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City of Blaine, Washington
TOURISM MARKETING & DEVELOPMENT PLAN

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Introduction and purpose

The City of Blaine has retained our services to create a tourism development and three-year marketing plan for the city. This plan has been developed from research including:

- Visitor Assessment (non-professional assessment)
- Professional Tourism Assessment
- Several dozen interviews
- Review of local documentation including
 - Lodging tax revenues and expenditures
 - City of Blaine Comprehensive Plan
 - Blaine Strategic Retail Development Plan
 - Blaine Design Guidelines and Sign Ordinance Supplement
 - Blaine Harbor's Development Plan

Tourism is Washington's fastest growing industry generating \$10 billion in travel spending in 1999 and employing more than 126,800 full-time workers. Since 1991, travel spending in Washington has grown 4.7 percent annually, nearly twice the rate of inflation.

Whatcom county ranks fifth of the 39 Washington counties in terms of visitor spending at \$278 million in 1999. The industry employs 4,080 workers throughout the county. Visitors staying in commercial accommodations such as hotels, motels and bed & breakfast establishments spent more than all other types of visitors.

Blaine generates approximately 20% of the county's tourism spending, primarily on the shoulders of Semiahmoo. Bellingham generates approximately 60% of the county's spending and the other cities and unincorporated areas account for the remaining 20%. Based on lodging revenues, tourism spending in Blaine is approximately \$24 million annually.

Purpose of the plan

The purpose of this development and marketing plan is to provide the City of Blaine and its business community with a step-by-step guide to further developing the industry in terms of attractions (things to see and do), amenities, infrastructure and marketing.

The plan also includes a look at Blaine's lodging tax revenues and expenditures over the last three years with recommendations for marketing and development over the next three years.

Nearly every idea and recommendations made in this Tourism Plan originated with the people of Blaine. There have been hundreds of excellent ideas and it has been our mission to find those that can actually be fulfilled and will create the greatest return on the city's (and Port, and Trillium Corporation's) investments. Finally, we have developed a plan that can actually be implemented. It will take a number of years, but Blaine, with some patience, will be a much stronger community and will have an outstanding tourism program in place.

History of the area

For thousands of years, the Semiahmoo Indians lived on the shoreline from Birch Bay to Blaine and some distance inland. The local rivers, forests, and the Sound provided them with a good living, harvesting fish, shellfish and wild plants and animals. They lived in cedar framed houses covered with hand-split cedar planks, traveling in dugout canoes.

When Captain George Vancouver anchored his ships in Birch Bay in 1792, he sent rowboats out to chart the territory. His purpose was to strengthen Great Britain's claims on the Northwest, and weaken the claims of Russia and Spain.

Settlers first came to Blaine in 1856, when the US Boundary Survey Commission arrived to survey the 49th parallel. The Fraser River gold rush brought an influx of settlers in 1858, creating a short-lived boom-town. When the Commission completed its work, and it became necessary for prospectors to get a license in Victoria to pan for gold, the town became deserted. In 1870 the revised Homestead Act permitted twice as much land per claim, and settlers once again moved into the Blaine area.

In 1870 three families made the journey to Semiahmoo in search of claims. They were the Bobletts, the Richards, and the Dexters. Before building their own homes, they shared one of the abandoned houses left from the gold rush boom times. Much of the original townsite of Blaine had been the homesteaded 155 acres of the Cains, who had arrived in 1871. They platted the townsite from the border to H Street, and from Sixth Street to the waterfront. They encouraged settlement of the town, and ran a general store, the first newspaper, a shingle mill, and built a 36 room hotel.

Blaine grew into a thriving town, becoming a dairy supply center and a fishing port. According to the 1900 federal census, Blaine's population was 1,563. By 1908, it was estimated that the population had grown to nearly 4,000. Blaine bustled with commerce: five canneries, three lumber mills, three shingle mills, an oyster industry, a crab cannery, and another eight shingle mills nearby. Freight trains, cargo ships, steamships, and schooners all provided transportation for the many goods produced in Blaine. There was a small fishing fleet, and a ferry that operated between Blaine and the Semiahmoo spit.

The powerful Alaska Packers Association purchased some of the canneries on the spit in 1894. Most of the workers were housed in bunkhouses near the canneries, returning home on their days off. They traveled by ferry across the spit to Blaine when they wanted to go "into town."

With the increasing traffic in the harbor, in 1905 the U.S. Government installed a lighthouse in Semiahmoo Harbor. It was replaced by a pyramidal light station in 1944, and again replaced in 1971 by a light and daymark.

In 1920 construction began on the "Peace Arch" sculpture, which commemorates the Treaty of Ghent in 1814 and the Rush-Bagot Agreement of 1817 between England and the United States. These agreements, resulting from the war of 1812, provided for an unguarded US/Canadian

History of the area

border from the Bay of Fundy to the Strait of Juan de Fuca. Industrialist Sam Hill had the inspiration for the “Peace Arch,” and now Peace Arch State and Provincial Park straddles the border, signifying the goodwill between the two countries. The 67-foot jointly maintained arch was completed in 1921, and bears the inscriptions: “Children of a Common Mother” and “Brothers Dwelling Together in Unity.”

Poor salmon runs in Puget Sound and the Fraser River led to canning operations closing down at Semiahmoo in 1965. Machinery repair and scow maintenance continued, as did use of the vast warehouses for storing canned salmon. By 1975, however, the office of the Alaska Packers Association moved to Bellevue, and the salmon storage was transferred to Vancouver, Washington, leaving the entire site on the spit available for sale. The Trillium Corporation of Bellingham purchased the property in 1980, leased part of the site to Atlas Hotels in 1985 to build the four star hotel, The Inn at Semiahmoo, and developed 900 acres into lots for homes, an Arnold Palmer golf course, and condominiums.

Today all of the original mills and canneries have long been closed. The old APA bunkhouses have been moved to a Whatcom County Park right at the neck of the spit, where visitors can explore them. The Inn at Semiahmoo is a thriving resort. Retail, trade, fishing, fish processing, and tourism are the city’s primary economic activities, supporting a population of approximately 3,575. Because of the quality of life, the beautiful surroundings, and the proximity to large potential markets, it is anticipated that the population of Blaine will increase to approximately 5,800 by 2010.

The primary industry in Blaine is tourism, primarily due to the development of Semiahmoo Resort and its neighboring golf course community. Second to tourism is retail sales and services which has decreased from a peak of \$43 million in 1992 to \$29 million in 1997, adjusted for inflation.

Retail overview

Blaine's share of county retail sales declined from 2.5% in 1992 to 1.5% in 1997.

These trends occurred for several reasons including:

- A decline in the purchasing power of the Canadian dollar. This effect was compounded because a large amount of retail development in Blaine and other parts of Whatcom County was designed to attract Canadians.
- Other Whatcom County retailers (especially in Lynden and Ferndale, as well as in Bellingham and the unincorporated county) have redesigned and restructured their retail sector and have become more competitive with Blaine merchants. Bellis Fair Mall is a good example. Because of these shifts, Blaine is seeing a tremendous amount of retail "leakage" – residents spending money outside of their community. Additionally, Blaine has not been able to take advantage of the 25,000 visitors who cross the border each day.
- British Columbia retailers have also restructured and become more competitive, especially with respect to sales and gas stations and convenience stores. Additionally, the low Canadian dollar is attracting more U.S. purchases of general merchandise in Canada.
- Blaine's commercial retail space in the downtown core has an extraordinarily high vacancy rate. Numerous neighborhood retail establishments (retail primarily appealing to local residents) have moved to the new mall on the eastside while other visitor oriented businesses have simply ceased to operate due to the decline in retail spending in the area.
- There are a number of closed gas stations, caused by the drop in the Canadian dollars some years ago.

Lodging overview

Lodging revenues in Blaine have increased an average of 5.5% annually from 1995 through 1997, above the state's average. However, over the past two years (1998, 1999), Blaine's lodging revenues have been relatively flat with an average increase of just 1.25%, far below the state's average increases in lodging revenues. Bellingham, by comparison has increased by an average of 3.7% over the past five years.

- Blaine, however, has been keeping pace with lodging revenues throughout the county and is not losing market share with any local communities except Bellingham. This is primarily true

Situation analysis

because Blaine has no mid to upper priced accommodations between that of Semiahmoo and the current lodging offered in downtown Blaine. This market now stays in Bellingham where there are numerous accommodations that fill this gap.

- Blaine is home to 291 lodging rooms in 8 facilities. While Semiahmoo includes 68% of the total rooms, it generates more than 90% of all lodging revenues. In can be said that as Semiahmoo goes, so does Blaine, in terms of visitor spending.

Tourism

- Blaine is fortunate to have three primary tourism draws: Semiahmoo Resort, Blaine Harbor Marina and its water-based activities, and the city's proximity to the Canadian border crossing which sees 9.3 million travelers annually.
- One of the most popular visitor activities is shopping and dining in a pedestrian setting. While Blaine and the Port of Bellingham (which owns Blaine's marina) have invested heavily in infrastructure improvements, the city is very underserved in terms of retail shopping and dining.
- Currently, visitors to Blaine, and in particular, Semiahmoo do most of their shopping and dining on the premises or in neighboring communities of White Rock (B.C.), Ferndale, Lynden, and Bellingham. Nearly a third of downtown Blaine's retail storefronts are vacant as are several prime commercial lots.

Lodging tax expenditures

- The City of Blaine currently collects a 2% lodging tax (part of the state sales tax paid on overnight accommodations) and a 1% add-on tax. The tax generates approximately \$185,000 annually. Revenues in 1999 were up 3.7% over the previous year.

In 2000 the city will have "invested" these revenues as follows:

• Events	\$59,978	38%
• Visitor Info Ctr.	48,500	31%
• Plover operations	25,608	16%
• Bham/Whatcom CVB	14,000	9%
• City mgmt. of fund	<u>2,750</u>	6%
• Total expenditures:	\$157,836	100% of expenditures

At the end of 2000 the lodging tax fund will have a carryforward balance of approximately \$50,000.

As part of this tourism plan, these expenditures have been closely examined to determine return on investment and the fit for each expenditure in Blaine's long term tourism development efforts.

Situation analysis

Real estate sales

Both the commercial and residential real estate markets are relatively flat. On the commercial side, there are many downtown vacancies, undeveloped land and abandoned gas stations. In speaking with numerous local real estate agents, the cause stemmed from the weak Canadian dollar, the move of some businesses over to the new mall, the higher than market expectations of absentee land and building owners and a perceived challenge of high hook up fees. Additionally, in the past, there has been a perceived lack of support by the city to recruit new business, lack of development of incentives for new projects, and a reluctance to work with and address developer's challenges. There have been several changes at the city level, which seem much more beneficial to working with new development interests.

On the residential side, sales and development were considered just fair. Blaine's new residential street improvement program seems to be providing the incentive for local residences to improve their properties and there is hope that this is the first step towards a more positive market.

Infrastructure

Over the past several years, the City of Blaine and the Port of Bellingham have invested heavily in infrastructure improvements to spur economic growth of the area. The Port has invested approximately \$16 million in the Blaine Harbor marina area including new docks, dockside facilities, beautification, and new parking lots. The marina now offers 700 moorage slips and is running at nearly an 80% occupancy rate.

There is still other infrastructure work to be done in Blaine. In order for tourism to flourish, Marine Drive will need major repairs, pathways need to be developed to the pier and along Marine Drive, and the damaged sidewalks and footings along Peace Portal Way will need major repairs. The boardwalk and Millennium Trail projects could fulfill several of these needs.

Summary

In summary, Blaine and the Port have come a long way in developing a downtown core and marina, in terms of infrastructure, that will provide the basis for future development - particularly tourism-related projects. But before Blaine can attract visitors for even short stays, it will need to recruit numerous retail businesses, additional dining venues, and attractions (things to see and do) that will keep visitors in the community for extended periods.

The first objective will be to provide a reason for visitors to stop, even for short periods. With the gradual growth of retail, dining, attractions, and amenities, Blaine has tremendous potential for capturing multi-day visitors.

*E*xecutive summary

Blaine is a city that has tremendous potential for a thriving tourism industry, but that potential has not been realized. Over the past several years the city and Port of Bellingham have invested more than \$18 million in infrastructure improvements which have included Marine Park, new downtown streets and sidewalks, decorative street lighting, substantial beautification efforts, numerous marina improvements including new docks, lighting, parking, and new dockside facilities.

These infrastructure improvements have set the stage for an aggressive economic development program, which includes tourism development and promotion.

Blaine's potential for tourism stems from three primary assets which set the city apart from competing communities in the region:

1. The city's location at the Canadian border, its location adjacent to Drayton Harbor with outstanding views of the harbor and the marina from its "main street," Peace Portal Way. Blaine's "ambiance," with some refinements creates tremendous potential for tourism development and marketing. Water-based activities offer tremendous tourism potential including kayaking, a ride on the historic Plover, sailing and powerboat charters, fishing, wildlife viewing, etc.
2. The city is situated on the Canadian border with more than 9.3 million annual visitors passing through the city via Interstate 5. Millions of travelers sit in line at the border crossing just a matter of feet from downtown Blaine. This provides a tremendous potential base from which to draw from.
3. Semiahmoo Resort and golf course provide one of, if not the, largest tourism draw in North-west Washington. Semiahmoo attracts upscale visitors with tremendous spending capacity, the resort continues to invest heavily in advertising and publicity, has a full-time communications and sales staff, and has plans for future additional development.

What Blaine is lacking are things to see and do – particularly attractions, shopping, and additional dining establishments. Without sufficient activities, tourism promotion and advertising are largely wasted. The goal of any successful tourism program is to get visitors to spend the night. Overnight guests typically spend four to five times that of day visitors. Blaine also needs mid-priced upscale lodging to fill the gap between Semiahmoo and other Blaine lodging establishments.

However, the first step for Blaine is to pull travelers from I-5 even for short periods. The use of public restrooms, for instance, is a viable reason for travelers to visit Blaine. But once the visitors are in Blaine, in order to gain a benefit, there must be activities that will encourage them to spend time and money in the city. The two most popular visitor activities are shopping and dining in a pedestrian-oriented setting. Other activities include cultural arts and educational exhibits (interpretive centers, museums, galleries, etc.)

Executive summary

The types of projects Blaine needs in order to develop a successful tourism industry include:

- Public parking
- Public restrooms
- Visitor information center in the downtown core area
- Pedestrian access between the marina and downtown
- Places to enjoy the vistas
- A major indoor-oriented attraction (or attractions)
- Additional and improved directional signage
- Shops: antiques, gifts, galleries, collectibles, clothing, etc.
- A theme: whether architectural or activity driven
- Additional view lodging
- Additional activities and themed events

With regards to marketing, Blaine has the following needs:

- A professionally designed and produced brochure
- An effective distribution program
- Professional photo library and press kit
- An attractive and effective tourism website
- Limited print advertising in annual publications

Implementation of this plan relies heavily on lodging tax revenues. The following are the projected revenues used as a basis for the recommendations made herein.

Revenue projections

2001		
2% basic lodging tax	\$126,116	2% over 1999 actual receipts
1% add-on tax	63,058	Already in place
1% add-on tax	<u>0</u>	Implemented beginning 1/1/2002
Total projected revenues:	\$189,174	

In order to secure the additional 1% add-on tax, the city would need to implement it in the summer of 2001 so that the Washington Dept. of Revenue has time to notify all lodging establishments of its need to collect the tax beginning January 1, 2002.

2002		
2% basic lodging tax	\$130,530	3-1/2% over 2001 estimate
2% add-on tax	<u>130,530</u>	
Total projected revenues:	\$261,060	
2003		
2% basic lodging tax	\$138,362	6% increase over 2002 estimate
2% add-on tax	138,362	
Additional revenues.....	<u>35,000</u>	New hotel (60 rooms @ 50% occupancy)
Total projected revenues:	\$311,724	

Executive summary

Expenditures overview

The following is an overview of how the funds would be spent. Complete budgets can be found on pages 92 through 96.

2001

Marketing, advertising, collateral materials.....	\$77,500
Event promotion	15,500
Visitor information center, distribution, website updates	49,300
Plover funding	25,000
Capital projects	40,000
Fund administration	<u>5,000</u>
 Total expenditures:	 \$212,300
Ending fund balance	\$26,874

2002

Marketing, advertising, collateral materials.....	\$47,400
Event promotion	20,000
Visitor information center	49,300
Plover funding	25,000
Capital projects	<u>125,000</u>
 Total expenditures:	 \$266,700
Ending fund balance	\$21,234

2003

Marketing, advertising, collateral materials.....	\$77,100
Event promotion	15,000
Visitor information center/chamber	49,500
Plover funding	25,000
Capital projects	<u>135,000</u>
 Total expenditures:	 \$306,600
Ending fund balance	26,358

The following pages outline the various recommendations made in this plan. They have been divided by categories as follows:

- Visitor services
- Program management
- Beautification
- Regulatory changes
- Annual programs
- Events
- Capital projects/improvements
- Joint projects with the Port
- Marketing
- Administration
- Funding

Executive summary

VISITOR SERVICES

1. Chamber operate VIC

Once the Welcome Center is open, (a capital project - item #23 on page 18) we recommend that management of the visitor information center and restroom facilities be managed by the Chamber of Commerce in exchange for rent-free use of the space. The city would continue to fund the operation, but by removing the day-to-day operation, it will allow city staff to concentrate on the development of other recommended projects.

