatives for the site. Members of the overall group were asked to select from one of four teams (Fig. 2), each charged with a redevelopment focus area based loosely on design discipline: Environment (natural resource and open space planning); Infrastructure (drainage, water and waste treatment, utilities); Transportation (site access, mitigation of impacts on existing roads, and transit alternatives); Built Form (land use, building location, and building massing, i.e.: height and breadth). The work of each team of public participants was facilitated by at least two volunteer design professionals; one generalist and one specialist with expertise in the focus area, and was followed by a brief presentation of ideas (Fig. 3).

A. Large Concepts

1. Overall: define the characteristics of a sustainably developed “coastal village”.
2. Environment: Restoring native habitats to inspire, and guide the master plan (Fig. 4).
3. Infrastructure: Integrate on-site waste treatment and power generation to limit the “footprint” of development and minimize impacts to neighboring communities, with day-lit drainage for stormwater management (Fig. 5).
4. Transportation: Turn a single site access location into an opportunity to discourage personal automobiles, and encourage public transit, including potential water-born transit options to Edmonds (Fig. 6).
5. Built Form: Increased density in specific site locations to maximize public open space and access to the beachfront (Fig. 7)

B. Specific Recommendations

1. Environment: Master planning & landscape design special features (Fig. 8).
 - a. Daylight native streams to create a dynamic system for stormwater control, layout of the streetscape, and park amenities.
 - b. Allow a proposal for site access, parking and landscaping to “lid over” a portion of the existing rail line to take advantage of this space and mitigate the “scar” of the rail line.
2. Infrastructure: Sustainable, low impact development strategies (Fig. 9).
 - a. The south end of the site is best suited to become an integrated public open space, including a state-of-the-art treatment facility for gray & storm water management using natural drainage features, wetland ecology, and permaculture technologies.

Proposal

- b. Power demonstration projects, including for example, wind turbines & tidal engines, should be planned for appropriate open space, the existing pier, and any future marina development.
3. Transportation: Improvements to limit private access impacts, provide public transit options, and improve public safety on existing roadways (Fig. 10).
 - a. On-site parking should be carefully planned and contained in discrete areas, with incentives provided for ride-sharing & human-powered transit (pedestrian/bike routes).
 - b. Water-taxi service, mimicking the “mosquito fleet” of ferries serving the area in the past, should be developed to connect the site with the Port of Edmonds, the existing Sounder station & services.
 - c. A detailed study of each distinct segment of the Richmond Beach Rd. traffic corridor beginning with the subject property and leading to access at Aurora & I-5 should be developed. Every intersection should be carefully examined for efficiency & pedestrian safety to protect the “walking neighborhood” of Richmond Beach.
4. Built Form: Building use and form at significant locations (Fig.11).
 - a. The greatest density should be located near the rail line & adjacent bluff to maximize density with the smallest site area possible. The topography suggests this can be done in taller buildings without significant impacts on views – more study is needed.
 - b. The group proposes a plan to absorb taller multifamily & office uses toward the middle latitude of the site, with low-rise buildings of housing and street level retail radiating outward toward the beachfront.
 - c. The north end of the site provides a close adjacency between the rail line and the Sound, suggesting a special location for water-related uses; such as scientific research, or the like.



Figure 3. Jerry Fleet, a facilitator for the Built Form group, presents large concepts during the Proposal segment.

