



A Waterfront for All

Discussion Guide for Georgia Strait Alliance's
Waterfront Initiative Citizens' Forum

January 28th, 2015
Creekside Community Centre, Olympic Village
Vancouver, BC



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Join Us in Building a Waterfront for All

Vancouver's waterfront is a special place in our community. It's the place where land, city, water and people have come together for thousands of years. It's the place that we are all drawn to—to play on the water and beaches, to live near the shore, to work, to travel around, to protect and connect with nature and history.

But our waterfront is changing: the shorelines are under increasing pressure from urbanization, pollution, population and industrial growth as well as intensifying conflicts over land use. And perhaps the most fundamental change that we're starting to see is the impacts caused by climate change and rising sea levels.

It's time to ensure a shoreline that meets all our community's needs now and in the future. A diverse waterfront supporting a vibrant economy, flourishing ecosystems, and great spaces for recreation in the heart of a big city cannot be taken for granted.

You are invited to join the conversation about the future of Vancouver's shorelines and become a part of Georgia Strait Alliance's Waterfront Initiative. The Waterfront Initiative is a collaborative effort to find creative solutions to revitalize and protect our waterfront together with all those interested in the future of the waterfront—government, the private sector, civil society and citizens (read more about the Initiative on p. 9). It's great to have you on board.

We can't take for granted a waterfront that meets our community's needs.

This discussion guide provides an overview of the role Vancouver's shoreline plays in our community, the broad issue areas that the Waterfront Initiative aims to address, and a number of questions to inspire dialogue at the Waterfront Initiative Citizens' Forum on January 28, 2015.

Vancouver is shaped by a diverse shoreline that includes parks, port lands, residential areas and more.

Why the Waterfront Needs Our Attention

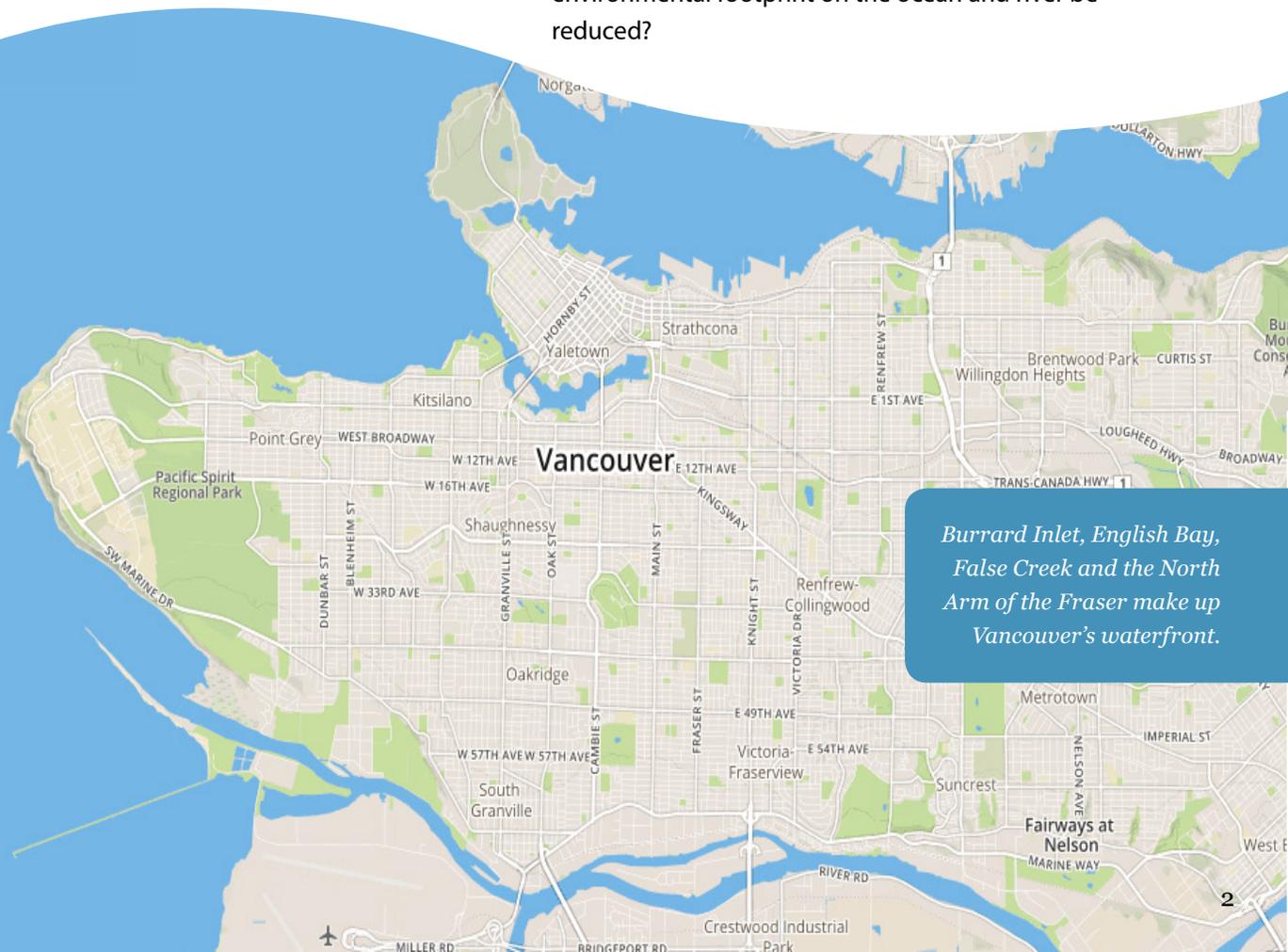
Many other maritime cities admire Vancouver for its waterfront. The city is surrounded by large stretches of shoreline parks along Burrard Inlet and the Fraser River, including the beloved Seawall and almost 18 km of beaches that lie within the limits of the city.