2. Expanded passenger ferry service

In 2001 the city will begin a revitalized marketing program designed to bring visitors to Blaine year round, with an emphasis on the spring and fall months. The Plover will be heavily promoted, and so we hope that the Plover organization will be willing to expand its services to weekends in April, May, September and October - particularly in 2002 and following years.

Over time, we hope the Plover will be able to operate nearly year round. We recommend the Plover receive continued funding of \$25,000 per year from the city's lodging tax revenues, and we also recommend that the Plover charge a crossing fee of \$1 to 2. The Plover currently receives donations that average approximately 75¢ per passenger.

We also support the proposed concept to expand passenger ferry service between Semiahmoo, Blaine, and White Rock, including acquisition of a larger (50 to 100 person) ferry to handle the weather and demand.

PROGRAM MANAGEMENT

3. Parks Board beautification

We understand that the city's Parks Board already provides services with regards to beautification projects. We recommend that this committee be called on to steer and implement the beautification efforts detailed in this plan. The city has come a long way over the past few years in terms of beautification, and the recommendations here will enhance that work even further.

4. Arts Commission

We recommend that the City assist in the creation of an Arts Commission (a not-for-profit organization as opposed to city staff) which would be charged with developing the theme, working with the Parks Board, Public Works and the City Parks Department in developing exhibitions and sculpture gardens.

We have recommended that the Arts Commission organization be funded \$25,500 in 2001, \$40,000 in 2002, and \$47,000 in 2003. In subsequent years, the Commission would receive approximately \$45,000 a year from lodging tax revenues.

The Arts Commission would also seek other funding so that a full-time Director could be hired and put in place to develop the theme, continue the current Peace Arch exhibition, and create new multi-day events around the theme.

Executive summary

5. Top Dog Committee

Blaine needs to take a leadership position in promoting itself and creating even better relationships with key stakeholders such as the Port and Trillium Corporation.

We recommend that the City Manager create and host a monthly meeting with Jim Darling (Port of Bellingham), the mayor of Blaine, a Trillium Corporation executive, Blaine's economic development representative, and perhaps a representative of the Discovery Center project. This monthly meeting would be to discuss how to make things happen. Burlington Northern should also be brought to the table to discuss its future plans, and developments which it will affect.

BEAUTIFICATION

6. Beautification/Cleanup

Blaine should be a showcase community for the U.S. and for Washington, "The Evergreen State." While Peace Arch Park and downtown Blaine are beautiful, this effort needs to be expanded to include the exit areas, particularly Exit 276 northbound and the southbound exit at the border crossing. All exits into Blaine should be mowed year round, trash removed, and seasonal color planted. Attractive exits will portray Blaine as an inviting community, pulling people into the city.

While beautification efforts may seem a waste by some people, we have found that the most successful communities – in terms of quality of life, tourism, and economic development – have strong beautification programs.

We recommend that the city volunteer to take responsibility from the Washington Dept. of Transportation (DOT) and, working with volunteer groups, adopt the exits and maintain them as beautiful entrances to the City of Blaine. Nearly every visitor who passes through Blaine will judge the "book" by its cover and so this is an important project.

7. Removal of blighted facilities

We recommend the city encourage or assist land owners with the demolition of the existing Gull station and removal of the chain link fencing next to the vacant pizza restaurant located at the corner of F Street and Peace Portal way. These two projects give Blaine a black eye in terms of appeal, and make the city look like one that's in a major recession. There are several avenues that can be pursued to bring these properties into an improved status.

8. Peace Portal Way sidewalks

We recommend that the city work with land owners to secure the foundation and bulkheads for city sidewalks along Peace Portal Way. Perhaps a business improvement district (BID) should be established to provide a funding mechanism for the repair of these walkways which will be important to increased pedestrian traffic downtown as well as improving downtown's visual appeal.

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9. Removal of Anchor Inn sign

While the Anchor Inn Motel sign may be grandfathered in, we recommend it be removed from its current location along Peace Portal Way. This is one of the more scenic drives in Washington and should provide unobstructed views of the bay. The sign does little to promote the motel. However, perhaps the city would consider granting a variance (no off premise signs should be allowed) if the owner would remove the sign and place a smaller painted (matching the theme) sign at approximately 5' from ground level (viewing height for motorists).

REGULATORY CHANGES

10. Allow sandwich boards

We recommend the city allow sandwich boards with specific standards that will fit the theme. Only one board per business should be allowed and the signage should be taken inside when the business is not open.

11. Perpendicular signage

The city should encourage painted perpendicular signage at a uniform height and size. Visitors see perpendicular signage and will often miss storefront signage. Many examples are available including Leavenworth and Winthrop, Washington.

12. Encourage awnings

The most successful tourism communities have a steady year round business. Unfortunately, Western Washington experiences a rather moist marine climate at times, yet one of the primary visitor activities is shopping and dining in a pedestrian-friendly atmosphere. Building owners and/or businesses should be encouraged to put up awnings, which should conform to certain predefined parameters. Awnings allow visitors to walk from shop to shop out of the weather.

13. Relocation of the adult book store

Unfortunately, the adult book store is right in the very heart of the downtown core and could be a major detractor in making downtown Blaine a quality, family-oriented destination. Regardless of the moral issues, visitors tend to equate these types of facilities, and subsequently the town with terms such as “seedy,” “sleazy,” “unsafe” and “scary.” While these impressions may be totally unfounded, the impressions are still there and will remain there until removed. You’d be hard pressed to find any facility of this nature in the heart of any successful small downtown. Look at LaConner, Leavenworth, Winthrop, Ocean Shores, Whistler, Victoria, and hundreds of other northwest towns. Even large cities like Seattle and Portland work hard to relocate these types of facilities to other areas of town. The city should continue to seek resolution and results in relocating this business.

14. Building fees & code review

The city should also look at the following and compare to other similar cities to make sure that Blaine can compete for business that might locate elsewhere:

- a. Review permitting processes to streamline
- b. Review impact fees and utility hookup fees

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- c. Change zoning east of Peace Portal Way (for several blocks) to eliminate auto-related businesses
- d. Consider “visitor retail” and “neighborhood retail” zoning ordinances for a confined area of downtown
- e. Review height restrictions along Peace Portal Way

15. Move auto-oriented zoning

The existing “Auto-oriented Central Business” zoning district, which encompasses just under six acres, should be relocated to the east side of I-5. The location of the gas stations in the downtown core (central business district) is unattractive and detracts from the market and pedestrian flavor the City is working to attain.

ANNUAL PROGRAMS

16. Create a sculpture theme

We recommend that the city adopt a sculpture theme. Over time, Blaine could become known as the “International City of Sculptures.” There is much more about this in the Capital Projects section (Item #22).

17. Economic development recruiting

In order for Blaine to succeed with its tourism efforts, it will need to attract new businesses to its downtown area. We recommend that Blaine put in place a professional recruitment program. \$20,000 has been set aside in the 2001 budget so that professional assistance can be retained to assist in this effort.

Among the projects to be recruited would be a mid-priced quality hotel (approximately 60 rooms and meeting space for 60) which would be situated in the downtown area with views. Previous studies have shown a need for this type of facility and we fully concur. The facility will become the “anchor tenant” for the downtown revitalization effort. A major benefit from this hotel development will include increased lodging tax revenues to further assist in developing a strong tourism industry.

Other recruitment projects include:

- a. Additional visitor-oriented retail establishments
- b. Assisting the Port in recruiting major charter operators to the marina
- c. Development of a downtown or marina based condominium development
- d. Amtrack services (once again)

While this effort may only be partially funded from lodging tax dollars, the city should look for other sources of funding to expand the recruitment effort. The City of Ocean Shores is seeing a 600+% annual cash return on its investment in recruiting new tourism projects – and paid for through a mix of lodging tax and general revenue funds.

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EVENTS

18. Events

We recommend that all events funded from lodging tax dollars be produced around the sculpture and art theme. This does not mean that Blaine should't encourage events such as regattas, birdwatching, festivals, etc. But with the very limited lodging tax dollars available, events should be created to promote the city's sculpture theme. All funded events should be multi-day events and should have enough pulling power to draw visitors to Blaine (as a destination) from at least 50 miles away.

Because Blaine has so many capital needs during the first five years of this program, very little money has been allocated to events. We hope current events will still thrive without funding from the city. The Independence Day celebration has been included in the budget for 2001 and 2002, but all other events outside the sculpture theme have not been included. Other organizations hold auctions and other fund-raising events to provide event funding.

CAPITAL PROJECTS

We recommend that Blaine begin to develop substantial tourism projects that will make Blaine a destination city. Recommendations include nearly \$30 million in total projects, of which Blaine would contribute and finance approximately \$2.3 million. The following briefly outlines each of the recommended projects:

19. Highway Signage

One of the first orders of business for Blaine is to change much of the signage along Interstate-5 and on each of the three exits to Blaine. The 16 signage recommendations include primarily text changes and the addition of only one sign along northbound I-5.

It is critical that visitors know that there is a "downtown" Blaine, and where it is, before they are there and have no time to decide whether or not to stop. Food, Gas & Lodging signs need to identify that these services are available at all Blaine exits. Signage needs to identify that public restrooms are available (an excellent reason to stop).

Likewise, exit signage also needs to be addressed. None of the off-ramp signage tells visitors where downtown is or how to get there. We recommend that additional directional signage be placed along city-owned streets directing visitors to the downtown core area.

In order to benefit from the 775,000 visitors who pass through Blaine each month, they must be told what Blaine has to offer, and how to get there. We have spent a great deal of time and effort on specific signage recommendations which should go a long way to getting visitors into Blaine where they will spend time and money.

In preparing budgets for 2001, 2002, and 2003, more than \$100,000 was earmarked for signage and beautification projects.

Executive summary

20. Gateway signage

In front of the Subway building is a small ground level sign directing visitors to Blaine Harbor. Because the sign is so low and small, it is easily missed and, therefore, the marina is easily missed. That's not good since the marina is currently Blaine's primary tourism asset next to Peace Arch Park. With the redevelopment of the Subway building (Item #23), the area behind the sign will be used for restrooms, which means a new very large entrance sign could be placed there with no problem in blocking those windows, which previously, housed a retail establishment.

The new sign would be professionally designed to fit the seaport theme, and would welcome guests to Blaine, would identify the building and provide directional signage to the marina and downtown area.

21. Architectural theme

We concur with the city that it should adopt and expand its turn-of-the-century seaport or fishing village architectural theme. The city should find ways to assist local building owners in adopting the theme which will require, in some cases, major capital investments. A Design Review committee should be put in place to work with new projects in the downtown core area.

Included should be a commercial fishing district that encompasses the area around McMillan and Sigurdson Avenues. Like antique furniture, much of what is currently at Blaine Harbor is on the verge of becoming historic, or at least represents some of the rich fishing history in Blaine. The area can easily be improved with a variety of low cost or free funding sources. This historic fishing district could become a haven for the local fishing community. One can visualize the other related businesses tucked away in some of the nooks and crannies of the district such as kayak rentals, wooden boat builders, an oyster bar, a fish market, and a high-end restaurant specializing in seafood.

22. Sculpture theme

As noted earlier, we recommend that the city create a sculpture theme. Each of the pocket parks (the west side of Peace Portal Way where the cross streets terminate) should become Sculpture Gardens. These would be professionally landscaped with seating areas, lighting, view railings, and interpretive signage. Major works of art would be placed in each garden.

Over time the city would have 40 major sculptures placed throughout the downtown core, the marina and at Semiahmoo. The sculptures would be rotated so that the theme does not become a "been there, done that" experience. Events centered around this theme would also keep visitors coming back. New sculptures or exhibitions would garner press coverage, and would encourage additional visits to Blaine.

The sculpture theme, in itself, should also have a theme - perhaps annually. Ideas include a windmill theme, fishing village and heritage sculptures, or the environment (whales, birds, etc.)

23. Purchase the Subway building

We recommend the city purchase the building where Subway is now located. The building

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would undergo an extensive exterior remodel to fit the turn-of-the-century seaport theme, and would be home to a permanent Welcome Center (visitor information center), would include offices for the Chamber of Commerce, Arts Commission, and would include public restroom facilities. The basement level of the building can be converted to storage spaces which could be rented. There is already a tenant in the lower level paying \$300 a month. The city currently pays \$500 per month to rent the current visitor information center building.

This building is the “gateway” building to the downtown core and is in a prime location to transition between downtown and the marina. The cost of the project including the purchase and all renovations is estimated to be approximately \$525,000 (or less).

24. Public restrooms

The Subway building would be home to six, or so, public uni-sex restrooms, one conforming to ADA standards, and others with changing tables. Restroom facilities, particularly at a border location like this, will be a powerful draw into the community. Extensive research has shown that visitors who stop to use the restroom will also take time to purchase treats, other goods, or often full meals. By having the restrooms located at the Welcome Center, visitors can easily learn of the things to see and do in Blaine. They will easily notice the marina, Semiahmoo Resort, and will be drawn into the downtown area.

25. Major attraction

We recommend that the city recruit the Northwest Discovery Center to have it sited in Blaine. An attraction of this magnitude would put Blaine on the map as a major destination city. The folks behind the center have been working on it for more than five years and have developed a concept that would be a perfect fit for Blaine. The facility could exceed 40,000 square feet and would include living and static exhibits, a living museum, U.S./Canadian cultural center, arts exhibits, a wildlife education center and rehabilitation clinic, marine conservation center, and a scientific research laboratory. Millions of dollars in grants, foundations, and other capital could be raised to develop the facility.

We recommend that the city donate the 2-1/2 acres it owns in the marina adjacent to Marine Park for the facility. This large in-kind donation would go a long way in recruiting an incredible facility such as this to Blaine. Additionally, we have budgeted \$200,000 in financing to assist in infrastructure improvements to the site such as water, sewer, parking and beautification.

The facility could require additional square footage, thus creating opportunities to build “pods” in such locations as the marina side of Drayton Harbor, on top of the proposed new stormwater holding facility, at Peace Arch Park, and on the Semiahmoo spit. This potential “campus” effect could extend visitor stays and increased overnight stays in Blaine.

This project would be a natural fit in the marina, overlooking a vital ecosystem, would be highly visible to millions of southbound visitors crossing the border, and would work well with Marine Park, the Plover, the Pier Park and other amenities already in place.

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26. Boardwalk and viewing decks

The city has been working on the possible development of a boardwalk system which would extend along the bluff of Peace Portal Way connecting buildings, the new hotel, and eventually providing a pedestrian access to the marina. We have recommended an allocation of \$250,000 as matching funds for federal and state grants to develop the boardwalk. The project will probably cost in the neighborhood of \$2.5 million, of which the funds will provide a 10% match.

This type of amenity would be a powerful draw to Blaine and a terrific local amenity as well. Significant and attractive sculptures, interpretive signs and lighting would be placed along the boardwalk highlighting the history, environment, and economy of the region.

27. Millennium Trail

The Millennium Trail is a terrific asset that will greatly benefit the Blaine area and the city should take an active role in its continued development. The trail can be a perfect connector between Semiahmoo, the marina, the Discovery Center, and downtown's boardwalk project.

While we have not set aside funds for this project, it remains an important development.

28. Public parking

While public parking is not a current problem for downtown Blaine, the city is very short of the parking it will need once the city starts to thrive. We recommend the city purchase land within a block of Peace Portal Way - near the north end of town, for future parking development. We anticipate that the city will need the additional parking developed in 2003 or 2004. The parking lot(s) should accommodate between 80 and 100 vehicles including tour busses and RVs. While this project would not be funded with lodging tax dollars, it is still an important amenity for the city and its residents - as well as for visitors.

29. Marine Park interpretive signs

Numerous interpretive signs have been constructed and should be placed in and around Marine Park. We recommend that the signs already developed be installed and that signage continue to be developed. Interpretive signs should eventually be installed along the entire length of the downtown core, marina and boardwalk. While no funding has been specifically set aside for these, there are numerous grants (state and federal) for environmental/educational signage.

30. Semiahmoo Lighthouse restoration

A considerable amount of work has been done on the Semiahmoo Lighthouse restoration. We fully support this effort and hope that it continues. Funds have not been allocated from lodging tax revenues for the project due to the very limited funding and the need to develop a major multi-day attraction to Blaine. However, the lighthouse project greatly enhances the appeal of Blaine, its heritage, and will be highly visible drawing visitors into the city.

31. Central Park

The city is currently negotiating a property swap between the Airport Commission and a local company. The result of this exchange, if it is ultimately done, will be the acquisition of a small

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lot on the southeast corner of H Street and 3rd Street. The lot is intended to function as the town's "central park." Its location at the center of the city makes it a perfect park for community gatherings, Saturday market functions, art exhibits, etc. While this would not be funded as part of this plan, we certainly endorse the parks development which will add to the overall appeal of Blaine's downtown area.

Capital projects financial summary

The following is a brief recap of the capital projects we have recommended. These costs are very preliminary and have not been finely tuned, but provide a foundation from which to build on:

• Welcome Center purchase & renovation	\$525,000
• Five sculpture gardens @ \$110,000 each	550,000
• Gateway entrance sign, landscape	60,000
• Pier park improvements	65,000
• Boardwalk development (matching funds)	250,000
• Discovery Center public access improvements	200,000
• Misc. tourism projects, A&E services	<u>200,000</u>
• Total capital projects funded w/lodging tax revenues	\$1,850,000

Over the first three years of the program, \$235,000 has been allocated to debt service.