Proposal

Large Concepts Graphics

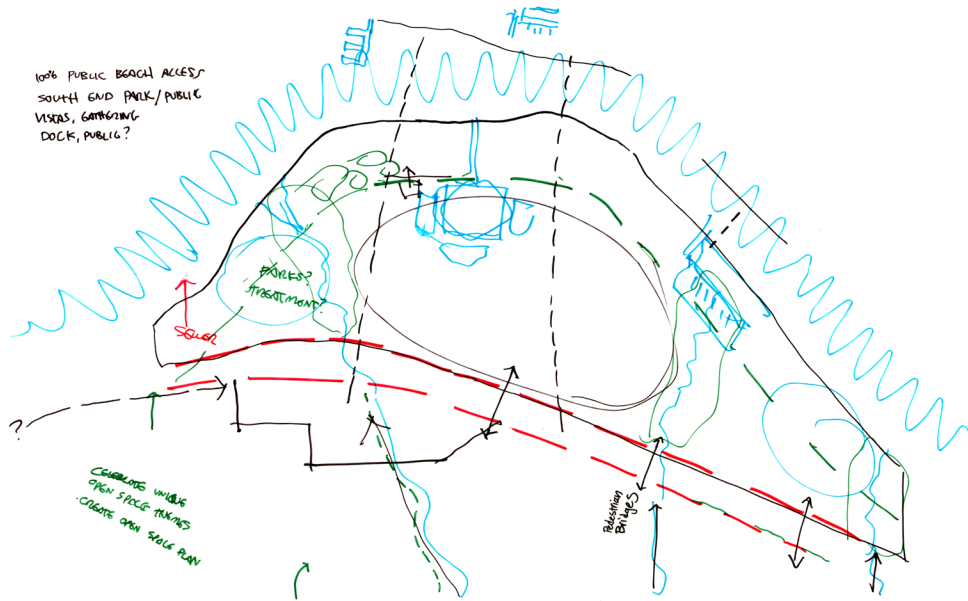


Figure 4. Environment Group

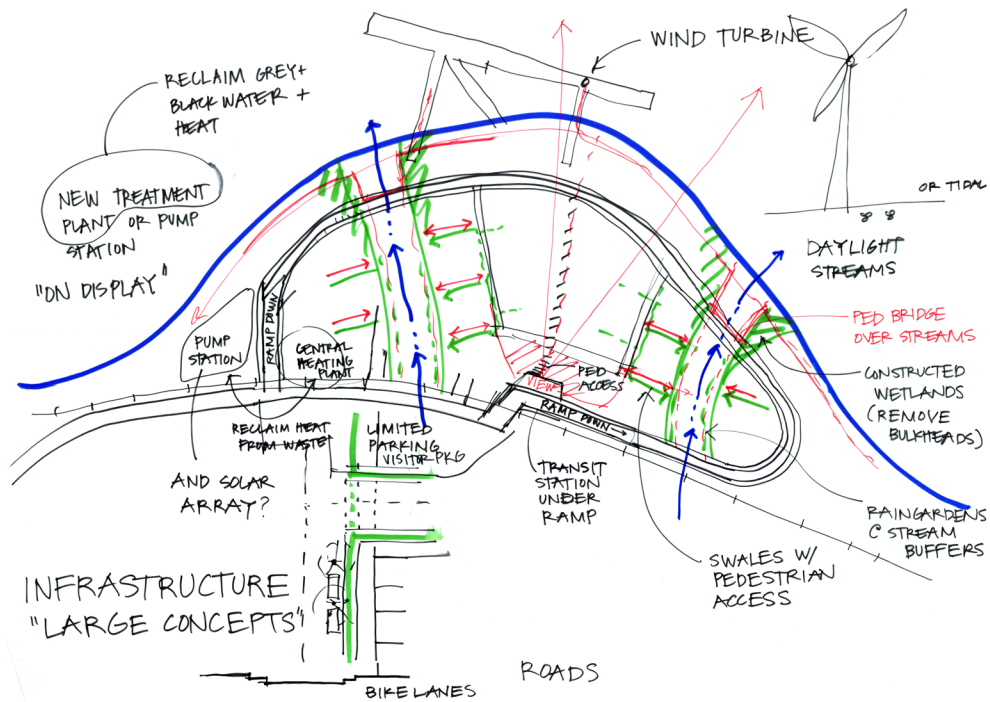


Figure 5. Infrastructure Group

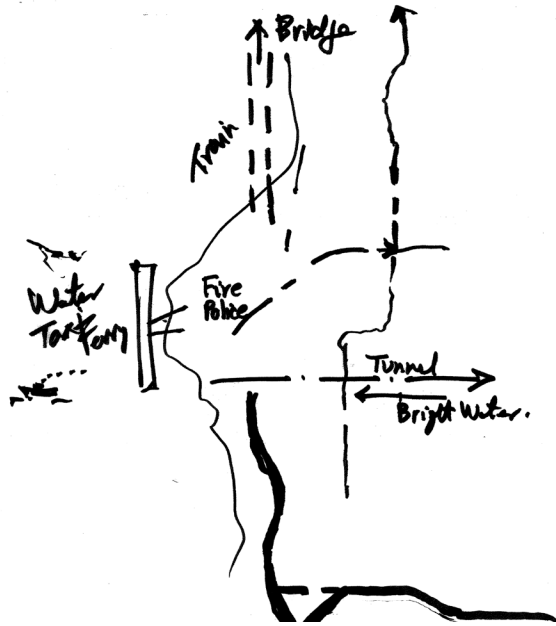


Figure 6. Transportation Group

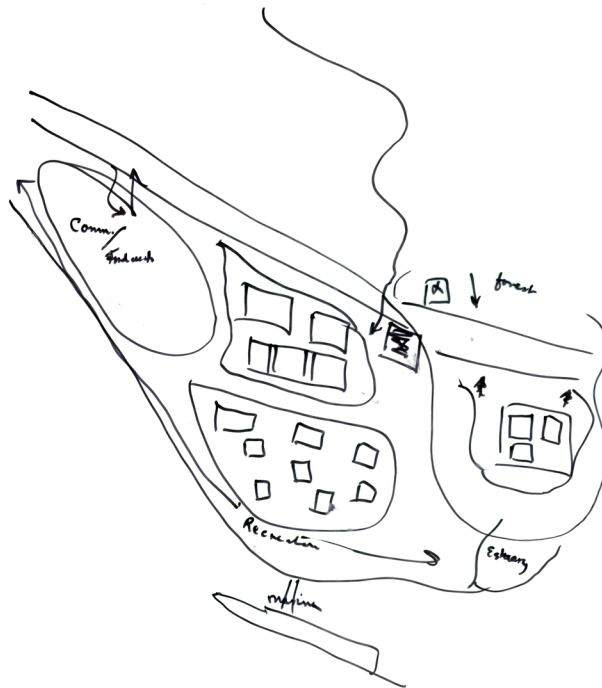


Figure 7. Built Form Group

Proposal

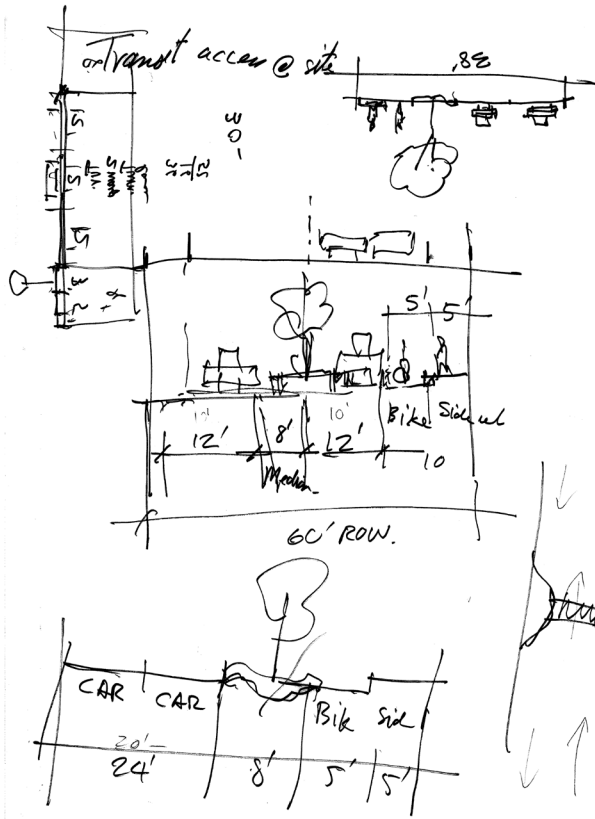


Figure 10. Transportation Group

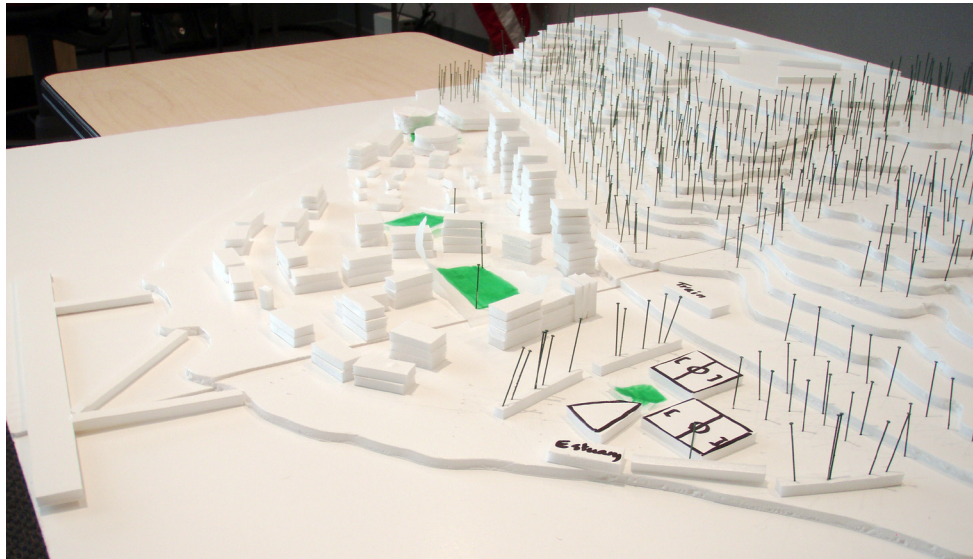


Figure 11. Built Form Group

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Resolution

Final Discussion by Large Group

Given the excitement and concentrated effort experienced within the small groups, it may have been assumed that the direction of design alternatives would diverge greatly from one group to the next. Instead, it was evidenced that multiple “common threads” or shared principles wended between the groups and gave the work on distinct development issues an overall cohesion. Nevertheless, when the small group work was presented, key areas of concern remained and should be considered the points of departure for further study and public input on planning for the site.

A. Comments and Critique

1. Any redevelopment of the site must put a priority on mitigation of significant impacts to Richmond Beach & Shoreline, as well as Woodway.
