
Chapter 3 – Shoreline Vision, Goals and Policies

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3.1 Vision

The Town's Vision for its shoreline is a working waterfront, historic district, cultural and recreational asset that assures no net loss of the existing ecosystem functions, makes the most of limited restoration opportunities, improves physical and visual public access, and increases public understanding of the relationship of the Town's shoreline to the larger ecosystem of Skagit and Padilla Bays and the Puget Sound.

The Town of La Conner's history, economic livelihood, and sense of place are defined by its position on the eastern shoreline of the Swinomish Channel. Although once a part of a system of tidal sloughs, salt marshes and mudflats, since 1937 the Swinomish Channel has been a navigable, man-made, inland passage connecting Padilla Bay to the north with Skagit Bay to the south. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers periodically dredges the channel to maintain navigability for fishing boats, tugs, recreational watercraft and shallow-draught freight vessels to access Puget Sound.

Ongoing dredging, historic shoreline armoring, over-water structures and the scouring action of tidal currents and storm surges are major factors shaping the ecosystem that exists along the Town's shoreline. These factors, together with the lack of freshwater inlets or beach accretion, means that the Town's shoreline does not provide spawning habitat for salmon, steelhead, herring, smelt or other fish. Portions of the Channel do however provide a migratory corridor and rearing habitat for these fish species as well as a migratory corridor and foraging habitat for harbor seal, river otter, bald eagle, heron, and various waterfowl. It is these shoreline ecological processes and functions, however limited, which must be protected.

3.2 General Goals and Policies for Master Program Elements

A. Goals

1. Protect shoreline natural resources by ensuring that future use and development of the shoreline will not result in a net loss of shoreline ecological processes and functions.
2. Undertake restoration opportunities to improve shoreline ecological functions and ecosystem-wide processes where feasible.
3. Promote physical and visual public access to the greatest extent feasible and provide opportunities for interpretation and understanding of the natural character and ecosystem values of shorelines of the state.

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4. Encourage shoreline uses in descending order of preference as follows:
 - a. Water-dependent uses;
 - b. Water-related uses; and
 - c. Water-enjoyment uses.
 5. Ensure that proposed shoreline uses do not infringe upon the rights and reasonable expectations of adjacent property owners.
 6. Ensure consistency between the Shoreline Master Program and the Town of La Conner Comprehensive Plan pursuant to RCW 36.70A.480.

B. Policies

1. Encourage restoration of shoreline areas that have been degraded or diminished in ecological values and functions as a result of past development activities, or catastrophic events.
2. Plan for and implement the acquisition of land for permanent fee-simple public access to the shoreline and where feasible and appropriate acquire public access easements as a condition of development of shoreline properties.
3. Priority should be given to “water-dependent,” “water-related,” and “water-enjoyment” uses. Uses that derive no benefit from a water location (e.g., non-water-oriented uses) should be discouraged, unless there are overriding public interests consistent with the Policies of this program and the Shoreline Management Act.
4. Encourage the redevelopment and renewal of urban shoreline areas in order to make maximum use of the available shoreline resource and opportunities for restoration and incremental improvements to water quality.
5. The construction of over water structures in any shoreline environment should result in no net increase in the amount of shade that falls on the surface area of the Swinomish Channel.
6. Encourage multiple and joint uses of sites and structures where compatible with water-oriented uses, for maximum utilization of the existing developed shoreline.
7. Dredging and filling activities should be conducted with minimum impact on marine habitat in the Swinomish Channel and authorized by appropriate agencies.
8. Uses in the aquatic environment should not block navigation channels or restrict access to sections of the shoreline.

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9. Actively promote aesthetic considerations by means such as sign control regulations, appropriate development siting, screening and architectural standards.
 10. Engage in on-going cooperative planning between the Town, the Port of Skagit County, the Swinomish Tribe, Skagit County, state and federal agencies to protect and enhance the shoreline of the Swinomish Channel.
 11. Encourage public input into the decision-making process for shoreline use.

3.3 Shoreline Goals and Policies by Element

3.3.1. Economic Development Element

A. Goals

1. Protect and encourage those economic activities which will be an asset to the Town's livelihood and which result in the least possible adverse effect on the quality of the shoreline and surrounding environment.
2. Promote healthy, orderly economic growth that takes advantage of the Town's unique history and shoreline setting.

B. Policies

1. Encourage new economic development to locate in areas already developed with similar uses that are consistent with this master program.
2. Any economic activity within the Town's shoreline management area should be constructed and operated to avoid and/or minimize harm to the quality of the environment of the site, the Swinomish Channel or adjacent shorelands.
3. Developments that convey the current small town feeling by their activity, scale and design should be encouraged.
4. The natural and cultural attributes that have made the Town economically stable should be protected.
5. Before new commercial/industrial development is permitted within the shoreline, proponents should demonstrate that upland areas are not feasible for the intended economic activity.