We have also recommended that the following capital projects be developed, but these would require other funding sources and would not be lodging tax supported projects:

- Marine Drive reconstruction/resurfacing, pedestrian access throughout the marina
- Relocation of adult book store
- Peace Portal Way sidewalk/bulkhead reconstruction
- Public parking
- Central Park development

Other projects we have outlined would be paid from incoming lodging tax revenues. These projects include:

- Signage and beautification projects
- Creation & funding of the Blaine Arts Commission
- Multi-day events around the sculpture theme
- Tourism development recruiting program
- Marketing program/materials

JOINT PROJECTS WITH THE PORT

32. Pier Park improvements

The Port owns the fishing pier at the end of Marine Drive which we recommend be developed totally as a park and as a passenger loading/off-loading site for the Plover. This will require eventual removal of the current tenant, existing structures, and parking from the Pier. The northern part of the pier is already a park and offers a very nice atmosphere. The primary challenge will be providing pedestrian access to the pier (item #34) - the current roadway is very

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substandard and could be considered dangerous in its current condition.

33. Marine Drive improvements

While this project would not be funded with tourism dollars, the roadway into the marina must become a priority. The marina area has seen \$16 million in recent improvements, yet the primary access is extremely poor, at best, and must be improved.

We recommend that the city make this project a priority. It should include pedestrian access to the pier, a bike lane, and paved parking for Marine Park.

34. Marine Drive boardwalk

The pier at the end of Marine Drive needs to be connected to Marine Park by a pedestrian access route. After city staff toured the site with the Department of Ecology, it appears that the construction of a pedestrian boardwalk adjacent to the north side of Marine Drive and extending over the riprap is possible. Its benefits are obvious: providing a safe and leisurely walk along the water, bird watching, and linking the two recreational facilities.

MARKETING

35. Professional marketing services

While these capital projects are moving forward, it is very important that Blaine begin a professionally produced marketing program. The marketing effort would begin in the first year (2001) with the creation of professionally produced marketing materials which would include:

- A marketing/city logo
- Full-color signature brochure
- Development of a professional photo library
- Website development
- Distribution program
- Press kit development
- Regional advertising

During the first three years of the program, \$199,000 has been earmarked for the marketing effort. \$45,500 has been set aside in 2001 and 2002 for the creation of the collateral materials which will serve Blaine for the following five years, with periodic reprints and updates.

In order to produce an effective program, we recommend that the City through BTAC immediately develop an Request for Qualifications for professional marketing assistance. The firm should be hired by February so that development of the necessary materials can be produced before the busy spring and summer seasons. The following projects would be produced by the marketing firm, working with BTAC.

36. Marketing logo

We recommend development of a marketing logo for Blaine. The logo would be used on all printed materials, website, and could be used by local organizations in promoting Blaine. It cannot be used by businesses as part of their logo however. The logo would be designed to fit the

Executive summary

turn-of-the-century seaport theme but needs to also be sophisticated enough to fit the sculpture and arts theme. The city could also adopt the logo as the city's official logo, if it so desired.

37. Website development, hosting and updates

The internet has become the number one resource for travel information. The city is currently developing a website and we recommend that the "front door" of the website showcase Blaine. We recommend a professionally produced site which will promote tourism and quality of life, and then also link to city services - the pages already being developed for the city.

Development of the site is only part of this project. It must also be registered among more than 400 search engines, linked to dozens of other Northwest travel-related sites, and continually updated so that it will be seen again and again.

\$8,500 has been budgeted for development and posting of the site including request for information forms, links, home page, etc. An additional \$1,200 has been earmarked for hosting fees in 2001 (usually \$20 a month, plus monthly updates to the site).

38. Collateral brochure

Volunteers have been working diligently over the past several months to create a color brochure for Blaine. While we applaud their efforts, we recommend that the brochure project be turned over for professional production. There are hundreds of competing communities throughout the Northwest, all vying for attention among hundreds of brochures in racks. Blaine's new brochure must stand-out, and must portray Blaine as an upscale arts community. This will be done through the use of professional photography, selling the experience, rather than the place. Photography of people doing things is very important. Communities often make the mistake of showing "things" rather than "activities." Sample brochures are included in the appendix of this plan. \$14,500 has been budgeted for the creation of the brochure including all production costs, photo licensing, and printing of 25,000 copies.

39. Distribution program

We recommend creating a distribution program which will place the new brochure in 50 to 100 visitor information centers throughout British Columbia and Washington. \$2,500 has been budgeted each year for this program including 2001, for distribution of the existing brochure. The cost includes the purchase of shipping cartons, shipping charges, and development and printing of an "Oops card." The card is placed on a rack behind the last brochure. This way when a VIC runs out of brochures, they simply fill out the postcard and drop it in the mail requesting more brochures. The distribution effort would ship brochures at least twice a year. Blaine's VIC would be charged with this responsibility.

40. Photo library

One of the first orders of business will be to develop a professional photo library that can be used on the web, in the brochure, and for the Blaine press kit. Nothing sells tourism more than quality photography. Every photo used should "make you want to go there," and should have "wow" appeal. Blaine, especially, can really benefit from top-notch photography. \$5,000 has been budgeted for development of the photo library. The cost includes licensing fees, high-quality digital scans, and archiving on CD ROM.

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41. Advertising

For the first three years, we've recommended limited advertising in the following publications:

- AAA Washington/Oregon Tour Book

This publication is printed each February and is only sent to AAA members who request it. It has a long shelf life (people hang on to it and use it), and has a circulation of 1,250,000. Blaine is already in the publication but we recommend all print ads be professionally developed and placed in full color.

- Washington State Travel Planner

This publication is also an annual travel guide and is the fulfillment piece for Washington State Tourism and the Washington State Hotel/Motel Association. Approximately 300,000 copies are printed and distributed each year.

- Whatcom County Visitors Guide

This annual publication has been redesigned and is a showcase piece for Whatcom County. It is the primary fulfillment piece for the CVB and is widely distributed throughout the Northwest region.

Approximately \$17,000 has been set aside for advertising each of the first three years. The ads would be produced the first year and would be used the following two years.

42. Support for Bellingham/Whatcom County CVB

We have also included funding for the CVB. We firmly believe that Blaine needs to become a part of the “bigger picture” which includes other areas of the county. We also believe that the county, as a whole, will be much more effective as one loud voice as opposed to individual small voices. The CVB's mission is to assist every community in the county in promoting and further developing the tourism industry. As Blaine begins its aggressive tourism development program, the CVB will become more and more a resource that can be tapped to promote the new theme, new attractions, amenities and lodging. \$10,000 has been set aside for support of the CVB's “Best Buys” marketing program plus \$4,200 for operational support.

43. Professional marketing assistance

We also budgeted \$2,000 for professional marketing assistance to other local organizations who are developing ads or promotional materials. The BTAC would “grant” funding to have the professional marketing firm provide creative services for certain projects. This way all marketing materials have continuity in look and feel. A poorly designed brochure can totally erase the effectiveness of the signature brochure when placed together. This way a strong, upscale image can be developed for Blaine.

44. Public relations & press kit

Public relations will garner the greatest return on Blaine's investment, particularly as the sculpture theme and new attractions are developed. \$36,000 has been budgeted beginning in the third year for a professionally produced PR program. This will provide a \$3,000 per month retainer to

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the marketing firm charged with developing the program. A public relations effort will be a very powerful way to “reposition” Blaine as an arts community and an excellent way to showcase the many improvements made over the past couple of years at the marina and in the downtown area.

45. Marketing partnerships

Blaine can greatly leverage its marketing budget by forming partnerships with local retailers, Customs, Semiahmoo, and even neighboring communities such as Birch Bay. The marketing effort will be much more effective as one loud voice as opposed to numerous small voices, hardly seen or heard. The purchase of larger sized ads or quantities will reduce costs and create a stronger effort.

46. Tracking and measurables

Tracking and measurables are needed to determine the effectiveness of your marketing effort. Measurables would include looking at lodging tax revenues, retail sales, calls and walk-ins at the visitor information centers, attendance at events, and periodic surveys.

ADMINISTRATION

47. Fund administration

In the past the city has allocated between \$5,000 and \$10,000 for administration of the lodging tax fund. While the fund is a small portion of the overall city budget, it is a very time consuming fund to manage because of the many grants the city has traditionally given to various organizations. We hope that as this plan is implemented, the financial management will be reduced. We have included in the 2001 budget fund administration of \$5,000 and have removed this allocation in following years.

The reason for doing so is to allow every penny possible to be put directly into tourism promotion and development so that those who collect the tax from their guests will see a return on the investment. This means that city staff will be managing the fund as part of their general fund-supported job. We believe that an effective tourism program will bring in a tremendous amount of general fund revenues through property, utility, and sales tax revenues which will easily offset the staff time in managing the lodging tax fund.

FUNDING

48. Implementation of the remaining 1% lodging add-on tax

The recommendations, made here will require a substantial investment, but will provide a tremendous return on that investment. Of the 277 cities in Washington, nearly all (with lodging facilities) have implemented the entire 2% lodging add-on tax allowed by state law. We recommend that Blaine implement this tax. We have not found one single facility or city in Washington, Oregon, California, Arizona, Montana, Idaho or Wyoming who has seen a decline in lodging revenues as a result of lodging taxes.

The additional \$1 dollar for every \$100 in lodging rents, will provide the customer with added

Executive summary

services including the many facilities we've already discussed, and a quality professional marketing program which we will discuss next.

The additional 1% will generate more than \$65,000 annually - enough to finance approximately \$700,000 in capital projects. This is a critical part of this entire tourism development and marketing plan. We feel very confident that Semiahmoo and other lodging establishments will see a substantial return on investment. The funds will no longer be handed out as grants with no requirements that there be a return on investment, and programs will be put in place that will greatly benefit lodging establishments in Blaine.

Currently Blaine has little to offer guests of Semiahmoo, but with this program, Semiahmoo will garner the largest return on investment. The reason we point out Semiahmoo here, is that the resort's guests pay more than 90% of the total tax the city receives. We have gone to great efforts to provide a program that will result in substantially increased room rentals, amenities, attractions, and assets that will make Semiahmoo and Blaine a true multi-day destination.

We recommend the city adopt the additional 1% add-on tax to be put in place as of January 1, 2002.

Timelines & to-do list

Projects by priority -2001

FEBRUARY

1. BTAC adopt this plan, present to council for adoption
 - Council adopts plan, instructs staff to implement it
2. RFP for professional marketing services
 - Website, logo, advertising, brochure, photo library, event assistance
 - City consider adding general fund revenues for municipal part of website
3. Distribute current brochures statewide
 - 50 top VIC locations
4. Fund two sculpture related events, and one other event
 - Can fund multiple events by splitting funds (\$15,500 total!)
5. Set up Top Dog Committee
 - First meeting in March
6. Parks Board meets to begin beautification/signage program, assignments

MARCH

7. Develop the arts organization
 - Start-up board, name, organizational management
8. RFP for economic development services
 - Recruitment materials (Community Profile, opportunities)
 - Begin effort (charter, hotel, condo, retail, etc.)
9. Make offers, tie up Subway building
 - Four month option: feasibility/finance
 - Close sale on Subway by end of year
10. RFP for Architectural/engineering services
 - Preliminary cost estimates, design for Subway (fund out of reserves)

APRIL

11. Identify specific signage and beautification projects
 - Put together team
 - Get estimates
12. Contract signed with selected marketing firm
13. Look for grants - Subway project, beautification, signage, boardwalk
14. Begin working with private land owners regarding blights
 - This can start any time, but small projects should be complete by July

MAY

15. Contract signed with selected engineering firm
16. RFP for landscape architectural services
 - Design of landscape projects
 - Signage design and placement
17. Contract signed with economic development firm
18. Begin working with Discovery Center organization

Timelines & to-do list

JULY

19. Review Subway estimates, financing alternatives
 - Make the deal, close the property 12/31/2001
 - Subway franchise moving in October
20. Secure financing
 - Subway, improvements, other projects
21. Make advertising buys for 2002 publications
22. Second distribution of brochures statewide
23. Begin construction of signage, landscape projects
24. Contract signed with selected landscape architectural firm

SEPTEMBER

25. RFP for construction
 - Subway conversion (to be done in spring 2002)
26. Begin regulatory changes, draft new ordinances
 - Take to Planning Commission, council for approval
27. Apply for grants for sculptures and related gardens
28. Develop H/M funded projects for 2002

NOVEMBER

29. Contract signed with selected construction firm
 - Subway project (to be completed by April/May 2002)
30. Develop a schedule for 2002 projects

Visitor assessment summary

One of our primary goals is to find ways to encourage visitors to stop in Blaine. One of the most effective ways of doing this is to take on the role of visitor, performing the research a tourist might do in planning a trip and actually visiting the town. The research effort can show how easy it is for a potential visitor to find information about the city, and if that information is enough to encourage the visitor to stay in the town. The site visit will show how easy it is to find the town, follow the signs, and find enough to do to keep busy while there. From these findings, we can make recommendations for making information more accessible, improving the information that is available, and improving the destination by possibly changing signs, parking facilities, or adding more activities to the town.

In performing the visitor information research, we took on the role of a potential visitor to Blaine who had no prior knowledge of Blaine at all, but was looking for a place to stay near the Canadian border for a few days. The first resource looked at was the Washington State map, which shows Blaine and the Peace Arch Park clearly. From there, we attempted to find information about Blaine on the internet, using various search engines. This proved to be more difficult. Several sites do mention Blaine, but have no real information. Some of the links to Blaine are not operational. In the search for “Blaine,” the site with the most information proved to be the Horizon Bank site.

In stretching the search further, we looked for information on Blaine by searching for items under “Washington State” and “Whatcom County.” We were able to access the Bellingham/Whatcom County Convention & Visitors Bureau’s site, and while it makes only a brief mention of Blaine, it does list four hotels/motels in Blaine, from which one can link to Semiahmoo’s site. Semiahmoo’s website is excellent for selling the resort.

The search for “Washington State” yielded Washington State Tourism’s website, which does mention Blaine, but does not give much information except to list the Blaine Chamber of Commerce’s telephone number. That was good, and led us into the next part of our research.

We called the Blaine Chamber for information, and the woman who helped us was extremely friendly and helpful. She presented Blaine as being a very friendly place, and encouraged our visit. She offered to mail more information, which we received within only four days, and it included a wealth of information about Blaine, lodging, dining, businesses, and activities.

We also found the ad in the AAA Tour Book for Blaine, and it was excellent, including more information than found in any of the websites.

The second part of the research was the on-site visitor assessment from the point of view of a tourist. This involved a visit to Blaine to spend the day, with no prior knowledge of the area.

Heading north on I-5 towards Blaine, there is a sign reading Blaine, next three exits. It comes as a surprise that the third exit is after crossing the border into Canada, but to reach Blaine city center, it is necessary to take the second exit.

Visitor assessment

The vacant buildings on either side of the street after leaving the freeway gave the immediate impression of a downtown in decline. After a couple of blocks, however, we arrived in the more viable part of downtown. Driving through town we found a few local businesses, an attractive park with interesting whale sculptures, and proceeded to find the Visitor Information Center. We did find the signs for the Center, but as the distance was so great we thought we had missed it, it would be good to include the approximate distance on the sign, such as “Visitor Information Center – 2 miles.”

The Visitor Information Center is warm, inviting, well-stocked with information, and that information is well-marked. The people are friendly and helpful, and do an excellent job of selling Blaine. There is a restroom available nearby, which is clean.

We found there really wasn't a lot to do while there, and that it would be better to visit Blaine during the summer when the ferry is running and the weather is good enough to go for hikes, bird watching, and enjoy walking through the parks and marina. Downtown just didn't have enough to offer, though, and while downtown looked clean and well-kept, the x-rated movie store had a negative impact. We found that the locals we met, in the restaurant, antique store, as well as the Visitor Center, were all friendly, courteous, and helpful.

In summary, we found that finding information about Blaine was difficult. A Blaine Visitor Information website would be ideal, including links to Whatcom County VIC, Semiahmoo, and Washington State Tourism. The website could include activities to do while visiting Blaine, local dining and lodging, the parks and marina, and a bit on the history of Blaine. A lot of photography showing the incredible natural beauty of the area would also be important to include.

We also found that there simply wasn't enough to do in Blaine, particularly during the rainy seasons, to keep a visitor busy for very long. Downtown, while clean, doesn't have enough retail to attract and keep a visitor.

The Visitor Information Center is definitely a plus. The courteous, friendly, helpful staff promotes the area well, and encourages potential visitors.

TOURISM DEVELOPMENT PLAN



Lodging tax uses & recommendations

Development recommendations:

- Visitor services
- Program management
- Beautification
- Regulatory changes
- Annual programs
- Events
- Capital projects
- Joint projects with the Port
- Assignments & committees

Three-year marketing plan

Administration

Funding & budgets

Lodging tax uses & recommendations

Lodging taxes, which are a portion of the state sales tax which is rebated back to the city, were first implemented in 1970. The lodging tax legislation was created on the heels of a large effort by state lodging facilities to help communities better promote tourism, particularly overnight stays. In fact, the legislation states that the funds are to be used for the “promotion and development of tourism.” These funds are economic development funds, not grant funds. The city should always look for a return on investment every time lodging taxes are expended.

Recently, communities have had the ability to implement an “add-on” sales tax of up to 2% (only charged on overnight accommodations) for a total tax revenue of 4%. Blaine, to date, has implemented a 1% add-on tax. We are recommending that Blaine add the second 1% which would generate more than \$60,000 a year in additional revenues.

Often, tourism itself needs to be explained. In essence, a tourist is a visitor who travels into your community, for business or pleasure, from at least 50 miles away. The object of a successful tourism program is to get those visitors to spend money while in the community. Successful communities import more cash from visitors than they export. Successful communities include Vancouver, B.C.; Leavenworth, Ocean Shores, Long Beach, Seattle, Langley, Victoria, and the San Juan Islands.