But not all is well on Vancouver's shores. The loss of important marine habitats is a major challenge in the Strait of Georgia—the inland sea between the Lower Mainland and Vancouver Island—and our cities are at the centre of this trend. Frequent discharge of pollutants such as pesticides and toxic chemicals originate not only from industrial operations or landfills, but also from private lawns, homes, and workshops. Fuel entering local waters from vessels as well as from storm water run-off are a common problem, and so is untreated sewage from multiple sources, including combined sewer overflows during heavy rainfalls.¹

What is more, parts of the shoreline—especially along the Fraser River—are changing rapidly. Ecosystems as well as industrial lands on the shoreline are under increasing pressure from development as our population continues to grow and property values soar. Sea level rise is exacerbating the scarcity of land and could represent serious challenges for the city over the coming decades.²

As a result, we're seeing more and more conflicts between different uses of the waterfront: businesses whose work depends on access to the water, residential development, public access, space for recreation and protection of the environment and cultural history.

How do we reconcile competing needs for limited space along the water? How can we, at the same time, make efforts to restore and protect natural habitats and parks lands along the shore? How can the city's environmental footprint on the ocean and river be reduced?



Burrard Inlet, English Bay, False Creek and the North Arm of the Fraser make up Vancouver's waterfront.

A Great Opportunity

Building a waterfront for all is not solely about challenges. It presents a great opportunity. The waterfront wraps around almost the entire city, from Burrard Inlet to English Bay and along the Fraser River. As a natural connector, the shoreline has the potential to become a strong link for our community, economy and urban ecosystems.

Working together as a community toward innovative solutions can lead to a return to a healthier, more sustainable place to live and work.

For example, we can make existing industrial activities on the waterfront more sustainable, try to attract clean-tech and other 'green' industries to the waterfront and harmonize them with the ecosystems that surround them.

Vancouver showcases great examples of how this can work: over the last few years, spawning herring have returned to False Creek—a crucial species in the marine food chain that sustains larger animals like salmon and whales.

All this is happening in close proximity to a working fishing harbour, a cement plant on Granville Island and the recently developed Olympic Village community.

And there's also great potential for the shipping industry in Vancouver to contribute to sustainability. Urban planning expert Tim Beatley from the University of Virginia recently wrote that improved port and shipping operations can contribute significantly to better local living conditions and, at the same time, reduce broader marine and ocean impacts: by "shifting to cleaner fuels, reducing air and water pollutants and discharges while ships are in port, and shifting the associated trucking to more energy-efficient, less polluting vehicles."³

Improved port and shipping operations can contribute significantly to better local living conditions.

Other innovative ways of thinking about urban waterfronts apply to the design of the water's edge. The most environmentally friendly designs of urban waterfronts are called "green shores" that look and function like natural shorelines. Because of their softer profile, green shores are also a good protection against rising sea levels and storm surges. A green shore design can be seen in action at the site of the former navy wharf at Jericho Beach (see picture below).



*Natural shores provide great habitats—
and protection against rising sea levels.*

Why a Dialogue on the Future of the Waterfront?