3.3.2 Public Access Element

A. Goals

1. Provide, protect and enhance a public access system that is physical and visual, utilizing, but not limited to, lands that increase the amount and diversity of public access to the state's shorelines and adjacent areas, and is consistent with the character of the natural shoreline, private rights and public safety.
2. Increase the public's ability to view, reach, touch and enjoy the water's edge.

B. Policies

1. Connect waterfront access points with one another where feasible through the development and implementation of a plan to provide a waterfront "boardwalk" from North First Street to Pioneer Park.

2. Develop and implement a comprehensive public access plan that incorporates public access into new shoreline development and unifies individual public access elements into an organized system which could provide a unique physical and visual access to the waterfront, benefit navigation in the channel, provide wave protection to existing structures, and enhance fire protection.
3. Public access should be considered in the review of all private and public developments (including land division) with the exception of the following:
 - a. Existing dwelling units.
 - b. Where deemed inappropriate due to health, safety and environmental concerns.
 - c. In the Residential Environment which lies east of 3rd Street.



4. Public access should be provided as close as possible to the water's edge without adversely affecting a sensitive environment and should be safely accessible to physically disabled persons.
5. Public access afforded by shoreline street ends, public utilities and rights-of-way should be preserved, maintained and enhanced.
6. Public access should be designed to provide for public safety and to minimize potential impacts to private property and individual privacy.
7. There should be a physical separation or other means of clearly delineating public and private space in order to avoid unnecessary user conflict.

3.3.3 Recreational Element

A. Goals

1. Increase substantial recreational opportunities for the public in the shoreline area.
2. Coordinate with the Town's public works department and the Skagit County Department of Parks and Recreation and the Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission to optimize opportunities for water-oriented recreation.

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3. Integrate recreational elements into public access and conservation planning.
 4. Consider both active and passive recreational needs of a wide range of users when planning for safe recreational areas.

B. Policies

1. The location and design of shoreline recreational developments should relate to local population characteristics, density and special activity demands.
2. Acquisition priorities should consider these needs, demands, and special opportunities as well as public transit access and access for the physically impaired.
3. Shoreline areas with a potential for providing recreation or public access opportunities should be identified for this use and, if possible, acquired by state and local governments or leased at a fair market value and incorporated into the public park or open space system.
4. The linkage of shoreline parks, recreation areas and public access points as linear systems, such as pedestrian walkways or easements should be encouraged.



5. Recreational developments should be located, designed and operated to be compatible with and minimize adverse impacts on shoreline ecological functions, environmental quality and valuable natural features as well as on adjacent and surrounding land and water uses.
6. Pathways along the shoreline should be located, designed and maintained to protect bank stability.
7. Insure that recreation developments and plans recognize the primacy of preserving natural character, resources and ecological functions of the shoreline.
8. Develop Conner Way waterfront area with camping, picnic and kayak launching facilities.

3.3.4 Circulation Element

A. Goals

1. Balance essential circulation needs with protection of the shoreline.
2. Promote provisions for various modes of travel with some freedom of choice and multiple use corridors where compatible.
3. Protect, manage and enhance those characteristics of shoreline roadway corridors that are unique or have historic significance, or great aesthetic quality, for the benefit and enjoyment of the public.



B. Policies

1. Provide safe, reasonable and adequate circulation systems to shorelines where routes will have the least possible adverse effect on unique or fragile shoreline features and existing ecological systems, while contributing to the functional and visual enhancement of the shoreline.
2. Trucks and heavy equipment should be routed around shoreline areas to the maximum extent possible.
3. New development within the shoreline jurisdiction should be required to contribute to multimodal transportation, such as pedestrian boardwalks, trails, and bicycle lanes.
4. Trail and bicycle paths should be encouraged along shorelines where they are compatible with the natural character, resources and ecology of the shoreline.

3.3.5 Shoreline Use Element

3.3.5.1 Residential Use

A. Goals

1. Strive to preserve, improve and enhance the existing housing stock, including historic structures and sites within the Historic District.
2. Achieve consistency with the historic preservation provisions of the LCMC which limit the location and extent of residential uses.

B. Policies

1. Residential development should be permitted only where there are adequate provisions for utilities, drainage, and transportation access and circulation.
2. The overall density of development, lot coverage and height of structures should be appropriate to the physical capabilities of the site and as set forth in the Uniform Development Code.
3. Liveaboard vessels should be encouraged to moor in marinas with adequate water and sanitary facilities to accommodate them.
4. Preference should be given to joint-use community piers and docks.