Overnight visitors spend four to five times more than day visitors, and so the ultimate goal is to provide the activities and attractions that will keep visitors for multiple days.

In this report, we have taken a close look at the city’s past expenditures, current requests for funding, and what can be done in the future to promote tourism – starting with day visits and gradually working towards multi-day stays.

The city must be careful in its use of lodging taxes. For instance, most infrastructure costs do not qualify: sidewalks, lighting, beautification, law enforcement, etc., do not typically qualify under the promotion and development of tourism, because they benefit the local community more than visitors. However, projects such as restrooms do qualify because they serve only visitors – locals can use the restroom at home.

When we review lodging tax expenditures we ask several questions:

1. Does the expenditure bring visitors to Blaine?
2. Will it help keep visitors overnight?
3. Does it fulfill a need that will bring people into the city center where they can spend time and money?
4. If it is an event, does it draw visitors from at least 50 miles away?
5. What was the return on investment?

Blaine is currently lacking in activities, amenities and attractions that will spur visitor spending in the city. Semiahmoo is, in fact, the lifeblood of tourism for Blaine, Birch Bay and other local communities. But even Semiahmoo needs more for its visitors to see and do – the more there is,

Lodging tax uses & recommendations

the longer visitors will stay and the further they will travel to visit.

This brings us to the “Four Times Rule.” Visitors will travel a distance if you can keep them busy four times longer than it took them to get there. For instance, if you have to drive 15 minutes, will the destination keep you busy for an hour? (Four times 15 minutes). If visitors drive 1-1/2 hours to Blaine, is there enough to keep them busy for six hours? If there are enough activities to keep them busy for eight hours or more, the community will stand a very good chance of getting them to spend the night, where they will spend additional dollars for lodging, meals and shopping.

For Blaine, we recommend that the city implement the full 2% add-on tax which would generate a total of nearly \$200,000 annually in revenues which can be used for the promotion and development of tourism.

In the case of Blaine, we recommend that a majority of these funds be used for the development of attractions and amenities – things that will encourage travelers to visit Blaine. Currently, outside of Semiahmoo, Blaine offers little in the way of tourism amenities and attractions. However, of all the cities we’ve worked with in Western Washington, Blaine has the most potential. The city has a beautiful downtown core area in terms of infrastructure: underground wiring, sidewalks, beautification, decorative street lighting, bike lanes, incredible views of the marina and bay, a thriving marina (with a variety of water-related activities), Semiahmoo’s resort and golf course, and most importantly, 750,000 visitors a month passing within 100 yards of downtown.

The types of projects Blaine needs in order to develop a successful tourism industry include:

- Public parking
- Public restrooms
- Visitor information center in the downtown core area
- Pedestrian access between the marina and downtown
- Places to enjoy the vistas
- A major indoor-oriented attraction (or attractions)
- Additional directional signage
- Shops: antiques, gifts, galleries, collectibles, clothing, etc.
- A theme: whether architectural or activity driven
- Additional upscale view lodging - boutique lodge
- Additional activities and themed events

With regards to marketing, Blaine has needs in this area as well:

- A professionally designed and produced brochure
- An effective distribution program
- Professional photo library and press kit
- An attractive and effective tourism website
- Limited print advertising in annual publications

*P*lan outline

We have separated the Tourism Development portion of this plan into ten different areas as in the Executive Summary:

- Visitor services
- Program management
- Beautification
- Regulatory changes
- Annual programs
- Events
- Capital projects
- Joint projects with the Port
- Marketing plan
- Administration
- Funding & budgets

Developing a successful tourism industry begins in steps. First, you must get people to stop, and have a reason for them to stop. You can't become a destination until you can get people to stop, then have enough attractions, activities and amenities to get them to stay. The following demonstrates the various recommendations categorized by their purpose:

Getting passersby to stop

- Signage (freeway and downtown)
- Beautification program
- Architectural and sculpture theme development

Creating the reason to stop

- Purchase of the Subway building
- Visitor Information Center
- Public restrooms
- Gateway signage
- Sculpture theme and gardens
- Expanded shopping and dining
- Boardwalk and view corridors

Providing the attractions to get visitors to stay

- International Northwest Discovery Center
- Pier park improvements, parking
- Expanded sculpture gardens, exhibits
- Multi-day events
- Millennium Trail development
- Recruitment of charter operators
- Development of additional public parking

Garnering stronger visitor spending in Blaine

- Economic development recruiting program
- Marine Drive resurfacing, paved parking
- Removal of Gull Station, fence, other private eyesores
- Expanded Plover services
- Amtrak passenger service

Visitor services

VISITOR SERVICES

1. Chamber operation of VIC

The City of Blaine currently operates and manages the Blaine Visitor Information Center and has done an excellent job of doing so. We have recommended that the city purchase and develop a new location for the VIC. Once the new site is ready, (mid 2002), we recommend that management of the VIC be turned over to the Blaine Chamber of Commerce. Because chambers of commerce, by their charter, are charged with promoting local commerce, this is a natural progression and will allow the city to concentrate on the larger picture of providing services, infrastructure improvements, and assistance in developing and recruiting economic development projects.

Under this program, the chamber would then have an office, would manage the VIC and the public restrooms for the city, in exchange for a reduced rent of perhaps \$1 each year. The chamber would be charged with maintenance of the restrooms and the building's interior and landscape.

Successful VICs are open seven days a week, approximately 360+ days of the year, with extended hours on Friday evenings – particularly during the summer months.

It will be important to secure approximately 15 volunteers to assist in staffing the center on a rotating schedule so the center can remain open 362 days each year.

Operating hours, year round, should be from 10:00 am to 6:00 pm daily with extended hours on Friday (till 8:00 pm) from Memorial Day through Labor Day. Holiday closures would include Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Year's Day.

Fifteen volunteers can be secured to work just two two-hour shifts each week. Four volunteers would work a typical day in shifts from 10:00 to noon, noon to 2:00, 2:00 to 4:00 and from 4:00 to 6:00. On Fridays, an additional volunteer would cover the VIC from 6:00 to 8:00 pm. The full-time staff person would assist, and once the Chamber takes over, would be allowed to conduct Chamber business while volunteers work with visitors. During the busy summer months, volunteers would be asked to work two four hour shifts each week so that there is double coverage to handle multiple phone calls and walk-in visitors.

Volunteers need not only be retired folks. We recommend that local merchants, city staff and others take a two hour shift at least once a month. This “front line” contact with visitors is very important and keeps the city and local business owners in touch with visitors and their questions or concerns about the area.

A full-time position will still be very important but that position may assume the title of the chamber's executive director. As the chamber grows, it will gain new members, will be able to

Visitor services

produce new events, and will be able to grow in terms of staff and financial capacity. The better job the chamber does of promoting tourism, the more money in the form of lodging taxes will be received, which will allow for additional funding.

An excellent example is the Ocean Shores Chamber of Commerce. This organization, for years, only received \$20,000 from the city for its VIC operation. Over the years its extended its hours and is now open 364 days a year. It receives a call or walk-in an average of every three minutes, year round. In 1999 the Chamber sent out more than 30,000 visitor packets, and had more than 60,000 calls and walk-ins. The chamber, as a result, now receives \$70,000 a year from the city. This successful chamber has approximately 14 top-notch volunteers and a staff of four.

A word about volunteers:

Please don't make the mistake of finding anyone who will volunteer some hours. Each volunteer is the community's sales person. They must have a love for Blaine, must have excellent communication skills, must be willing to go the extra mile to encourage the traveler to visit Blaine, and must be presentable both in dress, manners and looks. They are of MAJOR importance. All the advertising and marketing will be directed to these frontline volunteers. Choose them carefully, and recognize them annually.

We recommend that the Blaine Chamber and city staff visit the Ocean Shores Chamber for a day and discuss funding, volunteers, marketing, etc. The executive director is Barbara Smith and she can be reached at 360/289-2451. There are other exceptional VICs and chambers throughout the Northwest as well. Spending some time with any of those in successful tourism areas will be beneficial in establishing an effective chamber and VIC program.

Cost: \$45,000 annually (whether City or Chamber management)

2. Expanded Plover services

As the tourism industry in Blaine increases, the Plover will become more and more important to the city and Semiahmoo. As tourism increases, so will the season. Eventually, it would be good to have the Plover running on weekends year round and running every day for probably 10 months of the year. But for now, we recommend the Plover, in 2001, operate on its normal schedule, but offer weekend service in May and in September.

Each year the Plover should extend its season by adding additional weekends and a month to its operation. By providing a loading point for the Plover at the Pier Park, redevelopment of Marine Drive, a Welcome Center where the Subway currently is located, expanded marketing program, new full-color marketing materials, a tourism website, and other promotional efforts, will all bring added passengers to the Plover. While this effort will increase over time, it will be important that the Plover be ready to expand its services. We also support the plan now being developed to provide year round passenger service between White Rock, Semiahmoo and Blaine using a new, larger vessel capable of transporting between 50 and 100 passengers per crossing.

Program management

We recommend that the Plover continue to receive funding of \$25,000 annually. Additional funds have been requested, but we believe that the difference can be made up by charging a fixed crossing-fee of approximately \$2.00. The current “donation” averages 70¢ per crossing but would probably be substantially increased with a more visible donation box and a skipper request made to passengers during each crossing.

PROGRAM MANAGEMENT

Introduction: The Blaine Tourism Action Committee (BTAC)

BTAC would provide oversight of this plan, for the city, except for the “Big Dog Committee,” which is detailed in Item #5. The City Council will always have the final say in any of the elements, but BTAC has been selected by the City, under state law, to provide recommendations regarding the expenditure of lodging tax revenues.

Because council members and city staff already have very full plates, these committees should first report to BTAC and then BTAC would report to the City Council.

Under this program, “grant funds” are no longer available. However, the VIC, Arts Commission, and other organizations and committees who receive funding from lodging tax revenues would still be required to present budget requests to BTAC and should be required to provide (at least) annual reports to BTAC demonstrating return on investment.

3. Parks Board beautification efforts

We recommend that the city’s Parks Board assist in the implementation of the many beautification recommendations made throughout this plan. We are recommending that the city adopt a sculpture theme, with art placed throughout the downtown core area. Because of this, there needs to be a strong link between the Parks Board, Public Works, and the Arts Commission. The committee would meet once a month to discuss and present to the city council recommendations for beautification projects.

This particular committee has major work to be done almost immediately. They will be charged with working with D.O.T. regarding freeway and exit signage, will be charged with additional and improved city signage, pocket park and sculpture garden development (partnering with the Arts Commission), and other beautification projects. The Committee should (and may already) include representation from:

- | | |
|------------------------|------------------------------------|
| a. Blaine City Council | e. Parks Dept. and/or Public Works |
| b. BTAC (optional) | f. City staff/management |
| c. Chamber of Commerce | g. Citizen at large |
| d. Arts Commission | |

Program management

The Parks Board will rely heavily on city staff for work with D.O.T. and for the placement, bids, design of garden areas, signage, etc. A staff person should be assigned to work a portion of each week on fulfilling the recommendations made in this plan. Without proper signage much of the effort to get visitors to stop will fail.

One note about these committees and projects: Semiahmoo Resort generates more than 90% of the total revenues that will pay for these projects. We have recommended that the City impose the remaining one percent add-on tax, which Semiahmoo has opposed in the past. Because Semiahmoo is so important to Blaine's tourism development efforts, every effort should be made to include them wherever possible, either at the corporate level (Trillium Corporation) or at the resort management level. We firmly believe each Semiahmoo guest will see a tremendous benefit from the additional dollar or two the city will be collecting from them, but we also believe that Semiahmoo should be provided ample input into the process and each project. Trillium has additional future plans for Semiahmoo which should tie into the work being done in Blaine, thus the need to create "partnerships" with these projects. Additionally, Trillium may be able to bring additional funding to many of these projects, particularly where it will benefit their guests.

4. Arts Commission

We recommend that the City assist in the creation of an Arts Commission which would manage development of the theme. In fact, the city might even approach the Peace Arch Anniversary Association and perhaps change the name to the Blaine Arts Commission (or a similar name), keeping in place the existing not-for-profit corporate structure. The city should consult with the City Attorney regarding this suggestion. Once the organization is created, it would have no direct organizational ties to the city.

The Arts Commission should not become a part of the Chamber because its focus is totally on one thing: development of the sculpture theme and related events. The city will be home to dozens of sculptures which may come from around the world, and will be rotated, maintained, and publicized continually.

If funding were available, we would recommend that a full-time person be put in charge of the Arts Commission, but with limited funding, we have recommended that \$2,500 be allocated in 2001, \$25,000 in 2002, and \$30,000 in 2003. These funds include funding for the current exhibition and related events. In fact, we recommend that all lodging-tax funded multi-day events revolve around this central theme.

While these funds are not enough to establish a full-time effort and associated marketing, insurance, and event costs, it will be necessary for the Arts Commission to also seek memberships, other fund raising efforts, and to work to secure grants and foundation funding wherever possible.

Before the city grants funding for 2002 and future years, the Commission should prepare a

Program management

business plan, goals and specific projects for further development of the theme. The plan would be presented to BTAC for its approval and subsequent approval of the City Council.

The Arts Commission will be charged with creating multi-day arts events, exhibitions, and development of the sculpture theme including the securing of grants, funding, memberships, displays, etc. One vital role of the Arts Commission is to ensure that all sculptures and exhibits meet very high quality standards. The sculpture theme will be a success if quality is demanded.

The Commission should hire a part-time Executive Director until it can afford a full-time position. The Commission would be given a rent-free office in the new Welcome Center. The Commission's board should include representation from:

- a. Blaine City Council
- b. BTAC
- c. Chamber of Commerce
- d. Beautification Committee
- e. Parks Dept.
- f. City management
- g. Citizen at large

And other organizations that could play a role in the Commission's efforts. The board, in our opinion, should not have more than 11 members and we recommend seven to nine members.

5. Top Dog Committee

Blaine needs to take a leadership position in promoting itself and creating even better relationships with key stakeholders such as the Port and Trillium Corporation.

We recommend that the City Manager create and host a monthly meeting with Jim Darling (Port of Bellingham), the mayor of Blaine, a Trillium Corporation executive, Blaine's economic development representative, and perhaps a representative of the Discovery Center project. This monthly meeting would be to discuss how to make things happen. Both Trillium and the Port have tens of millions of dollars invested in Blaine and may be able to invest additional funds for key projects. The best, and perhaps only way, to make this happen is to open up a dialog in a closed-door, informal setting where common foundations can be developed and then presented to the public, Blaine's City Council, The Port Commission, and Board or Trillium executives. Brulington Northern should also be included in the committee on a periodic basis – they play an important role in the future development of the marina and access to its facilities. But the idea is not to meet for the sake of meeting, but to actually figure out ways to develop and fund real projects where all parties can benefit.

Projects might include Marine Drive reconstruction, the advent of a major attraction in the marina area, hotel and condominium development, recruiting of a major charter operator, the boardwalk. This small group of no-nonsense management executives could jointly lay the foundation for joint grant applications and, low and zero-interest financing.

Beautification

No decisions would be made in these meetings, but would provide a starting point to find mutual ground and common projects that can benefit all the parties. Again, it is critical that the city takes the lead in forming and running these meetings.

Welcome Center Committee (Optional)

This committee is an optional one, but would be in place for about a year or until the Welcome Center purchase and renovation has been completed. The committee would steer the effort working with city staff, hired architectural assistance, etc. Committee members should include representation from:

- a. Chamber of Commerce
- b. Current VIC staff
- c. VIC volunteer
- d. Arts Commission
- e. City Council
- f. Citizen at large
- g. City Manager or management staff

BEAUTIFICATION

6. Beautification

Nothing sells a town better than a first impression. Furthermore, first impressions are lasting impressions. None of the four exits to Blaine are attractive (3 northbound and the southbound border exit). Blaine should be a showcase for the State of Washington and the U.S. for visitors traveling either direction. While Peace Arch Park is beautifully landscaped and attractive, this look should be carried out along each exit, particularly exit 276 northbound. Here are several recommendations:



The following are several projects which should be completed during the spring of 2001:

Northbound exit 276

As you exit Interstate-5 the off-ramp right-of-way, which extends for nearly 400 feet, is extremely unattractive with overgrown weeds and grasses, blackberry vines, and an abundance of litter. The chain-link fence is also unattractive. Working with D.O.T., the city should “adopt” this exit, have it cleaned up on a weekly basis (including grass growing up into the chain link), and annual color planted to provide an attractive, flowered “gateway” from April

Beautification

through September. The exit should be maintained on a weekly basis during these months, and monthly from October through March.

If possible, we recommend that the Beautification Committee find a local business or organization to adopt this exit. This project will need to be coordinated with D.O.T. but is very important.

We also recommend that, working with neighboring property owners and D.O.T., that the chain link fence be replaced with a cedar or another type of fence that will screen the private properties, and will look more attractive. We have not included this in the budget, but should be a project that might be facilitated between the State and the private property owners.



Beautification of this exit is the primary concern.

Southbound exit at the border

This exit mirrors northbound exit 176 and should be maintained likewise with seasonal color, frequent mowings, and litter control. In particular, at the end of the exit is an area that should become a beautifully landscaped pocket park (see photo below right) with directional signage. The signage is addressed in that section of the recommendations. We recommend for this beautification project, a qualified landscape architect or designer be retained to develop the “park” including signage placement, lighting, irrigation and plantings. Like the other areas, the pocket park should include seasonal color and evergreen plantings so that it remains attractive year round.

