



**Date:** May 12, 2011  
**To:** Hal Ferris, Chair  
Planning Commission  
**From:** Faith Roland, Chair  
Parks & Community Services Board  
**Subject:** Shoreline Master Program Comment Letter

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the draft Shoreline Master Program. Development Services staff attended our meetings in April and May to provide information on the update process. Upon review of the draft policies, the Parks & Community Services Board offers three overarching principles for the Planning Commission to use as it considers regulations impacting public access, shoreline recreation and open space uses. Additionally, the Board provides specific draft policy modifications for your consideration that support these principles.

**The SMP should support the City's long-standing policy of increasing public access to the shoreline and preserving open space.**

The city's first park acquisitions in the 1950's were shoreline parks. Since that time, acquisition and development of shoreline and wetland parks has remained a top priority. The 2010 Parks & Open Space System Plan, as adopted by the City Council, calls for continued waterfront, wetland and stream-side acquisition for the next 20 years to increase access for all Bellevue residents and preserve unique and valuable open space. Public access can be improved by maintaining and improving public view corridors<sup>1</sup> and improving directional signage to existing facilities. Further, and in combination with the above, requiring major private redevelopments to design for public view and access can assist in reaching the Shoreline Management Act's public access goal.

**The SMP should recognize that parks use a small percentage of Bellevue's overall shoreline to serve all Bellevue residents. To accommodate demand, intense use of the shoreline is often necessary.**

Bellevue's waterfront parks are highly used facilities. Less than 4% of residential lots in Bellevue front water. The vast majority of Bellevue residents consider Bellevue parks their waterfront property. Bellevue's population of 122,000 has access to approximately 12% (1.7 miles) of Bellevue's shoreline in the form of public parks. The high demand on these facilities is reflected in a 2009 statistically significant survey of Bellevue residents finding that 69% of Bellevue residents visit a community beach, waterfront park or boat launch at least twice every year. Almost 40% visit six or more times per year.

**The SMP should allow a balance of public access, ecological restoration and historic and cultural preservation and restrict uses in shoreline and wetland parks that do not advance these interests.**

The 2009 Bellevue resident survey referenced above found that Bellevue residents express a strong desire for the City to continue to develop waterfront parks and boat launches, improve the ecological function of forests, wetlands, lakes and streams and preserve

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<sup>1</sup> A concept supported by draft policy SH-43

historical structures and heritage sites. The City has been able to make this balance under the existing SMP and seeks to continue under the new regulations. Consider the following from the 2010 Parks & Open Space System Plan:

Mercer Slough Nature Park is an excellent example of parkland serving multiple functions. It offers trails for pedestrians and bicyclists and waterways for canoes and kayaks. The wetlands and waterways of Mercer Slough provide habitat for more than 160 different species of wildlife, including heron, beaver, and salmon. A sense of Bellevue's historical and cultural heritage is preserved at the historic Winters House and through the continuing agricultural practices of farming blueberries in the park. In addition, the Pacific Science Center offers environmental education programs at the Mercer Slough Environmental Education Center. Added to this, the Slough provides immense benefits in stormwater detention, water quality filtering and carbon emission capture and storage.

To aid in aligning the draft SMP policies to the above principles, the Parks & Community Services Board recommends the following draft policy modifications. The first recommended modification adds weight to the community's priority of creating additional public access and more directly transfers the meaning and intent of existing SMP Policy SH-21 into the revised policy set.

#### **General Policies**

**SH-18.** Provide Encourage acquisition and development of additional public or community access consistent with the existing character of the shoreline, the scale or type of development, and in full consideration of the impact on ecological function.

The second recommended modification broadens the scope of the policy to address a wider variety of water-oriented recreation activities.

#### **Recreation Use Policies**

**SH-63.** Encourage existing recreation facilities to provide as appropriate, access to a variety of public water-enjoyment activities including but not limited to non-motorized boat launching facilities. Require new recreation facilities to provide as appropriate, access to a variety of public water-enjoyment activities including but not limited to public non-motorized boat launching facilities where feasible.

The third recommended modification adds a new policy that encourages higher utilization of existing shoreline recreation resources by better directing residents to their location through signage.

#### **Sign Policies**

**SH XX(new):** To promote and facilitate public enjoyment of the waterfront, encouraging signage and wayfinding techniques to direct individuals to public access points from nearby streets and trails.