Georgia Strait Alliance launched the Waterfront Initiative to move past divisive debates that benefit only a few, and start a dialogue to help our community build a shoreline for all. Unlike a debate, dialogue is not about who has the right answer and who wins an argument. A dialogue is a conversation with a centre, not sides, that starts from the assumption that everyone holds a piece of the truth.⁴ Only by listening to each other and working together can we make progress.

Having a dialogue, however, does not mean to agree on everything. The Waterfront Initiative brings together a wide variety of stakeholders, whose ideas converge in some areas and differ in others—for example on questions like fossil fuel transportation in the Strait. The Initiative wants to be a place where disagreements can be voiced, but even more so a forum to find common ground that we can leverage to the benefit of a healthy urban waterfront.



“The Waterfront Initiative wants to move past divisive debates that benefit only a few, and start a dialogue that helps us build a shoreline for all.”

VANCOUVER'S WATERFRONT IS ...

A Place to Live and Play ...

The shores of Burrard Inlet and the Fraser River have been home to people for thousands of years. For the Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh Nations on whose traditional, unceded territories Vancouver was built, the waterfront continues to be of great social, economic and cultural significance.

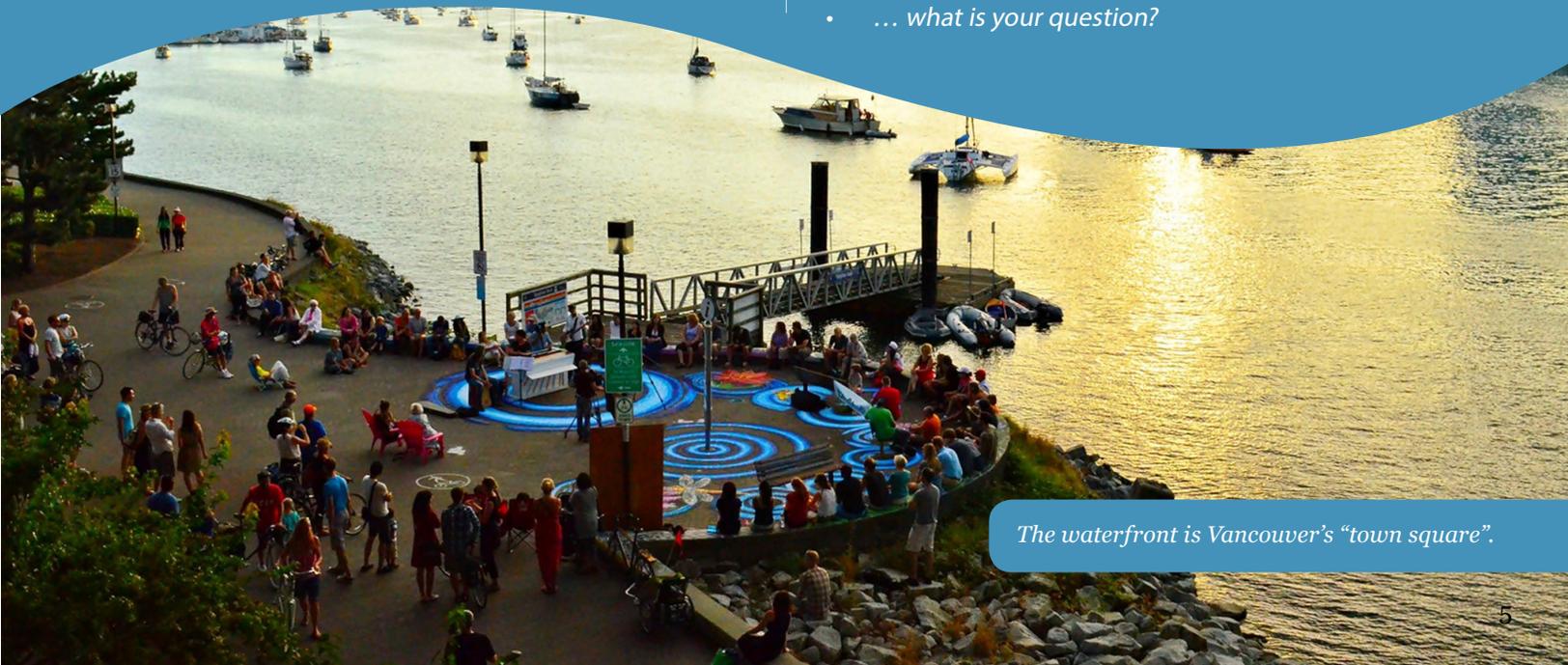
Vancouver is often rated as one of the most liveable cities in the world, and a key factor is the proximity to ocean and river.