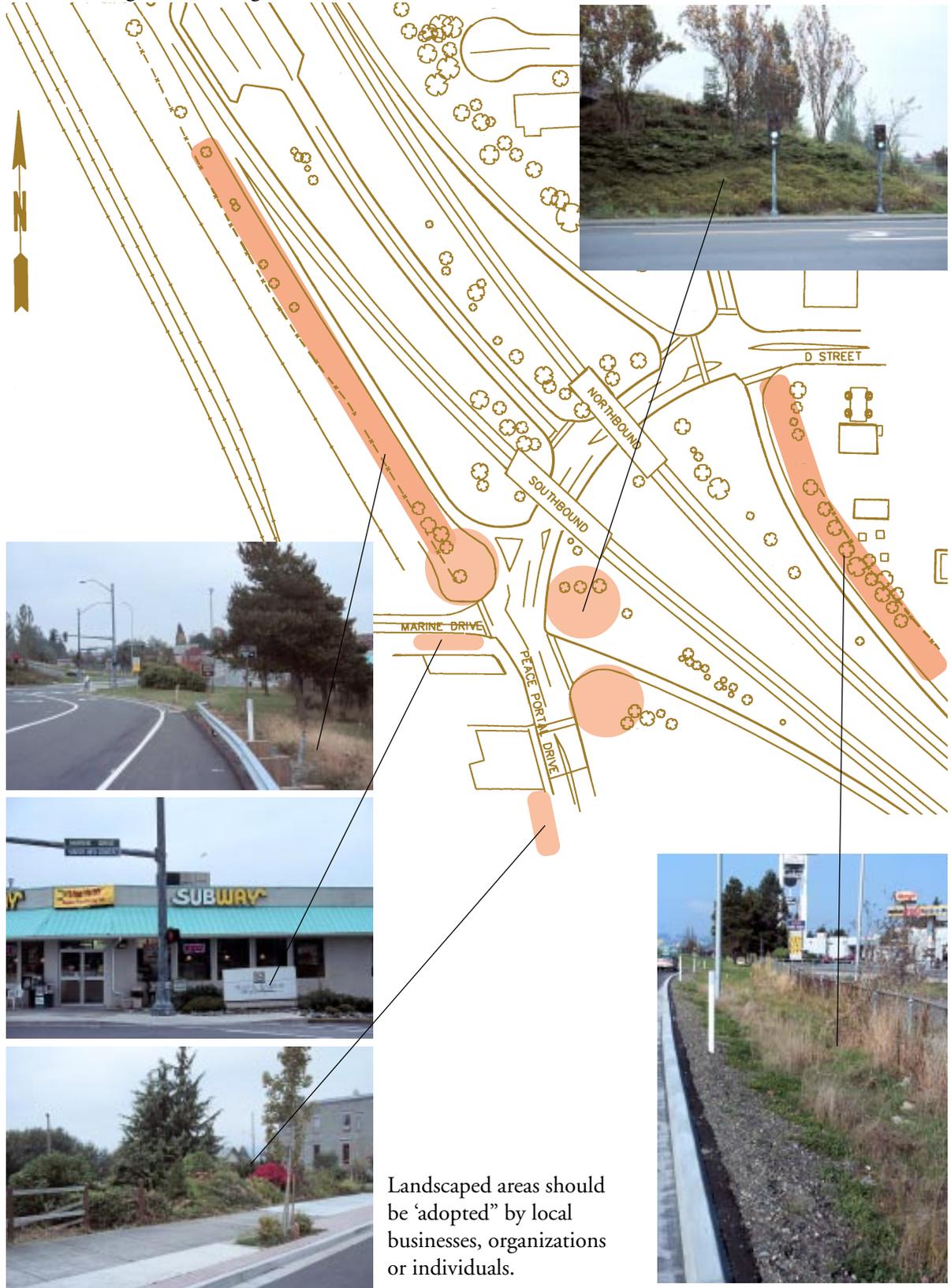
The signature element in the park should be a sculpture that introduces the sculpture theme and the architectural turn-of-the-century seaport theme.



This area of the exit is probably D.O.T. property, so the City should ascertain ownership and then work with D.O.T. to get permission to assume management and maintenance of the site.

Beautification

Exit 276 diagram showing areas that need to be addressed with beautification efforts



Landscaped areas should be 'adopted' by local businesses, organizations or individuals.

Beautification

While volunteers might adopt planted areas around the city, we feel this primary entrance location should be managed by personnel charged with maintaining the other downtown plantings and flower gardens.

Around directional signage (Highway 548, D Street, H Street)

In order to attract visitors to Blaine's downtown core area, we have recommended the placement of several additional directional signs. Each of these signs should also include seasonal color. A small circular garden (perhaps 36" across) with the sign post in the center would be fine. Because water will not be readily available to these small signage gardens, it will be important to have volunteers maintain the gardens. A retired couple, for instance, may "adopt" the three or four signage gardens, with the city providing bulbs and annuals to be planted. The planting should match those found in downtown corner and streetside planter locations.

A note about volunteer efforts: Every effort should be made to encourage volunteer participation in the beautification effort. This encourages community pride, and showcases the high quality of life found in Blaine. Volunteers should sign a letter of agreement that states the city will provide the actual plantings, but that the volunteer(s) or volunteer organization will maintain their adopted garden on a weekly basis from May through September, and bi-weekly in March, April, and October, and monthly in November, December, January and February. We also recommend that a small "adopted by" plaque be placed in each garden providing recognition for the volunteer. Additionally, this way their name is on the line hopefully ensuring adequate care of the garden.

Downtown beautification

Downtown beautification efforts in Blaine provide a shining example to other small cities on what they should do. These efforts are important in attracting visitors, new residents, new businesses, and really showcase the high quality of life found in Blaine.

These efforts should continue and should include areas along the western bluff of Peace Portal Way: removal of blackberry vines, weeds, trash, and the beautification of street corners not currently landscaped or maintained.

Sculpture garden development

The city owns areas on the western side of Peace Portal Way where east-west roadways intersect Peace Portal Way. For this report, we have called each of these pocket park areas "Sculpture Gardens."

(See photo) There are approximately six of these areas and one is home to the war memorial, and another already has a sculpture in place. The remaining four should be jointly developed by the



Beautification

city, Beautification Committee and the Arts Commission. These gardens will showcase outstanding sculptures which would be rotated periodically. Each of the gardens, including the two already in place, should be similarly designed and planted. We recommend that one be professionally designed and engineered, and that it be used as a template for each sculpture garden.



Each garden should include lighting for the art, an interpretive sign crediting the artist and providing information about the piece, walking and viewing area (we suggest a paver stone surface), benches, and a railing along the bluff. Eventually several of these gardens may provide access points to an elevated boardwalk which would run along the bluff.

These gardens are the most important segment of the downtown beautification effort because they provide view corridors to the bay and Semiahmoo, will showcase the sculpture theme, and will add to the city's ambiance and will encourage pedestrian access throughout town. As visitors walk between each sculpture garden they will be much more likely to frequent shops, delis, and other retail businesses downtown.

7. Removal of Gull station, fence, other private eyesores

Currently, there are a couple of areas in downtown Blaine that reflect a town on the decline. We recommend that the city work with the land owner of the vacant pizza restaurant (F Street and Peace Portal Way) to remove the chain link fence (see photo) and to clean up the parking area.



A major eyesore is the vacant Gull Station (see bottom photo, previous page) which is easily seen from Southbound I-5. We do not know the status of this property, but the city should be proactive in having the building removed and remediation of underground tanks begun.



We understand that U.S. Customs has been working with D.O.T. to expand the border

Removal of eye sores

crossing facilities. This will be a major project which may require the relocation of the south-bound exit from its current location to an area that may include the Gull station. The Dept. of Transportation is just beginning this work and will be bringing conceptual plans and alternatives to the city for review over the next several months (winter/spring 2000/2001).

Regardless, the city should encourage the removal of the service station as a blighted facility. The first effort would be to work directly with the land owner, and if something cannot be arranged, to work through the city attorney to see what other options might be available.

8. Peace Portal Way sidewalk and bulkhead improvements

The city should continue to work with land owners along the bluff to shore up foundations and bulkheads so that sidewalks can be repaired. The western side of Peace Portal Way offers spectacular views and is a very nice walk, except for areas where the sidewalks have collapsed due to base erosion.

The city may want to explore the creation of a Business Improvement District (BID) for the repair of the sidewalk, installation of railings, and some additional landscape improvements.



9. Removal of Anchor Inn Motel sign

The Anchor Inn Motel sign situated along Peace Portal Way (see photo next page) does little to promote the motel and is an eyesore along one of the most beautiful stretches of road in the state. The sign dates the hotel as a 60s motel, and portrays the facility as a low-quality property. While the sign is probably grandfathered in, there is little incentive to have the sign removed. However, the city council could grant a variance for the hotel owner if they would remove the existing sign and replace it with a smaller hand painted attractive sign placed at a five foot (or so) level which is the ideal height for vehicle traffic. While off-premise signs should not be permitted, this could be done as a variance to encourage the existing sign's removal.



Regulatory recommendations

REGULATORY CHANGES

10. Allow sandwich boards

We recommend the city allow sandwich boards (or A-boards) along Peace Portal Way from F Street to Boblett and east to 4th Street. The sandwich boards should be of a uniform size, use certain fonts and fit the overall theme in terms of look and design. The firm hired to produce the marketing materials for the city or the landscape architectural firm hired to design the pocket parks and sculpture gardens can develop a simple prototype board, creating design standards. Sandwich board designs should be presented to the building department for a permit, to ensure continuity to the theme. Only one sandwich board per store should be allowed, and it should only be placed outside the store during store hours.



11. Perpendicular business signage

Florescent signage is a thing of the past and does not fit the city's architectural theme. In most cases, these signs date the business to the 50s, 60s or early 70s. We recommend that the city encourage and allow painted or sandblasted perpendicular signs for each store front. They should be placed within a certain height and fit within certain size limitations. The city might consider looking at the signage ordinances used in Leavenworth, Washington where size, theme, text, placement and other factors have been put in place successfully.



12. Awnings

The ultimate goal of this program is to make Blaine a year round, multi-day destination. To this end, it will be important to provide a quality shopping experience year round. Awnings can add to the theme, while providing weather-protected pedestrian access to downtown retailers, and should be encouraged.

Regulatory recommendations

13. Relocation of adult book store

Unfortunately, the adult book store is located in the very heart of downtown and does not fit within the definition of “visitor retail.” In fact, for many visitors, it will present Blaine as a seedy town and one they won’t feel comfortable walking around in. While this may not be fair, it is reality. If there was an adult bookstore in the heart of Leavenworth’s retail district, what would it tell you about Leavenworth? What image would it leave with visitors?



Our views are not a commentary on moral issues whatsoever, but purely reflect the image of Blaine as seen by visitors. The goal of this program is to bring visitor dollars into Blaine - particularly into the downtown area. Shopping and dining in a pedestrian-friendly setting is one of the top activities of visitors, and is the one activity that garners the most spending outside of lodging. Many visitors will label Blaine as unsafe, seedy, and a second-class city and will ultimately take their business elsewhere. While this is unfair and unfounded, it is a reality. In 20 years of working around the country we have not found one successful visitor-friendly small town with this type of facility in the heart of the city. Examples include Ocean Shores; Long Beach; Westport; Leavenworth; Winthrop; Victoria; Sequim; Port Townsend; Langley; Coeur d’Alene; Sandpoint; Jackson, Wyoming; Whistler, B.C., etc.

In fact, even larger cities including Seattle, Portland and Vancouver, B.C. have worked hard to have these types of businesses relocated to other less family-oriented areas of the city.

We recommend that the city continue to pursue avenues that would result in a relocation of the business. Because this is such a highly visible location, the business would probably do better in a less visible location where customers would not be so obviously identified and seen and thus embarrassed.

14. Building fees and codes review

The city should also look at the following and compare to other similar cities to make sure that Blaine can compete for business that might locate elsewhere:

- a. Review permitting process to streamline
- b. Review impact fees and utility hookup fees
- c. Change zoning east of Peace Portal Way (for several blocks) to eliminate auto-related businesses
- d. Consider “visitor retail” and “neighborhood retail” zoning ordinances for a confined area of downtown
- e. Review height restrictions along Peace Portal Way

Annual programs

15. Move auto-oriented zoning

The existing “Auto-oriented Central Business” zoning district, which encompasses just under six acres, should be relocated to the east side of I-5. The location of the gas stations in the downtown core (central business district) is unattractive and detracts from the market and pedestrian flavor the City is working to attain.

ANNUAL PROGRAMS

16. Creation of a sculpture theme

We recommend that the city adopt a sculpture theme and work to become the “International City of Sculptures.” There are several reasons for a theme of this type:

- a. It doesn’t conflict with the turn-of-the-century seaport theme and may, in fact, enhance the architectural theme.
- b. It is relatively inexpensive to implement since most or all of the art will be donated or loaned to the Arts Commission, which we recommend be developed to oversee the theme.
- c. The theme can be implemented in a much shorter time frame than other themes including event themes (Shakespeare festivals, etc.).
- d. There is already a solid foundation for the theme. The Peace Arch Anniversary Association has developed the annual sculpture exhibition at the park and has done a phenomenal job of promoting it on less than a shoestring budget. Their work (in particular Christina Alexander) has been nothing short of outstanding and should be expanded into downtown Blaine, and year round.
- e. The sculpture theme will attract a tremendous amount of publicity - particularly since cultural tourism is the fastest growing segment of the industry. Publicity is far more effective than advertising and will leverage future marketing budgets.
- f. The arts attracts higher-income visitors, and will provide a quality tie to Semiahmoo guests who currently spend little time or money in Blaine.

17. Economic development recruitment program

One of the most important aspects to building the tourism industry and tax base in Blaine will be the recruiting of new investment into the city. We recommend that the City hire the services of a professional recruiting firm to attract the following investment projects:

Annual programs

- a. Mid-priced view hotel (60 rooms, meeting space for 40 to 60)
- b. Visitor retail businesses
- c. Assistance with the Port to attract a medium to large charter operation
- d. Downtown/marina condominium development

The recruiting effort is of critical importance and should begin in the spring of 2001 with the initial emphasis on the hotel. Once a hotel has been recruited, the work involved in recruiting retail businesses will be much easier.

Development interests will see Blaine as “pioneering” – where they must create the market rather than fulfill a demand that is already there. In order to attract the type of businesses Blaine is looking for, the city may need to review its impact fees, permitting processes and guidelines to make sure it isn’t cost prohibitive to “take a chance” on Blaine. Ocean Shores, for instance, recruited more than \$100 million in new tourism development in just four years. To do so, the city hired professional assistance, made sure there were no impact fees, kept the building permit process to a minimum, and the city’s general attitude (staff and council) was “what can we do to help?” As a result, Ocean Shores is seeing a 600% annual cash return on its initial investment in the form of increased property, utility, B&O, sales, and lodging tax revenues.

\$60,000 has been budgeted out of lodging tax dollars for this effort over the next three years, but the effort should continue through 2007. The city should also allocate some general funds to the effort as well. The effort can also be used to recruit non-tourism businesses to the city concurrently. The City should work closely with the Whatcom County EDC and should establish an economic development committee to assist with the business attraction effort - for both industrial and tourism projects.

Recruitment of charter operator(s)

The City should also do everything it can to assist the Port in recruiting a major charter operator to the marina basin. Guests who charter boats typically spend the night prior to their departure, are typically higher-income individuals, and tend to charter a boat annually. Charter operators are a large part of Anacortes’ tourism base and their clients spend millions in the community each year.

Moorage rates and amenities in Blaine Harbor are easily sufficient to accommodate charter operations, and the Port is currently working to attract this type of business to the marina.

Recruiting Amtrak passenger service

There has been an effort towards establishing Amtrak service to Blaine. The historic railroad station in Blaine could be a tremendous asset, particularly with the advent of the Discovery Center, increased Plover runs, a new hotel, and a pedestrian-



Annual programs

oriented retail district just a block away. Passenger service currently includes Bellingham and Vancouver, B.C.

There are many challenges to resuming service to Blaine including:

- a. Additional time necessary to stop in Blaine for few, if any, passengers. Blaine is currently not a destination city.
- b. There is a lack of parking at the station which could be overcome with nearby additional public parking.
- c. There may be competition from points just north of the border as a boarding point.

While it will be a number of years before train service to Blaine is viable, the City should work with Amtrak, Burlington Northern, and local State Representatives to set the stage and begin opening the door for future service - particularly in conjunction with the major Discovery Center attraction which will draw multi-day visitors to Blaine from both the greater Vancouver, B.C. and Puget Sound regions. They should be made aware of these development plans and should be kept informed on a quarterly or semiannual basis as work and progress go forward.

Recruitment of retail businesses

Once visitors have decided to stop and see downtown Blaine, small business development will occur naturally. The city should do everything it can to attract small retail businesses to the downtown core area. These businesses should be “visitor retail” oriented shops: antiques, floral, gifts, collectibles, galleries, clothing, books, pubs, delis, restaurants, dessert and ice cream shops, bakeries, espresso shops, home furnishings, jewelry, artist studios (open to the public), camera & film, bike rentals, environment retailers, charter operators, a Plover ticket office, etc.



If Blaine can become a hub for this type of retail, the retail - in itself - will become a draw to the town. Even a dozen or so shops of this type will turn downtown Blaine around and will make the area a draw for visitors and locals - and a magnet for current and future Semiahmoo guests.