 - a. Before any redevelopment is allowed, the extent of contaminated soils from years of petroleum-related industry on the site must be thoroughly assessed and state/federal requirements for removal made public record.
 - b. Given the projected vehicle trips associated with Point Wells redevelopment on Richmond Beach Drive and Road will undoubtedly effect quality of life in the community, any planning effort must thoroughly study the traffic impacts and put a priority on mitigation provisions for Richmond Beach.
 - c. Impacts to Shoreline public services, such as public schools, libraries, medical facilities have not been adequately studied in the existing documentation, or richly considered in this event.
2. No amount of public process can guarantee that the Point Wells property owners will observe Shoreline resident’s interests without disincentives or legal consequences. Chief among such measures of control would require our elected officials achieve some jurisdiction or authority over the site, most likely through annexation or local agreements for services.

B. Common Threads

1. Two significant historic stream drainages should be day-lit for use in stormwater control and as amenities guiding a “radial” master plan.
2. The south end of the property should be devoted to public open space and access to restored beach ecology, playfields & active areas, and a sustainably designed water/waste treatment facility/visitor center, accommodating all effluent generated by uses on the site.
3. The existing rail line ROW takes up significant site area that could be captured to reconnect the historic drainages mentioned above, the uplands and lowlands landscape for pedestrian access, and for use in planning public transit station(s). This could be done with a structural lid over the rail line.
4. Any park areas proposed for the site, particularly ballfields intended for night time use, should be required to follow “Dark Skies Lighting” standards to avoid glare impacts to neighboring homes.
5. The beachfront and any day-lit streams should incorporate a

Resolution

- no-build zone or buffer requirements consistent with current planning practice, to maintain watercourse protection & public recreation access.
6. Massing of buildings on the site should take advantage of the approx. 220 ft bluffs to maximize density near the rail line & step buildings down in height and bulk toward the sound. This strategy will conserve views and open space.
 7. Discussion of what is a “reasonable” level of development at Point Wells focused on the number of new dwelling units proposed. A total not to exceed 1,500 new dwellings was largely based on data from a City of Shoreline traffic study of Richmond Beach Rd., which associates 1500 dwellings with a threshold of significant degradation to the level of service of intersections on the arterial.

