



Planning for the Shoreline

A Summary of the roundtable discussion at Georgia Strait Alliance's second

Waterfront Forum

June 23, 2014

SFU Harbour Centre

Vancouver, BC



Georgia Strait Alliance
Caring for Our Coastal Waters

Planning for the Shoreline

Georgia Strait Alliance's (GSA) 2nd Waterfront Forum took a closer look at how Vancouver's waterfront is governed, and explored opportunities to work together on planning its future. The conversation highlighted the need for collaboration on harmonizing and integrating different uses of the shoreline and managing economic growth in a sustainable way: from preserving industrial lands to responding to the cumulative effects of our activities on the waterfront.

What is the waterfront? How do you define it?—GSA's Waterfront Initiative is finding answers to these questions as we develop a vision and action plan to protect, restore and revitalize Vancouver's shoreline together with partners and stakeholders. The Initiative looks at the vital role our urban waterfront plays for people, the economy and ecosystems in the city. To achieve this, we have to take into account the processes that go on beyond and below the high-tide line. And we also have to take into account what is happening on the uplands adjacent to the shore.


Because the Waterfront Initiative is taking a broader view on how we use, protect and improve the waterfront, we are not just looking at the geographical features or the pieces of physical infrastructure that mark the water's edge—we are looking more generally at the zone where land and ocean meet.

But how is the interface between land and water regulated? And what plans do we have in place for it?

GSA's second Waterfront Forum on June 23rd, 2014 focused on shedding light on this question to map out "the lay of the land" on the waterfront and provide a basis for an informed dialogue.

How is the interface between land and water regulated? And what plans do we have in place for it?

More than thirty representatives from government, industry and civil society came together to engage in a conversation with three roundtable speakers from government agencies involved in shoreline planning: Alec Drysdale, Director of Resource Operations at the BC Ministry of Forests, Lands and Resource Operations, Carrie Brown, Director Environmental Programs at Port Metro Vancouver, and Jim Bailey, Senior Planner at the City of Vancouver.



The Waterfront Initiative is an invitation to work together to all organizations with a connection to the shoreline.

Multiple Jurisdictions on the Waterfront

City, Province and Port make decisions based on their mandates, their long-term strategies, and their respective jurisdiction. Through its zoning process, the City probably has the most direct influence on shaping Vancouver's shoreline. As Jim Bailey explained, the City is committed to the goals for economic growth, livability and sustainability set out in the Greater Vancouver Region's Growth Strategy, and it works towards achieving these goals through its zoning policies and the review of development applications.

Reserving land for industry along the shore in order to accommodate economic growth is a major focus of the City's planning for the waterfront. The other main focus is enabling public access to the water. Bailey stressed the need to stop seeing industrial development and environmental protection as opposites. "We need to ask what we can do to reconcile the two," he emphasized, and cited the City's effort to do so in its work on a [community plan for Marpole](#), a neighbourhood that encompasses a large chunk of Vancouver's Fraser River waterfront.

Ensuring public access and reserving industrial lands are two focuses of waterfront planning at the City.

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

While the Port's authority begins at the high-watermark, the Federal Government has given it several upland areas for its operations. As Carrie Brown explained, these areas are not always restricted to industrial uses: for example, the Port leased the land that is home to Crab Park to the City of Vancouver.

The Port's jurisdiction covers more than 600 km of shoreline in the region.

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](#)."

The Port's vision includes a strong commitment to growth—and growth creates the need for development on the shore. At the same time, Carrie Brown pointed out that the Port is expecting growing pressure from increasing urbanization, expanding natural resource markets and rising consumer demands.

Brown stressed that the Port is looking to collaborate with other levels of government, civil society and the private sector to find ways of managing the growth of its operations in a sustainable way.

Alec Drysdale (Province), Carrie Brown (Port Metro Vancouver) and Jim Bailey (City of Vancouver) spoke at the 2nd Waterfront Forum.



For example, she explained in response to a question from another participant that not everything the Port builds is a dock or an armoured shore. The Port is looking at opportunities to build softer profiles where possible, i.e. where seismic and other risk factors allow.