Facts:

- Vancouver has 17 hectares of natural shoreline—that's equivalent to more than 100 hockey rinks. ⁵
- Every year, ca. 5.5 million people visit Vancouver's Seawall and beaches. ⁶
- 25,000 residents live within 300 meters of the shores. ⁵ From most places in the city, it takes a half-hour bus ride or less to get to the water.
- There are 16 million square feet of residential space on the shoreline. ⁵
- An additional 1 million people are projected to move into Metro Vancouver by 2040. ⁷
- A 2008 OECD report ranked Vancouver 15th out of 136 large port cities in terms of the value of assets exposed to sea level rise by 2040. ⁸

Questions:

- As a community, what do we need to keep in mind when addressing sea level rise?
- Which public infrastructure do we want to build on the waterfront? Parks, trails, playgrounds, public docks ... what else?
- How can we ensure public access to the water?
- What can we do to limit the environmental impact of our buildings and infrastructure on the ocean and river?
- How do we manage access to the shoreline in areas with industrial facilities?
- Do we want to extend the seawall or build more natural beach areas?
- How can we achieve great water quality along our entire waterfront?
- ... *what is your question?*



The waterfront is Vancouver's "town square".



... A Place to Work and Get Around ...

The waters and shores of Burrard Inlet, English Bay and the Fraser River have provided livelihoods and work for people since the beginnings of human settlement in the area. For those living here—First Nations and immigrants—the waterfront has always been a place to travel from place to place and to move goods around.

Using our urban shorelines for sustainable transportation and industries is important for a diverse, vibrant economy and for managing our community’s environmental footprint: Transportation by boat is many times more fuel-efficient than transportation on the road. And if industries stay on the waterfront, there is less need to get people to their jobs outside of the city and truck goods back in. The waterfront also offers many opportunities for jobs in “lighter” industries, including tourism and hospitality.

Facts:

- More than 6 million passengers use the Seabus to cross Burrard Inlet every year.⁹ The Aquabus and False Creek Ferries are highly popular transportation options among locals and visitors.
- The float plane and helicopter airport in Coal Harbour registers over 50,000 aircraft movements every year.¹⁰
- Over 800,000 cruise ship passengers visited Vancouver in 2013 and spent \$ 121 million.¹¹
- The Port of Metro Vancouver handles approximately 135 million tonnes of cargo every year.⁵
- A wide range of small and large businesses depend on the waterfront—from restaurants to cement plants and log booming grounds.

Questions:

- As a Community, how can we preserve space for industrial activities while property values are rapidly increasing?
- How can we use the shoreline better for short- and long-haul transportation?
- Which jobs will be tied to the waterfront in the future?
- What can shoreline industries do to become greener and protect our ocean and river environments?
- What types of industries are most compatible with ecosystems and communities that surround them?
- ... *what is your question?*

... And a Habitat We Share.

Ocean and river ecosystems are an important part of the natural environment in Vancouver—and a critical part of the health of Georgia Strait. Few large cities harbour such a diversity of habitats and species, including salmon, seals, bald eagles, and even the occasional visiting whale. Their well-being and survival depends on how we manage the relationship between our city and the ocean. Yet, we have very little hard data on the health of marine and river ecosystems in our city.

Facts:

- Vancouver's coastal waters are home to more than 1,200 species⁶, some of which are among the Salish Sea's 119 species at risk.
- Cetaceans have been seen off Vancouver's waterfront for five years in a row: a gray whale in 2010, killer whales in 2011, 2012, and 2013, and white sided dolphins in 2014.
- Burrard Inlet and English Bay are important habitats for over-wintering waterbirds, 34 species were counted in Stanley Park alone in 2014.¹²
- Vancouver Harbour used to be home to biologically productive eelgrass beds, a critical habitat for so called "forage fish", i.e. small fish that are an important food source for larger species.¹³
- A 2010 report by the Stanley Park Ecology Society noted that the park's aquatic ecosystems were declining and suffering from "unnatural water regimes, pollution, and invasive species."¹⁴
- There are still hundreds of incidences of untreated wastewater being discharged into Burrard Inlet every year.¹⁵
- High E.coli counts around False Creek forced the City to close beaches in 2014.

Questions:

- What do community and decision makers need to know about the city's marine ecosystems and our impact on them?
- Which areas are ecologically sensitive or culturally significant, where development and/or public access should be limited?
- What can be done to reduce water pollution from pesticides, toxic chemicals, fuel, and sewage?
- What contributions can cities make to protect marine species at risk?
- What can we do to restore shoreline habitat for the species that use it?
- How do we want to interact with nature in our parks?
- Should parts of our waterfront be "re-wilded", i.e. designed for nature rather than humans and accessible only from boardwalks and viewing platforms?
- Can sea level rise and climate change be an opportunity to rethink how we plan and manage our waterfronts?
- ... *what is your question?*



Who Plans for Vancouver's Waterfront?