3.3.5.2. Commercial Use

A. Goals

1. Promote a stable and diversified economy offering a wide variety of services and employment opportunities to the citizens of La Conner.
2. Encourage economic development that conserves natural resources and open space, protects environmental quality, and enhances the community's quality of life.
3. Support La Conner as a visitor destination by preserving and enhancing the unique qualities of our community.



B. Policies

1. New commercial development located in shoreline areas should be limited to those with water-oriented uses and activities as defined herein.
2. Commercial development in shoreline areas should be encouraged in descending order of preference as follows:
 - a. Water-dependent uses;
 - b. Water-related uses; and
 - c. Water-enjoyment uses.
 - d. Non-water-oriented development that is not accessory to a water-oriented use may be allowed only as a conditional use.
3. Commercial development should be prohibited over water unless the use is water-dependent.

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4. Encourage new commercial development along the shoreline to locate in those areas with existing consistent commercial uses.
 5. Encourage commercial development to utilize existing transportation corridors and minimize the number of access/egress points which should be designed to minimize potential conflicts.
 6. Commercial development within the shoreline area overlapping with the Commercial Transitional Zone must jointly comply with this shoreline master program and the provisions of Chapter 15.36 LCMC.

3.3.5.3 Industrial Use

A. Goals

1. All shoreline environments in which it is possible to locate industrial/office uses/activities should be restricted to water-oriented industrial/office uses (such as industrial facilities for processing, manufacturing, storage of finished and semi-finished products, wholesale/retail outlets or showrooms, warehousing and offices) and to public access.
2. Industrial uses and redevelopment encouraged to locate where environmental cleanup and restoration can be accomplished.



B. Policies

1. Industrial uses may incorporate wholesale/retail outlets or showrooms for sales of products manufactured, assembled, or produced on and warehoused on the premises provided that they occupy no more than 49 percent of the gross floor area of the industrial space.
2. Industrial or office use which is neither water-dependent nor water-related may be authorized when such use incorporates features in the site design that assure it will comply with the definition of water-enjoyment use by providing an opportunity for a substantial number of people to enjoy the shorelines of the Town.
3. Joint use of piers, cargo handling, storage, parking and other accessory facilities among private or public entities should be strongly encouraged in waterfront industrial areas.

3.3.5.4 Public Use

A. Goals

Ensure optimum utilization of existing public property and rights of way for public uses or purposes.



B. Policies

1. Shorelines owned or leased by the Town should be limited to water-dependent uses or public recreational uses, otherwise such shorelines should remain protected open space.
2. The use of shoreline street ends and publicly owned lands for public access and development of recreational opportunities should be encouraged.

3.3.6 Conservation Element

A. Goals

1. Conserve renewable resources of the shoreline.
2. Reclaim and restore degraded areas while maintaining appropriate use of the shoreline.

B. Policies

1. Maintain natural aquatic flora and fauna of the shoreline and prevent infestation of non-native invasive plants harmful to the waterway.
2. Protect the shoreline and its waters from degradation due to contaminants such as petroleum products, chemicals, heavy metals, solid or human waste, or soil sediments from erosion.

3.3.7 Historic, Cultural, Scientific and Educational Element

A. Goals

1. Identify, protect, preserve and restore important archaeological, historical, and cultural sites located in the shoreline management area of the Town for educational, scientific, and enjoyment of the general public.
2. Preserve and protect identified historic sites and structures, especially those on the National or State Historic Register.



B. Policies

1. Promote the vitality of the historic preservation district by encouraging full, active use of land and structures, including multiple or spatially overlapping uses where compatible.
2. Encourage educational projects and programs that foster a greater appreciation of the importance of shoreline management, maritime activities, maritime history and environmental conservation.
3. Areas and facilities determined to be of historic, cultural and educational value by the State Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation should be made accessible to the public.
4. Support the Swinomish Tribal Community in the recovery and disposition of any indigenous artifacts associated with the Tribe that may be identified as a result of development within the Town.
5. Protect scientific and educational purposes sites containing artifacts, by observing state law regarding notification of appropriate authorities, including the Swinomish Tribal Community.

3.3.8 View Protection Element

A. Goals

1. Protect and develop view corridors to waterways, farmlands, and scenery of the community as public land locations permit. Note: from Parks Plan Goal 3.
2. Protect the visual character of the Town's shoreline and promote opportunities to see the shoreline from multiple vantage points, both public and private.

B. Policies

1. The configuration and location of building mass in new developments on or near the shoreline should protect and enhance the public's visual access to the water.
2. Maintain existing view corridors in public rights of way and street ends to and from the Swinomish Channel and adjacent shoreland features.
3. Public views from the shoreline upland areas should be enhanced and preserved.