The Province administers Crown land. Its role on the Vancouver waterfront has recently become more prominent because of the Port's decision not to renew

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its head lease for Provincial waters 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 Province does not pro-actively plan the allocation of tenures on Crown land, but rather responds to requests by individuals, local governments and businesses interested in using Crown land. Part of the decision making process involves considering relevant by-laws and zoning policies of local governments, as well as input from authorities such as the Port. Alec Drysdale stressed that the public always has an opportunity to comment on any Crown land proposal. The ministry works, he explained, to mitigate conflict between parties interested in the development or use of Crown land, and makes decisions based on social, environmental and economic considerations, as well as First Nation interest

Opportunities for Collaboration

What became clear during the conversation is that while there are plans in place at different levels of government, what happens—or doesn't happen—on the shoreline, depends to a large extent on the applications that are submitted for approval.

The opportunity brought by the Waterfront Initiative is that a collaborative effort to create a plan for the shoreline would help make the review and approval processes at different levels of government mutually supportive towards achieving the goals set out in the plan.

Second, an integrated plan for the shoreline would inform how approved projects are implemented. As Alec Drysdale pointed out, conditions that are placed on projects can be used to work towards specific planning goals: "This is where we need input and collaboration."

Finally, a vision and plan for the entire waterfront would help invite innovative applications that try to reconcile industrial development and environmental protection as well as other uses of the shoreline.

The question of the cumulative effects of all our activities on the shore, which was brought up during the conversation, would also best be addressed with the help of an integrated plan for the shoreline. Currently, cumulative impacts are considered in the review processes for larger projects, but not specifically for smaller applications.

The Question of Data and Monitoring

Good planning and effective implementation always hinge on the quality of the knowledge and evidence it is based on. The conversation at the Forum indicated that there is a wealth of accessible information about the waterfront, our uses and their impacts. However, we currently don't have a way or mechanism to use all this information to protect, restore and revitalize the urban waterfront. The conversation underlined the need to better leverage available data and fill existing gaps to identify emerging trends, issues or challenges on the shoreline.

Several participants pointed out the vacuum in the area of monitoring and reporting that was left behind by the discontinuation of the Burrard Inlet Environmental Action Program (BIEAP) and the Fraser River Estuary Management Program (FREMP).

FREMP, for example, provided a mapping tool that was important for habitat management and restoration in relation to Port activities. For the time being, the Port is filling the role previously played by the BIEAP-FREMP office, but, as Brown explained, is looking to relinquish this responsibility in the long-term.

A central part of Georgia Strait Alliance's Waterfront Initiative is to increase our understanding of the shoreline and measure progress towards a sustainable and resilient waterfront in Vancouver. The conversation at the 2nd Waterfront Forum underlined the relevance of this goal and our plan to produce the first State of the Waterfront Report over the coming year together with our growing Network of partners. The report will provide a base-line assessment of the situation on the shoreline and a set of indicators to measure progress in the future.

Moving Forward

The 2nd Waterfront Forum was another step in the ongoing process of developing a vision and a plan for Vancouver's shoreline. Over the summer of 2014, Georgia Strait Alliance is reaching out to the public to engage them in the conversation about our waterfront. We want to hear what the shoreline means to citizens and what their hopes and ideas are for its future. This outreach will culminate at the Water's Edge Day on October 5th, a celebration of the waterfront hosted at the Vancouver Maritime Museum that will offer citizens a range of exciting activities to explore and learn about the shore.

At our next Waterfront Forum in early 2015, we will start forming working groups to develop the Waterfront Agenda and Action Plan and inform the production of the State of the Waterfront Report.

If you and your organization are interested in the Waterfront Initiative and would like to get involved, please contact our Waterfront Initiative Lead Sebastian Merz at sebastian@georgiastrait.org, 604-633-0530.



GSA has reached out—and continues to reach out—to a broad network of organizations and individuals to engage them in the Waterfront Initiative. Below is a list of organizations who were able to participate in our second Waterfront Forum:

British Columbia Ministry of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations
Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation - Granville Island
City of Vancouver
City of Vancouver Park Board
Ecomarine Paddlesport Centres
Fraser Basin Council
Fraser Riverkeeper
Hemmera
International Longshore and Warehouse Union
Lehigh Hanson/Ocean Concrete
Metro Vancouver
Port Metro Vancouver

PWL Partnership
Rivershed Society of British Columbia
Simon Fraser University
Stanley Park Ecology Society
Stewardship Centre for BC
Surfrider Foundation
Tourism Vancouver
Tsleil-Waututh Nation
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