Even half-a-dozen shops will make a tremendous difference and a solid foundation from which to build. This may require a professional recruitment effort, which is discussed further in the next section and should take place in 2002, providing the city with a year or so to complete major initial assignments.

Events

The city should also investigate low-cost financing methods that will encourage building owners to renovate within the theme context.

EVENTS

Events are usually a touchy subject, particularly in rural and smaller communities. Most events are underfunded, only marketed locally, and as a result, only draw local residents. Lodging tax dollars, by law, are to be used for the promotion and development of tourism. A tourist is defined as a person who travels at least 50 miles and spends time in your community. For Blaine, we believe that a visitor from Bellingham spending time in the community would qualify as a visitor. How many events in Blaine are drawing visitors from at least 25 miles away?

Additionally, the real goal of this effort is to have visitors spend the night. Overnight guests spend four times more than day visitors. Therefore, we recommend that only multi-day events be funded. We also believe that lodging-tax funded events revolve around the central sculpture theme. This does not mean the city should not promote sailing regattas or bird watching, but that it should concentrate on building the city as the “International City of Sculptures” – what the city is know for.

We have recommended that the city assist in the formation of an Arts Commission that will be charged with developing events around the theme, and with further development of the theme. We recommend that the Arts Commission be granted the \$2,500 budget in 2001, increasing to a \$25,000 budget in subsequent years, with certain parameters for the years 2002 and beyond:

- a. That there be at least three different multi-day events each year.
- b. That each event be sufficient to draw visitors from at least 25 miles away and be enough to encourage overnight stays in Blaine. After the third year, the events should be substantive enough to draw visitors from at least 50 miles away.
- c. That the funds be used for marketing, advertising, and public relations purposes to visitors outside the immediate community. The Peace Arch Anniversary organization has done an excellent job at this on a very minuscule budget.
- d. That each event provide a summary to BTAC showing the number of visitors, where they have traveled from, and how long they stayed. Questionnaires should be developed for this purpose. BTAC should be shown the return on their investment in the event.

Events geared to local residents should not be funded through lodging tax dollars. Likewise, single-day events should not be funded unless the event is large enough to draw visitors for an overnight stay.

Events / Capital projects

Important: Every event should, after the second or third year, provide a solid return on the city's investment.

18. Multi-day events

Multi-day events should be encouraged and should revolve around the arts and sculpture theme. By concentrating on a particular niche, it will elevate the theme as the primary attraction. For instance, Ashland, Oregon has concentrated on what was once just a weekend event - the Shakespeare Festival. By putting all of its efforts into this event, they've expanded it to last more than 10 months and the city now draws visitors internationally. The city hosts more than 450,000 visitors annually who spend an average six days in Ashland.

This doesn't mean that Blaine should not encourage other events that revolve around birding, fishing, boating, etc., but with regards to lodging tax expenditures, all funds should initially go towards theme-promoting events.

Events might include sculpture exhibitions, workshop events and artisans at work, art and street fairs (visual and performing arts), and other events that promote the arts. Victoria has done very well promoting these types of events which have a pulling power beyond just local residents.

With regards to lodging tax expenditures, it's important to point out that those funds are to be used for the promotion and development of tourism: attracting visitors from distances of more than 50 miles. A secondary goal of lodging-tax funded events is to encourage overnight stays, thus the focus on multi-day events. We recommend that events only be funded that will draw visitors from outside Whatcom County and that the marketing be done outside the county as well to draw people to the events.

Every event held in Blaine, that we are aware of, is a good event and should continue, however, we recommend that those events find other sources of revenue outside of lodging tax funds.

CAPITAL PROJECTS

19. Freeway signage

Signage is absolutely critical to Blaine's tourism success. With more than 9.3 million visitors passing through Blaine each year, Blaine can garner millions of dollars in visitor spending by convincing passersby to stop - even if only for a short while.

The first order of business is to place signage along Interstate-5 alerting motorists of what Blaine has to



Capital projects

offer. For instance, currently visitors are unaware that Blaine has a downtown, or which exit it can be found at. When “downtown” is finally posted, travelers have less than 60 seconds to decide whether or not to stop. Blaine’s close proximity to the border crossing, in some ways, can be a challenge. Motorists are concentrating on the border itself - lines, access, etc., and Blaine often gets missed.

Once visitors decide to exit into Blaine, the problem is even more compounded with little or no signage directing them into the downtown core area.

An entire section of this report beginning on page 57 deals with signage issues and includes nearly 20 recommendations for state freeway and exit signage as well as city signage.

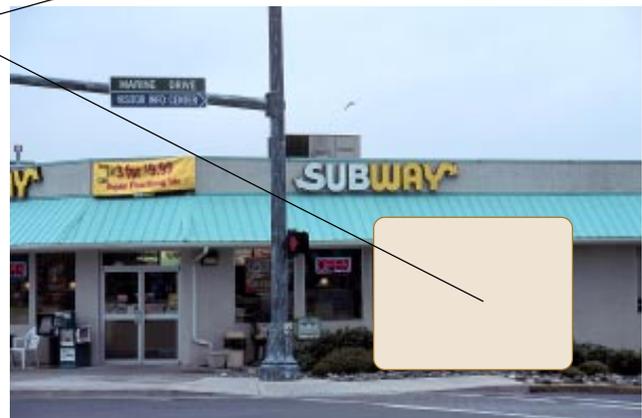
We recommend the city assign a staff person to work with the Dept. of Transportation in facilitating signage changes along I-5 on exit right-of-ways and with Public Works on developing additional city signage.

20. Gateway signage

Outside the new Welcome Center (VIC) there is a Blaine Harbor sign. We recommend this sign be removed and a new “grand entrance” sign be put in its place. Because the windows behind the sign will not need street exposure, the new sign can be much larger. The sign should be professionally designed since it will provide the key first impression. It should state “Welcome to Blaine” in large attractive lettering (fitting the theme), followed by directional arrows to “Blaine Harbor Marina” and “Downtown.” It should also note “Public Restrooms and Visitor Information here.”

The sign should be lit with ground level lighting, and the landscaping around it should match that as described earlier, with seasonal color and evergreen plantings.

The following several pages detail the signage recommendations by individual recommended sign.



Signage recommendations

Signage will be of utmost importance in Blaine’s downtown revitalization efforts and in the success of businesses who will invest in the downtown area. Most of the following signage recommendations will take place along Interstate-5, Highway 548, and on along Exit 276 (north and southbound).

Recommendation #1 - Addition to existing sign

While being located right on the Canadian border is attractive, it can also become a negative in terms of getting people to visit Blaine. Part of this problem is due to existing northbound freeway signage. At mile marker 272.5 there is a freeway sign that states “Blaine Next 3 exits” which is fine. However, it would be very beneficial to add to the sign “City center - 3rd exit.”



Travelers going over the border need time to make a decision whether or not to stop. At this point they’ve passed the last rest stop, have just seen the “Border crossing information - Tune in 1610 AM” and will begin making decisions. By adding “city center - 3rd exit” to the sign we are telling travelers that Blaine has a city center and where it is. Currently, the first sign identifying any city center is placed only a mile before the border - which gives visitors less than a minute to decide whether or not to stop.

Recommendation #2 - Text change to existing sign

At mile post 273.5 there is an existing blue sign that states “Food, Gas, Lodging, Camping - Next right.” We recommend that instead of stating “Next right,” the sign be changed to “Next three exits.”



This particular exit (exit 274) is a very unattractive entrance to Blaine and offers minimal services, thus the need to tell visitors that all three exits offer these amenities.



Signage recommendations

Recommendation #3 - New sign

We recommend placing a new sign at mile post 273.5 that says “Downtown Blaine 2 miles - Exit 276.” This will be a reminder that there is a downtown Blaine, and that it’s coming up in two miles. Once visitors get past exit 274, they know there are only two more exits. This sign will identify which one provides access to the downtown area.



Recommendation #4 - Addition to existing sign

At mile post 274.5 there is an existing sign that states “Canada customs - 2 miles - Open 24 hours.” We recommend that text be added to the sign that says “Downtown Blaine - 2nd exit - public restrooms.” The reason for placing the sign here is the fact that many visitors think exit 274 (H Street) is the primary exit. In fact, during our initial assessments we noticed several travelers taking this exit accidentally and then swerving

back onto the freeway and trying to negotiate around lines of semi-trucks, busses and other larger commercial vehicles.



Signage recommendations

Recommendation #5 - Text change to sign

At mile post 274.6 there is a second blue sign that states “Food, Gas, Diesel - Next right.” Instead of “next right,” we recommend changing the sign to read “Next 2 exits.” It’s important for travelers to know there are services at the last exit - before they are right on top of the exit and they have no time for decisions. The fact is that most of the services are available at the last exit.



Recommendation #6 - Move sign, add second banner

At mile post 275.7 there is a brown sign with the text “Peace Arch State Park - Next right.” This sign is only a quarter mile from the exit and is the first notification about the park. We recommend that the sign be located south about two tenths of a mile and that a blue banner sign be added to the post with the text “Public restrooms.” There are public restroom facilities at Peace Arch Park and there will be the new restrooms at the “new” VIC building.

Recommendation #7 - Elevate sign, add text to banner

At the last exit (276) the existing sign reads “Exit 276 - 548 South - Blaine City Center” with a blue banner that reads “Gas, Food, Lodging.” We recommend adding the words “Public restrooms” to the banner.



Signage recommendations

Summary of freeway signage

These seven recommendations only require the addition of one new sign, relocation of one existing sign, and adding or changing text to five signs. These changes, while they seem simple, may require new signs in order to facilitate the changes or additions. The Washington Department of Transportation has been severely impacted by the passage of I-695 which has created budget shortages and the recommended changes do come at a price.

It took Ferndale several years to get exit signage to reflect their downtown. We firmly believe that these changes are necessary for the survival and redevelopment of Blaine's downtown core area. Currently travelers have no idea where downtown Blaine is until they've gone past the second of the three exits. By that time they have only moments to decide whether or not to take that last exit.

We recommend that the City of Blaine, along with local organizations begin working with Dept. of Transportation officials to make these changes. Of course, it would be nice if the changes could be made in one fell swoop, but even if only two changes were made each year, Blaine would benefit tremendously.

Priorities if phased

1. The top priority would be to change the two blue signs to read "Next 3 exits" and "Next 2 exits" rather than simply "Next exit." These are also the least expensive of the recommendations. (Recommendations #2 and #5).
2. Recommendation #1, adding "City Center - 3rd exit," and Recommendation #6 which would relocate the Peace Arch Park sign with the Public Restrooms addition.
3. Recommendation #7, adding Public Restrooms to the existing sign; and Recommendation #4 adding "Downtown Blaine - 2nd exit" and "Public restrooms."
4. Recommendation #3, adding a new sign stating "Downtown Blaine - Exit 276."

While sign changes and additions are usually paid for by the Department of Transportation (DOT), if the cost becomes an issue in fulfilling these recommendations, we would endorse the city spending lodging tax dollars to assist in these changes. We are not sure that it is possible to do this, but it is certainly worth exploring.

We're not done with D.O.T. signage yet. The next signs have to do with exit signage along State Route 548.

Signage recommendations

Recommendation #8 - New sign, new location

When visitors take Exit 275 (H Street), there is only one small, easy-to-miss sign at Boblett Street with the text “City Center - D Street.” There are also two other signs, a directional sign to Blaine Public Works, and one to the airport. We recommend that all these signs be combined into one substantial sign that would read:

Downtown Blaine
Shopping, dining, lodging
Marina, public restrooms
Left at light

A second sign on the same post would have the airplane icon and an arrow to the right.

This new sign should be placed approximately 200 feet south of the existing sign. This way, the Boblett Street Sign and Public Works sign could remain at this intersection.



Recommendation #9 - New sign

Just south of H Street on SR548, there should be a sign that reads:

Gas, Food, Shopping
(with an arrow pointing both directions)
Lodging, Attractions
Visitor Information
Public Restrooms
(with an arrow pointing left)



Signage recommendations

Recommendation #10 - New sign

Another sign would be placed just south of D Street that would read as shown to the right. This type of sign is easy to read and will demonstrate all that downtown Blaine has to offer.



Recommendation #10 (City of Blaine) - improved signage

D Street needs to be better identified. Most travelers would have no idea where D Street is until they are past it, and in line to go across the border.

Recommendation #11 (City of Blaine) - new signs

On H Street, before Mitchell, a directional sign should be placed in the right-of-way: “Downtown Blaine” with a straight-ahead arrow. A duplicate sign should be placed on D Street approximately half way between the highway and downtown.

Recommendation #12 - New signage

When visitors take exit 276, they really have no clue where downtown is. Existing signage provides a directional for visitor information and Peace Arch Park. We recommend a new sign be placed in the same location and it would read as shown below, right.

This particular sign is of major importance. In fact, it should be the first priority.



Signage recommendations

Recommendation #13 - Additional sign

When visitors head south and are waiting to get through U.S. Customs they should know that Blaine's city center is only a couple hundred feet after the customs check-through. We recommend that a sign be placed approximately 300 feet prior to the crossing that would include the text shown to the right.



Recommendation #14 - Sign removal

When you take the southbound downtown exit, there is a sign that states "Historic Attraction." This sign should be removed. The directional pointed to the marina but we were unable to find anyone who knew what or where the historical attraction is.



Signage recommendations

At the bottom of the southbound exit, and where D Street passes under the freeway, is a “pocket park” of sorts, which is currently landscaped. This is the primary entrance to Blaine’s city center and where directional signage will be most important.

This particular sign needs to be professionally designed to include landscaping, lighting and should be consistent with Blaine’s seaport/harbor theme. It should have three faces: one facing southbound exit traffic, one facing D Street traffic, and one facing northbound Peace Portal Drive traffic.

This property, from what we were able to ascertain, belongs to D.O.T. We recommend that the city get permission to create a professionally designed sign for the site and that the city be charged with maintenance of the sign and landscape. Any signage will have to be approved by D.O.T., which would be expected.

The following illustration provides the recommended text for the three-sided sign.



Sign as seen from the southbound exit just after customs

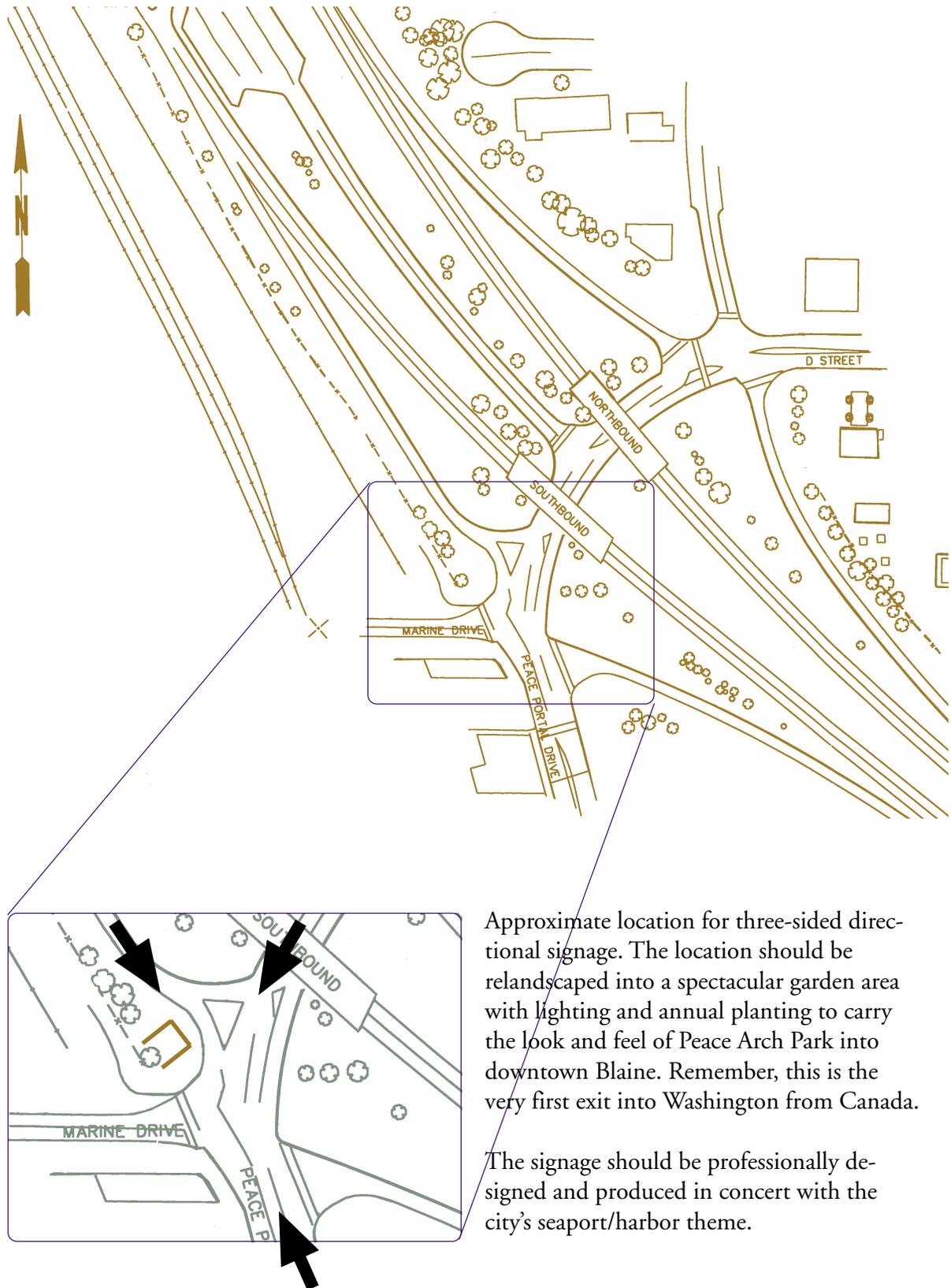
Northbound sign as seen from Peace Portal Drive

Downtown ↑
Visitor Information →
Public Restrooms →
Marina & Park →
 ← *Peace Portal Park*

← *Downtown*
Visitor Information ↗
Public Restrooms ↗
Marina & Park ↗
 ← *Peace Portal Park*

Thank you for visiting Blaine!
I-5 South →
To border crossing ↗
Peace Portal Park ↗
 ← *Marina & Park*

Signage recommendations



Approximate location for three-sided directional signage. The location should be landscaped into a spectacular garden area with lighting and annual planting to carry the look and feel of Peace Arch Park into downtown Blaine. Remember, this is the very first exit into Washington from Canada.