Notes (Endnotes)

1 According to a Snohomish County Planning Commission Briefing document, issued February 24, 2009, the County Planning and Development Services staff accepted the Paramount of Washington proposal in early February, as part of a review process for planned amendments to the Urban Center designation in the Land Use chapter of the General Policy Plan, and the accompanying Future Land Use Map. The effort would also serve to replace the Urban Centers Demonstration Program due to expire on November 29, 2009, according to the document. Specific language further defines the specific intent behind the Paramount application:

“The Paramount (SW 41) docket application proposes a new Urban Center to be located at Point Wells near the Snohomish/King County border. Should this proposal be supported, it would need to be added to the introductory text of the Urban Centers section.”

“The existing policy provides direction for considering a future re-designation from Urban Industrial to Urban Center/Mixed Use.”

2 At this writing, the City of Shoreline is finishing a draft Subarea Plan in which a “Vision” for the development of Point Wells will be presented, according to the City website. Joe Tovar, Shoreline Planning Director, has stated publicly that the information produced at the Point Wells Charrette will be considered in the development of the Subarea Plan document. The draft Subarea Plan is to be accompanied by a draft Zoning regulation that will specify the density, heights, standards and processes that the City would require if Point Wells were to annex to Shoreline and propose development under the City’s jurisdiction.

3 Historical references and photographs utilized in the Point Wells Charrette provided by the Shoreline Historical Museum.

4 Per Wikipedia, SWOT Analysis is a strategic planning method used to evaluate the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats involved in a project or business venture. It involves specifying the objective of the business venture and identifying the internal and external factors that are favorable and unfavorable to achieving that objective. The technique is generally credited to Albert Humphrey, who originally led an eponymous convention at Stanford University in the 1960’s using data from Fortune 500 companies. Employed in planning charrettes, SWOT analysis is an effective way of assessing the socio-physical, political, cultural, and economic status quo of a community, and postulating what the collective aspirations for growth may be. In this scenario, the “objective” may be defined as development sympathetic to the physical and cultural context of a community as understood by its residents; what some master planners have termed, however idealized, the “pride of place.”

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Appendices

Glossary of Terms

A brief list of technical terms in alphabetical order from the planning, design, and/or construction disciplines, not defined elsewhere within the document.

Building Density

Building density is an example of what may be called a unit density calculation, the measure of two dimensional units – people, dwellings, trees, square feet – positioned on a base area. Building density, as opposed to the more commonly known “residential density” calculation for dwelling units per acre, deals with building area (regardless of use) per the same unit measure of land area. This calculation is used for planning standards in urban settings and is commonly converted into FAR, or Floor Area Ratio, which is the total floor area of a building divided by the total area of the legal lot on which it is built. A higher FAR indicates a greater building density on a given land area.

Charrette Facilitator

A charrette facilitator is a volunteer design professional, often with special expertise in a subject area of the charrette. It is assumed that these individuals approach the work without bias, and have no vested interest in any specific outcome regarding the charrette.

Environmental Impact Mitigation

Environmental impact assessment, or the assessment of potential environmental risks attributable to a proposed action, is a precursor to mitigation, which is the determination of the requirements for the elimination or reduction of frequency, magnitude, or severity of exposure to specific environmental risks and potential hazards. Mitigation is a component of Washington state environmental law by way of SEPA, the State Environmental Policy Act, which requires mitigation as a remedy for adverse impacts, if determined by review to be “significant.”

Environmental Remediation

Environmental remediation deals with the removal of pollution or contaminants in physical media, including soil, groundwater, sediment, or surface water for the general protection of human health and the environment, from a location such as a “brownfield” site (containing contaminated soils) intended for redevelopment.