Currently, there is no overarching plan in place for building a sustainable and prosperous waterfront in Vancouver. But who makes decisions about what is happening on the different parts of the City's shoreline?

The area where Vancouver is located is the traditional, unceded territory of the Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh First Nations. While these territories include much of the watersheds draining into Burrard Inlet and Howe Sound, the three First Nations administer and plan for their current Reserve Lands, many of which are situated on the waterfront. The Musqueam First Nation's [Comprehensive Sustainable Community Development Plan](#), for example, includes steps to pursue economic development and to protect land, ecosystems, salmon bearing streams and cultural sites on Reserve Lands and in areas within the traditional territory.

In addition to First Nations, municipal, regional, provincial and federal governments manage and plan for Vancouver's shoreline. A large part of Vancouver's shoreline falls within the jurisdiction of the City of Vancouver.

The City has direct influence on shaping the waterfront through the zoning by-laws that apply to lands under its jurisdiction. "Zoning" means that the City designates different types of lands, on which specific uses and buildings are permitted, such as residential or industrial lands. The city can also determine what can be shipped from these lands, although its decisions do not apply to land administered by the Port.

Vancouver is located on the traditional unceded territories of the Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh First Nations.

Important documents for waterfront planning are the City's community plans, which exist for all Vancouver neighbourhoods. Vancouver's [Climate Change Adaptation Strategy](#) also touches upon many shoreline-related questions.

The regional government of Metro Vancouver manages areas like Pacific Spirit Park, which surrounds the UBC Endowment Lands. Documents and projects relevant for the waterfront include Metro's [Regional Parks Plan](#) and the [Experience the Fraser](#) project.



The [Regional Growth Strategy](#) also has implications for waterfront planning as it includes goals to further a sustainable economy and “employment close to where people live,” environmental protection and climate change adaptation.

The Province of British Columbia administers Crown land. Its role on the Vancouver waterfront has recently become more prominent because of the Port’s decision not to renew its head lease for Provincial areas on the Fraser River. As a result, the Ministry of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations is taking over the role of a landlord for approximately 360 tenures, including a wide variety of community, commercial and industrial users, marinas, log storage, and float homes.

The Port of Metro Vancouver’s jurisdiction covers more than 600 km of shoreline in the region. Accountable to the Federal Minister of Transport, the Port’s mandate is to facilitate international trade and manage the movement of goods and people on the region’s waterways.

While the Port’s authority technically begins at the high-watermark, it also manages several upland areas. These lands are not always restricted to industrial uses: for example, the Port leased the land that hosts Crab Park to the City of Vancouver.

The most important planning tool for the parts of the waterfront under Port jurisdiction is the Port’s Land Use Plan, a [“living document and decision framework to manage the growth and development of port land and waters for the next 15-20 years.”](#)

Finally, the Federal Government’s Fisheries and Oceans Department together with Transport Canada regulate what is happening on the water as it relates to safe naval traffic (including the operations of the Canadian Coast Guard) as well as the protection of marine environments, and the conservation and use of saltwater and freshwater fisheries. For example, Fisheries and Oceans Canada is generally responsible for reviewing projects near the waters of Burrard Inlet and the Fraser for their impact on fish.



Several different government bodies regulate what is happening on the waterfront.

About Georgia Strait Alliance's Waterfront Initiative

Georgia Strait Alliance is an environmental charity that has been working to protect the waters of the Strait for almost 25 years. Since many of the problems we see in the ocean—such as critical habitat loss, pollution from sewage, contaminated storm water runoff, industrial discharges—can be traced back to major urban centres, we believe that we need to start managing our cities and their waterfronts in a more balanced and sustainable way.

The Waterfront Initiative provides a forum for all stakeholders and citizens to come together to envision what a sustainable and prosperous shoreline can look like, and to develop an action plan with measurable objectives to get us there. The Initiative is independent, non-partisan and guided by the [principles of collaboration, accountability, inclusion, and engagement](#).

The Waterfront Network is open to everyone and includes representatives from all levels of government, as well as broad and growing representation from the private sector and civil society. Participants include Tsleil-Waututh Nation, City of Vancouver, Port Metro Vancouver, Tourism Vancouver, Stanley Park Ecology Society, Stewardship Centre for BC, Vancouver Maritime Museum, Light House Sustainable Building Centre and many others.

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Appendix

Notes

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