The signage should be professionally designed and produced in concert with the city's seaport/harbor theme.

Signage recommendations

Recommendation #16 - New entrance sign

Right in front of Subway (the new VIC) there is a Blaine Harbor sign. We recommend this sign be removed and a professionally designed, major entrance sign be put in its place. Because the public restrooms will be directly behind this sign, the new sign could be significantly higher without any effect on covering windows in this portion of the VIC.

The sign would be probably 12' wide by approximately 12' high and would be designed in the turn-of-the-century seaport motif. It would perhaps be a sandblasted sign with the words "Welcome to Blaine - the International City of Sculptures."



Possible location for
entrance Welcome sign

NOTE: The federal government is working on plans to expand the customs operation for all southbound traffic coming into the U.S. from Canada. These plans could include relocating the southbound exit. This project would not effect any of the signage recommendations we've made. The only signage that would be changed would be the southbound exit panel (in the pocket park) and the southbound exit signage at the border crossing which would simply be changed to reflect that Downtown Blaine - 1/2 mile.

If and when this change happens, a new southbound exit will be created and downtown Blaine visitors would enter Blaine in a different location, at which time new signage would need to be addressed to direct visitors into downtown Blaine.

Signage recommendations

Signage. The following section summarizes the signage needs for Blaine.

Freeway signage along I-5 coming from the South.

Mile Marker	Existing Signage	New Signage	Comments
267.5	Rest Area		
269.0	Linden Birch Bay 1 mile		
270.0	Linden Birch Bay		
270.5	Private commercial retail sign Best Western		Would be beneficial to take over this sign or add another billboard promoting some private retail
271.5	Border Crossing Information Tune in 1610 AM		Add Blaine message about visitor information and/or public restrooms
272.5	Blaine Next 3 Exits	City Center 3rd Exit	
273.5	All Trucks and Buses Exit 275		
273.5	(Blue) Food, Gas, Lodging, Camping Next Right	Food, Gas, Lodging Next 3 Exits	Existing sign leads you to unattractive back-door gateway to Blaine
273.5		Downtown Blaine Exit 276	First directional sign for downtown
274.0	Exit 274 Peace Portal Drive Semiahmoo		
274.1	(Overpass) Exit 275 543 N Truck Customs H Street 1 mile		
274.4	Canada Customs 2 Miles Open 24 Hours	(Add above) Downtown Blaine Public Restrooms - 2 nd Exit	2 nd reminder for downtown Blaine exit
274.5	Freeway Ends		
274.6	(Blue) Food, Gas Diesel Next Right	(Blue) Food, Gas, Diesel, Lodging Next 2 Exits	Lets travelers know they have two choices
274.7	All Buses and Commercial Vehicles Must Exit		

Signage recommendations

275.0	Exit 275 543 North Truck Customs H Street		
275.4	(Overpass) Exit 276 548 South Blaine City Center 1 Mile		
275.7	(Brown) Peace Arch State Park Next Right	Move this sign South to the 275.5 mile post. Add (Blue) Public Restrooms	Need to move sign South to give travelers more warning before exit
276	Exit 276 548 South Blaine City Center Gas, Food, Lodging	Sign needs to be more elevated Add (Blue) Public Restrooms	

Signage from the South – At Exit 275 – Truck Customs and H Street.

Sign location	Existing Signage	New Signage	Comments
On exit ramp At Boblett St. Exxon Station	1. Boblett Street 2. City Center D-Street 3. Directional sign Airport 4. Directional sign: Blaine Public Works Dept.	Replace and move City Center D-Street Move South 200 feet (Blue) Downtown Shops, Dining, Lodging, Marina, Public Restrooms Left Next Light	Existing signage is woefully inadequate for traveler
Just South of H Street		(Blue) Shopping Next Right	Need to support new retail mall
At H Street		Better H Street Signage	
Just South of D Street		(Blue) Downtown Shops, Dining, Lodging, Marina, Public Restrooms D Street Next Left	
At D Street		Better D Street Signage	
On H Street Before Mitchell		Downtown Blaine (Directional sign with arrow)	
On D Street		Downtown Blaine (Directional sign with arrow)	

Signage recommendations

Freeway Signage from the Canadian Crossings coming South on I-5			
Immediately after Crossing	(Blue) Gas, Food, Lodging Visitor Information Public Restrooms	Downtown Blaine (Directional sign with arrow)	Sign needs to provide travelers with as much lead time as possible
Off freeway right of way		Welcome to Blaine Next Right	City sign

Capital projects

21. Architectural theme

The city has adopted an architectural theme based around the city's history as a turn-of-the-century seaport village. The Blaine Insurance building is the best example of this theme. Other good examples include the Chiropractic Clinic, Blackberry House, and the Bed & Breakfast establishments located along Peace Portal Way.

We recommend that the city continue with this theme in terms of design review, signage ordinances, and assistance - wherever possible - in working with existing building owners to encourage facelifts and facades that would fit and encourage the theme.

Building owner incentives

The city should research avenues to support existing building owners who will invest in their properties to bring them into the architectural theme. Methods may include low interest loans, technical assistance, and other methods that may become available to encourage theme development.

All new buildings and building renovations should conform to the theme and design standards. If the city does not have a Design Review Committee in place, it might explore this as an option. These committees are not charged with enforcement, but are to provide assistance to new and existing building owners.

Included should be a commercial fishing district that encompasses the area around McMillan and Sigurdson Avenues. Like antique furniture, much of what is currently at Blaine Harbor is on the verge of becoming historic, or at least represents some of the rich fishing history in Blaine. The area can easily be improved with a variety of low cost or free funding sources. This historic fishing district could become a haven for the local fishing community. One can visualize the other related businesses tucked away in some of the nooks and crannies of the district such as kayak rentals, wooden boat builders, an oyster bar, a fish market, and a high-end restaurant specializing in seafood.



22. Sculpture theme and gardens

Wouldn't it be terrific if Blaine became known as "The International City of Sculptures?" While

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many cities have placed and promoted sculptures as a central focus, they have too few sculptures, or they are placed so intermittently that the theme is usually overlooked. Because Blaine has a small downtown core area, 20 to 40 sculptures placed throughout downtown would have a significant impact and would become a major draw to the city. The sculpture theme would spawn other arts as well, making Blaine a coveted “arts community.” Visual arts also often create a draw for performing arts, expanding the overall art and sculpture theme.

Sculptures would be rotated every few months so that Blaine doesn't suffer from the “been there, done that” syndrome which negatively affect many other communities. Within an 18 month period, perhaps 20 to 30 of the 40 sculptures would be replaced by new art. A few signature pieces may remain as permanent fixtures - particularly those that enhance the seaport fishing village theme.

The Arts Commission would be charged with managing the sculpture exhibits, working closely with BTAC, city staff, parks, and the beautification committee. This theme would work well with the concept being developed for a Native American totem pole exhibit near Semiahmoo.



It's important that the art be located so that a walking tour can be developed within a one or two mile stretch. The first year (2001) may result in only two or three major sculptures, and approximately 10 new locations and sculptures should be added each year, so that after three or four years, the city is home to 40 major exhibits - not including the Peace Arch annual exhibition. The more exhibits the city has, the further visitors will drive to view them. The further the draw, the more likely visitors will be to spend the night - one of the primary goals of this program.

23. Purchase the Subway building

We recommend that the city purchase the Subway building located at the corner of Peace Portal Way and Marine Drive. The main floor of the building would house the Visitor Information Center, the offices for the Chamber of Commerce and



Capital projects

the Arts Commission, and would have public restroom facilities.

The lower floor, or basement, could be rented out as storage space to generate a small amount of income each month. Approximately 300 to 400 square feet is currently rented at \$300 a month. The remaining space could easily be developed into four or five storage spaces that would rent for about \$50 a month each for a total monthly income of approximately \$550, or \$6,600 annually.



The building was constructed in 1993 and has a substantial investment in the foundation alone. There are 13 total parking spaces with 10 along the north side of the building and three behind the building. The railroad should be approached to negotiate additional parking for staff and volunteers.

Once an offer on the building has been accepted, the sale should be contingent upon an inspection of the building, suitability and capacity for public restrooms, ability to finance, and an appraisal. During this due-diligence period, the city should seek architectural assistance in determining design and costs associated with the layout of restrooms, a “welcome center” (or VIC), offices, and exterior renovation to fit the city’s theme.

The reasons for this recommendation are many:

a. This is the first building seen by visitors coming into the downtown area from Interstate 5 both northbound and southbound. Currently, the building is not attractive and does not fit the city’s architectural theme. This will allow the city to create a much improved “entrance” and first impression.

b. The purchase of the building will also ensure its future use.



VIC area
Gateway signage

Restroom area

Capital projects

Rumors, at one point, suggested that perhaps when Subway relocated, the space might become a tavern or be used for a purpose that won't necessarily enhance the city's theme, architectural standards, or desire to be known as an arts community.

c. This is an ideal location for both public restrooms and visitor information. The building is easy to find, easy to see, and easy to identify.

d. The building will also serve as a transition between Peace Portal Way and Marine Drive. Currently, there is no transition between the two, and the marina, Blaine's primary visitor attraction, is easily missed.

e. The Blaine Harbor sign, currently existing in the buffer area, is easily missed because it needed to remain low to the ground so it didn't cover the storefront windows behind it. This area of the building would be converted to public restroom facilities, and so a grand entrance sign could be put in its place to roof height, if necessary, because the windows behind it would be of no consequence.

Visitor Information Center

The VIC or "Welcome Center" would be located where Subway is now located with the central doors on the corner providing access. The VIC should also be configured to provide two offices for the Chamber of Commerce, an office for the Arts Commission, and a small meeting/lunch room. The main floor of the building is approximately 2,200 square feet of which about 1,600 square feet would be used for these purposes and the remaining 600 square feet would be developed into restroom facilities.

24. Public restrooms

We recommend that four to six uni-sex restrooms be developed in a portion of the main-floor space which was formerly occupied by the Dollar Store. One will need to be ADA accessible, and one or two should also include changing tables.

Because Blaine will be seeking Public Restroom signs along I-5, it will be very important to contact D.O.T. and make sure the facilities will conform to the requirements necessary to obtain the signage. The restroom facilities should be accessible from the VIC during business hours, and from its own entrance after hours.

We recommend that the city lease the VIC to the chamber for a minimal sum of perhaps \$1 per year in exchange for services:

- a. The chamber would maintain the building's interior and the restroom facilities making sure the facilities are clean and well maintained. The city would maintain the exterior and physical plant (utilities, HVAC, etc.)

Capital projects

- b. The chamber would operate the VIC, keeping it open as recommended herein.
- c. The chamber would allow the use of at least one office to a new Arts Commission at no charge.

We recommend the city enter into a two-year lease with the Chamber with one-year renewable options. Because the Chamber is new and just getting on its feet, the City should look for a return on its investment in terms of how well the VIC is being managed and is open; how well maintained the facilities are; and how well the chamber is doing in terms of marketing tourism and the community to visitors, new residents, and new business interests.

25. International Northwest Discovery Center

For nearly 10 years, a dedicated group of individuals has worked to develop the Northwest Discovery Center. The Center was planned for a brownfield site in Bellingham, but could be located in Blaine. We recommend that the city and local organizations do everything possible to encourage its development in Blaine. The following is an excerpt from their materials describing the proposed center:



The Northwest Discovery Center will be the first of its kind, a new breed of living museum, science center, education facility and world-class destination attraction that takes a leading role in research and action, fostering collaboration between nations and across political and cultural borders to restore and sustain the ecosystems of the Pacific Northwest and beyond.

A multiuse educational and exhibition facility promoting understanding of the natural and cultural history of the inter-linked environments of the Pacific Northwest, the Center will inspire marvel and a sense of stewardship towards our rich natural resources. Scope will include Whatcom County, the San Juan Islands, and Lower Mainland British Columbia and Gulf Islands.

Located on or near the border between the United States and Canada, the Discovery Center will literally and figuratively occupy common ground. It will be a nexus for research, conflict resolution and action, where experiments in international collaboration to protect trans-border ecosystems are conducted, observed and reported worldwide.

The facility will be designed as a nonprofit public attraction and regional resource that is self-sustaining through admissions and other revenues, providing significant ongoing economic benefits to the region.

Capital projects

Facility Features

- Exhibits: Recreated living habitats and aquariums, interactive displays, educational programs, laboratories and classrooms will invite visitors to marvel at the natural wonders of a vast trans-border region stretching from the Cascade Mountains to beneath the Sound, an area that could be set aside as a Biosphere Reserve.
- Education and Outreach Programs: Programs will be available for all ages (K-12, University, Seniors), and will be integrated with regional school systems. Field trips, internships, volunteer opportunities and distance learning in the classroom will be offered.
- The Natural Connection: A resource library, call-in or on-site reference center for questions or research concerning any aspect of this bio-region. Also will provide links to other volunteer, educational or recreational facilities or programs in the region.
- Wildlife Rehabilitation Clinic: Abandoned or injured wildlife will be nursed back to health and released, volunteers trained, and information provided to call-ins regarding wildlife.
- Millennium Trail: NWDC will be a node on the Millennium Trail, and will service as the Trail's primary interpretive and administrative center. It will link visitors to the chain of trails throughout this region.
- Northwest Straits Marine Conservation Center: NWDC will provide a home for public education and outreach for protecting and restoring Northwest Straits marine habitat.
- Cascadia Biosphere Reserve: Efforts will be made to establish the area as a biosphere reserve, anchored and interpreted by the Discovery Center.
- American/Canadian Border: Borders and boundaries will serve as a major theme throughout the exhibits. In addition, exhibits and activities will focus on this international border crossing with such issues as surveillance and security, Point Roberts, trade immigration, and Canadian/American relations.
- Research Laboratories: In collaboration with colleges and universities in Washington and British Columbia, primary and practical research will be conducted on organisms and issues of importance to the region's marine, fresh water and forest habitats. Links will be developed with other research centers in the region and beyond.
- International Think and Action Tank: Scientists, scholars and leaders from the U.S., Canada, and other nations will convene around policies, issues and practical opportunities of international significance, with special emphasis on the natural world in an increasingly populated setting.
- Conference and Resolution Center: Conflicts and issues will be debated and settlements negotiated in the neutral setting of the Center's nonprofit Foundation. This facility will offer

Capital projects

state-of-the-art media equipment, internet access and all amenities for small conferences and public presentations.

As you can see from the overview, the Northwest Discovery Center would provide a major attraction in Blaine. We offer the following recommendations:

- That perhaps the center become the International Discovery Center (IDC) as opposed to the Northwest Discovery Center.
- That the facility be expanded to include an arts component. The High Desert Museum, located near Bend, Oregon has successfully included the environment, historical museum, and the arts into a very successful living museum. The Peace Arch Anniversary Association has been working on the development of an arts interpretive center, which could become another facet of the IDC.
- We feel the perfect site for the Center would be in Marine Park. The location is ideal in the fact that it would be highly visible to millions of visitors who sit in line at the southbound border. While the park is hardly noticeable, a major facility would provide a commanding presence. Additionally, the facility would overlook a very sensitive wildlife area (the bay), the Peace Arch, the border crossing, and would be ideally situated for marine biology research. Finally, the Center would be a natural fit to the park in terms of interpretive signage, displays, viewing and picnic areas, and sculptures.
- The city owns approximately 2-1/2 acres of land adjacent to the park and we recommend that the city deed the land to the Center as an in-kind donation and that the city also improve Marine Drive to accommodate the facility. The property would not be deeded to the Center, however, until the project becomes a reality. The street improvements and the land would be a significant donation to the center, which will provide the city with an incredible return on its donation in short order.

The facility and needed parking may require more than the 2-1/2 undeveloped acreage. In that case, a “campus” style facility may be appropriate with additional “pods” located at the marina, downtown, or Semiahmoo. Another “pod” it’s possible that a small portion of the park may be needed for additional parking.

This type of attraction will not only increase tourism to Blaine, but will bring long-term visitors to the area in terms of scientists, educators, researchers, and will also create many family-wage jobs of this type.

This single attraction is what Blaine needs in order to benefit from tourism, environmental awareness, research, and will act as a springboard for other related facilities in Blaine and at Semiahmoo, which also has available facilities. Tying the two together, via the Plover, would create an outstanding visitor experience.

Capital projects

26. Boardwalk and view corridors

The city has been looking into the development of a Peace Portal boardwalk and/or viewing areas from the bluff along Peace Portal Way. We recommend that the city continue with this work seeking state and federal grants wherever possible. The boardwalk project should eventually provide pedestrian access to the marina, and will definitely provide outstanding views and opportunities for the placement of sculptures.