Intersection Level of Service

The level-of-service of an intersection is an evaluation based on “load factors”, a measure of the percentage of trips delayed through a traffic light cycle, for each approach to an intersection occurring during morning and afternoon peak hours. The highest load factors are used to calculate the level-of-service, in a scale from A to F, corresponding to peak load factors 0 to 100%.

Appendices

Low Impact Development (LID)

LID is an alternative comprehensive approach to stormwater management based on natural drainage phenomena, using distributed micro-scale physical controls. The goal is to mimic a site's predevelopment hydrology using design techniques that infiltrate, filter, store, evaporate, transpire, and detain runoff close to its source.

Master Planning

A physical development plan, also known as a master plan, is a framework by which future planning decisions are made. Master planning seeks to provide overall site plans and descriptive guidelines for framing future development, but typically stops short of specific physical design proposals for individual structures.

Site Inventory

A site inventory for planning and design purposes, pertains to an investigation of property existing conditions. A typical assessment consists of all subject property physical characteristics, including soil geology, hydrology, habitat biology, topography, solar and wind orientation, views, and access, as well as documentation of all existing structures. In addition, local cultural history is usually researched for this type of effort.

Stormwater Management

Stormwater or surface water is a term derived from civil engineering principles to define a value for the estimated precipitation incident on an area within a site boundary over a period of time. According to standard engineering practice, stormwater falling on non-porous or "impervious" surfaces constructed as part of development must both be treated for pollutants and controlled for rate of release, before entry into any natural drainage system.

Structural Lid

A structural lid is a bridge-like structure, often required to carry significant loads associated with the structure itself and a depth of earth supporting trees and other large vegetation, designed to span and cover another use with a public amenity such as a park. An example of a structural lid is the Seattle Art Museum Sculpture Park, which spans an arterial and the Burlington Northern Right of Way.

Waste Treatment

Waste treatment refers to the activities required by law, to ensure that residential and commercial waste products have the least practicable impact on the environment. Sewage treatment is the disposal of human waste. Gray water is a term used to define waste water used in residential applications, such as showering and clothes washing, that does not contain human feces and may be reused with minimal treatment.

Appendices

Point Wells Charrette Agenda

Actual event varied per the document above

- ▶ Introductory Presentation 10:00am
- ▶ Discovery: Gathering Context Information 10:30am
 - What Defines the Subject Property? - Large Group
 - ▶ Geography, resources, adjacencies, & access.
 - ▶ SWOT Analysis: what are the strengths & weaknesses, and opportunities & threats for your community?
 - Assessing Critical Attributes – Small Group
 - ▶ Quadrants for Assessment:
 - Team 1: Environment – natural resources, public space, and waste remediation
 - Team 2: Infrastructure – water, sewer, power, and communications
 - Team 3: Transportation – transit efficacy, access, safety, & inter-modal options
 - Team 4: Built Form – land use, housing, commercial, and live/work potential
- ▶ Lunch: pizza, salad, & soft drinks provided by the City of Shoreline 11:30am
- ▶ Proposal: What Was Learned & What Can Be Done With It? 12:00pm
 - Creating & Evaluating Alternatives – Small Group
 - ▶ Large-scale Concepts:
 - Team 1: Celebrating unique natural patterns – an open space plan
 - Team 3: Appropriate infrastructure and public services
 - Team 4: Connecting Point Wells to itself and the region
 - Team 2: Land use based on what exists (locally) and does not
 - ▶ Small-scale Specifics:
 - Team 1: Park and landscape special features
 - Team 2: Sustainable, low impact development strategies
 - Team 3: Walk & bike-friendly amenities
 - Team 4: Building use and form at significant nodes
 - Team Presentations: Proposal
- ▶ Resolution: A Constructive Feedback Loop 2:00pm
 - Design Synthesis: critical analysis to integrate the parts
 - ▶ Critique: team facilitators & guests identify potential challenges
 - ▶ Response: team members propose revisions to alternatives
 - Towards Implementation: how do we make our case to decision-makers?

Appendices

- ▶ Discussion of final principals and recommendations
 - Do some features have priority over others?
 - Are any interdependent, i.e.: to have one requires another?
 - Other conclusions
- ▶ Public Participation Adjourns 3:00p