27. Millennium Trail development

While not a part of this plan, the Millennium Trail is an important asset that can benefit tourism in Blaine and throughout Whatcom County. One of the most popular tourist activities is walking and biking along view corridors and the Millennium Trail system offers this attraction. It's an amenity that can link Semiahmoo to the marina, and will link the marina to downtown Blaine. While no funding has been set aside specifically for the trail, as other projects are completed, the trail will become an integral part of those projects which include the International (NW) Discovery Center, boardwalk, marine drive improvements, etc.

28. Development of additional public parking

While parking downtown may not be a problem today, as Blaine's downtown area attracts new businesses, the recommended hotel, and thus more visitors, public parking will be a very important amenity.

We recommend that the city secure grants and/or other funding to purchase land for future public parking. The site should not be more than one block off of Peace Portal Way, should be easy to find, and should accommodate both passenger vehicles, tour busses and RV's. The lot (or lots, if necessary) should be able to accommodate between 80 and 100 vehicles.

If the development plan is carried out as planned, parking will need to be developed in 2003 for the busy summer season.

29. Marine Park interpretive signage

Numerous interpretive signs have been constructed and should be placed in and around Marine Park. We recommend that the signs already developed be installed and that signage continue to be developed. Interpretive signs should eventually be installed along the entire length of the downtown core, marina and boardwalk. While no funding has been specifically set aside for these, there are numerous grants (state and federal) for environmental/educational signage.

30. Semiahmoo Lighthouse restoration project

A considerable amount of work has been done on the Semiahmoo Lighthouse restoration. We

Capital projects

fully support this effort and hope that it continues. Funds have not been allocated from lodging tax revenues for the project due to the very limited funding and the need to develop a major multi-day attraction to Blaine. However, the lighthouse project greatly enhances the appeal of Blaine, its heritage, and will be highly visible drawing visitors into the city.

31. Central Park project

The city is currently negotiating a property swap between the Airport Commission and a local company. The result of this exchange, if it is ultimately done, will be the acquisition of a small lot on the southeast corner of H Street and 3rd Street. The lot is intended to function as the town's "central park." Its location at the center of the city makes it a perfect park for community gatherings, Saturday market functions, art exhibits, etc. While this would not be funded as part of this plan, we certainly endorse the parks development which will add to the overall appeal of Blaine's downtown area.

JOINT PROJECTS WITH THE PORT

32. Pier park improvements, parking

At the end of Marine Drive is a fishing pier and pier park. Currently part of the pier is leased to a private entity. We recommend that the city not renew the lease and develop the entire pier into a park with no parking allowed on the pier. The challenge to this recommendation has to do with parking and access. Current parking is quite a walk from Marine Park, and the roadway to the pier is narrow and there is no pedestrian access.

While vehicle traffic would not be permitted on the pier, there are adjacent businesses which will still need street access and may conflict with



pedestrian access. However, we understand there is work being done to provide Millennium Trail access from the pier along Marine Park, which would provide the pedestrian access. After the advent of the Discovery Center, perhaps a trolley or vehicle could shuttle visitors to the pier and back every 15 minutes.

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The pier creates another excellent location for sculptures and storyboards.

33. Marine Drive resurfacing, paved parking

Marine Drive is in dire need of reconstruction. As the Pier Park, Discovery Center, and new businesses and visitors are attracted to the marina, a decent roadway will be absolutely necessary. In fact, the existing roadway is the primary detractor from making the marina area a stand-out attraction. The street should be a top priority and should be reconstructed or repaved in 2001. The street project should not wait for the Discovery Center or other major development before it is facilitated. Pedestrian/bicycle access should also be included in this very important project.



34. Marine Drive boardwalk

The pier at the end of Marine Drive needs to be connected to Marine Park by a pedestrian access route. After city staff toured the site with the Department of Ecology, it appears that the construction of a pedestrian boardwalk adjacent to the north side of Marine Drive and extending over the riprap is possible. Its benefits are obvious: providing a safe and leisurely walk along the water, bird watching, and linking the two recreational facilities.

THREE-YEAR MARKETING PLAN

The following three-year marketing plan (2001-2003) is part of an overall tourism development strategy that includes approximately two million dollars in capital expenditures for projects which will provide a solid foundation for a sustainable tourism program. The following marketing plan includes the development of new marketing materials, limited advertising, the promotion of events, and a public relations effort.

The plan has been developed on the assumption that the City of Blaine will adopt the remaining one percent lodging add-on tax available under Washington State law.

Objective

The primary objective of the Blaine Tourism Development plan is to enhance the quality of the city's overall economic climate by maximizing its tourism industry potential. As a result of a strengthened tourism industry, overall improvement in local business revenues as well as needed infrastructure improvements will occur.

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While the ultimate objective is to make Blaine a destination city, the first objective is to get visitors to stop in Blaine for needed services, dining and shopping on their way to other destinations. With added shopping, attractions and amenities, Blaine, over time, will be able to capture more visitor dollars and additional overnight stays.

The first priority is to get people to stop. Then, with added amenities, retailers and attractions, visitors will stay for longer periods. The longer they stay, the more they spend. A stay of three hours or more translates to added dining and shopping revenues. Overnight visitors will spend four times that of day visitors, so the ultimate goal is to make Blaine a destination city.

To do so will require substantial investments in the development of visitor attractions and amenities, a professional marketing program, cooperative marketing partnerships with local agencies and businesses, and an eye towards return on investment on all lodging tax expenditures.

Strategy

The marketing strategy for Blaine will include growth of the marketing program over a three to five year period. This will give the city, chamber and other local organizations time to develop capital projects (draws to the area), the theme, multi-day events, etc.

The first priority over the first two years is to simply pull passersby into Blaine for short periods. With an average 25,000 visitors traveling both ways through the border every day, Blaine has a ready-made market it needs to tap into. The advent of public restrooms, better freeway and exit signage, and beautification improvements will go a long way to enticing visitors off the freeway.

The primary reason to exit into downtown Blaine will be the use of public restrooms. Since the restroom facilities will be located within the visitor information center, it will provide an ideal setting to convince visitors to stay a while and visit Marine Park, the waterfront, stay for a meal or shopping.

During this first two years, we recommend that the city continue to place full-color ads in key publications including the Washington State Travel Planner, AAA Oregon/Washington Tour Book, and the Whatcom County Visitors Guide. Many of the trips planned from the U.S. to Canada involve preliminary research. When heading north, the natural reaction is to get over the border before stopping. But if these travelers are aware of Blaine, its services, attractions and amenities in advance, perhaps a stop in Blaine will become a part of the trip as opposed to a last-second decision.

By the year 2003, with the addition of new attractions and amenities, we have stepped up the marketing program to include a public relations program which will target residents within a two-hour drive of Blaine in both British Columbia and Washington. While the Canadian dollar has hurt retail sales in Blaine for most of the 90s, the advent of antique shops, galleries, collectibles, and other unique shops, the sculpture theme, additional view restaurants, and a new

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mid-priced hotel will draw Canadian spending back into downtown Blaine. Lynden, Fairhaven and even LaConner have continued to see substantial Canadian spending. Once Blaine is ready, the Canadian market will be absolutely worth the marketing investment.

The hub of the marketing effort will revolve around a closer marketing partnership with Semiahmoo, the Port, and the development of the Chamber and visitor information center.

In the tourism development section of this plan, we have recommended that the city purchase the current Subway building. It provides a natural transition between the marina and downtown, and is the “front door” to the downtown core area. Of the 2,400 square feet of main-floor area, approximately 800 square feet would include six unisex restrooms, 800 square feet would be set aside for visitor information and the remaining 800 square feet would be divided into three offices and common area (mailing/copy room). One office would be for the chamber’s executive director and another office would be set aside for use by the Arts Commission, which we recommend creating to further the sculpture theme.

This “office” will become the hub of Blaine’s tourism development program. It will be important that the building be dressed-up to fit the city’s turn-of-the-century seaport theme, and this will require a major capital investment in the building’s exterior look. This has been addressed in the development portion of the plan.

Working with Semiahmoo will be very important, especially as Blaine develops its tourism infrastructure - new attractions and amenities. This partnership will need to be fostered over time, with partnerships beginning in years three through five of the program. Currently Blaine offers little to Semiahmoo guests, but as the city develops a visitor retail center, a major attraction, the boardwalk and sculpture theme, Blaine will become more and more of a marketing plus for Semiahmoo. One of the primary goals is to make Blaine a draw in itself. Currently visitors stay in Semiahmoo because of Semiahmoo. Wouldn’t it be great if visitors began staying at Semiahmoo because Blaine had so much to offer?

Because Semiahmoo is a high quality resort, it will be important to make sure that Blaine’s tourism development will appeal to their guests. There’s no question the arts and sculpture theme will be a good fit, as will the boardwalk and other amenities. It will be important that restaurants provide quality, that shops are attractive and generally upscale, and that the major attraction to be developed in the marina be substantial and of excellent quality.

By the fifth year of this program, if all goes as planned, the City will be able to embark on an aggressive marketing program which will include expanded marketing efforts throughout the Northwest and partnerships not only with Semiahmoo, but with White Rock and Birch Bay, with Blaine taking the lead in much of the effort.

The market

The initial market will be geared to both business and pleasure travelers who are making the trip

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between Vancouver, B.C. and the Puget Sound region. “On your way to and from Vancouver, the place to stop is Blaine.” Since the initial marketing is geared to Washington visitors who are traveling to and from Canada, the emphasis will be on promoting Blaine’s waterfront, the sculpture theme and the Peace Arch.

The demographic market will include business travelers looking for overnight accommodations near the border. The effort will include those that will be looking for budget accommodations as well as those looking for upscale lodging. This way all lodging facilities in Blaine will see a benefit.

The second demographic market will include primarily adults, couples, and empty nesters who are looking for “soft adventure” experiences such as sailing and power boat charters, biking and walking, bird watching, and pedestrian-oriented shopping. This group of people will also be looking for cultural and educational experiences - thus the importance of the sculpture theme, artisans in action, and the major attractions which would include the arts, environment and history of the Canadian/American border.

In summary, the initial effort will be geared to baby boomers and older adults who, by the way, have the highest disposable income of any demographic group in the Northwest.

Other niche markets to be tapped into as Blaine develops additional assets will include tour groups, schools, not-for-profit organizations, families and specialized niches such as Audubon Society, bicycling and arts organizations, etc.

35. Professional services

We recommend that the City create and issue a Request for Qualifications and hire professional assistance in developing new marketing materials and print ads for the city. The firm would be charged with multiple tasks including the development of a professional photo library, creation of a new city logo, creation of a full-color brochure, comprehensive website, press kit, and print ads for the three publications outlined in this marketing plan. The firm would also assist other local organizations in development of additional marketing and promotional materials for key events and exhibitions.

Once the firm has been selected, they would submit proposals or project estimates for each of the projects they will be charged with creating and managing. The marketing firm should be retained on a one-year agreement that can be renewed annually for a total period of three years. Once the collateral materials and initial ads are placed, the firm would be used on an as-needed basis.

The first year will require extensive professional assistance, while second year needs will be minimal. In the third year, a public relations program has been included and could be produced by the same firm under the initial contract, if it has an expertise in publicity. If not, the city should issue a Request for Proposal during the fall of 2002 for public and media relations services.

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Cost: The cost for professional assistance is included in each item as listed in the annual budgets: website, brochure, photo library, press kit, logo, and print ad creation. An additional \$7,000 has been set aside to assist other local organizations with development of quality marketing materials, which would be produced with assistance from the marketing firm. This will ensure quality and continuity - which is vitally important in effectively marketing a community.

Marketing materials

During the first year (2001) of this plan, an investment of \$24,200 will be made in the creation and distribution of quality marketing materials. This includes the development of a marketing logo for Blaine, a full-color professionally produced brochure, the creation of a first-class website, photo library, and a distribution program which will place the brochures in more than 100 visitor information centers in Washington and British Columbia. The press kit will be developed in 2002.

36. Marketing logo

Creation or refinement of an existing logo should be developed for use by the city on brochures and marketing materials and for use on the new website. The city, as it reprinted business cards and other business papers, could incorporate the new logo over time.

It is not necessary that the city use the logo for official business, and in many instances cities will have a marketing logo and an official business logo. It is our recommendation that Blaine create (or refine) its logo for use on all marketing materials and for official use on printed materials and on city owned vehicles. The logo would be created in concert with the city's turn-of-the-century seaport or harbor theme.

The professional assistance firm would be charged with coming up with at least two conceptual ideas which would be refined into three finalist logos. The final logo would be chosen by BTAC with public input and presented to the city council for adoption. In many instances, the locals won't even choose the final logo. Since the logo is meant to promote the city for quality of life, economic development and tourism, it is sometimes more effective to send the three final logos to between 10 and 20 people who are not familiar with Blaine. They are sent the three logos and asked to pick the logo that would most likely reflect the kind of place they'd like to live, visit, or do business. This way the logo does not become a political icon which can divide the community or committees charged with selecting the final logo.

Ultimately, however, the city council would adopt the logo for use in marketing and/or official use. The logo would be owned by the city but could be used by other organizations when promoting Blaine as a location for events and other visitor-oriented activities. Development of the logo would follow the city's turn-of-the-century seaport/harbor theme and would be available in black and white, in two-color format, and for use in full-color ads and promotional materials. The logo should be digitized in a variety of formats.

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Caution: We have found it unwise to make the development of a logo a wide-open public process. If you put 100 people in a room and ask them to design or choose a logo that they like, chances are you'll end up with 100 different logos. Usually a small committee will be chosen (such as BTAC) to steer the effort working with the hired marketing firm's graphic designer.

Cost: \$5,000 including final art in digital form

42. Bellingham/Whatcom County CVB

We recommend that the CVB be funded the sum of \$10,000 for the Best Buys marketing program and \$4,200 for operational support. In order for Blaine to be successful in its tourism efforts, it will be important to be a part of a larger visitor program that includes Bellingham, Ferndale, Lynden, Birch Bay and other communities within the county.

We often talk about the "Four-times rule." Visitors will travel a distance if you can keep them busy four times longer than it took them to get there. For instance, if a visitor drives 15 minutes, one way, will they have enough activities to keep them busy for an hour? (4 times 15 minutes). If visitors drive an hour and a half from the Seattle area, does Blaine offer enough to keep them busy for six hours? Maybe not. But if Blaine "partners" with Birch Bay, and other local communities, the collective activities may easily keep visitors busy for more than six hours. In fact, if visitors have eight or more hours of things to see and do, you'll have an excellent chance of keeping them overnight - the ultimate goal of this program.

The CVB is charged with marketing the overall area or region, and so they are a very important part of Blaine's marketing efforts. Marketing as one loud voice (together) is far more effective than marketing as one small voice standing alone.

Cost: \$14,200

37. Website development

The internet has become the number one source for travel information – far eclipsing other sources including visitor information centers, brochures and advertising. These are all still very important, but the internet is of primary importance. In our visitor assessment, professional assessment and research efforts, we turned up very little that would effectively promote Blaine.

We recommend that the city reserve a domain name such as visitblaine.org, blaine.org, or an easy to remember domain name that can be used in all advertising and marketing efforts. It can be hyper-linked to the city's official domain name <http://www.blaine.ci.wa.gov>, if the city is using this domain. What happens is that if <http://blaine.org>, for instance, is keyed in, it would automatically and seamlessly go to the www.blaine.ci.wa.gov site.

The website would include approximately a dozen pages including the home page, border

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information, links to other sites, a request for information page, things to see and do in the area, photographs of the area, weather, events, etc.

The website should be easy to navigate, should include lots of photography, and should be linked and registered with the 100 or so most popular search engines on a regular basis. Having a website is one step: making sure it can be seen is another step and even more important. Key words will be critical. Search engines look at key words to see if there's a match for what a browsing individual is looking for. For instance, if a visitor types in "bird watching," will Blaine's website come up in the list? It would if those key words were incorporated into the site's infrastructure.

In summary, the site must be attractive and must be good enough to either close the sale or encourage the potential visitor to call or fill out a request for more information. Secondly, it must be easy to navigate, easy to find, and must be technologically advanced to be viewed on a variety of platforms and browsing software.

While the first dozen pages would be dedicated to marketing Blaine, the city can add additional pages, funded from other sources, for city council agendas, departmental information, economic development, citizen input, etc. This way the city has a comprehensive site that promotes the community for tourism, quality of life and economic development, and will also serve local residents for city services.

In essence, these marketing pages would create the "front door" or first impression of Blaine. Enough so that visitors to the site will want to explore further.

NOTE: There must be continuity between the logo, the brochure, website and all marketing materials. They should all have a similar look and feel, and should all carry a similar background or "theme." This is part of the total "package." If a visitor spends time on the website, fills out an on-line request for information, then gets a brochure a few days later in the mail - continuity will tie the two together.

Cost: \$8,500 (marketing portion of the site)

Website hosting and updates

Once the website is created, it must be "parked" somewhere so it can be viewed. This is usually done by an Internet Service Provider (ISP) that provides "hosting" services. Website hosting usually costs between \$10 and \$25 a month and is really a rental fee for the use of website server hard-disk space. It's possible that a local Internet Service Provider (ISP) will host the site at no charge or at a reduced fee in exchange for a link to their services or a small banner on the home page promoting them as the host.

Once the site has been created and the domain name registered, it will be "uploaded" to the hosting service. From there it can be changed, updated and edited periodically. It's important

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that the website be updated on a regular basis so it does not become static. The last thing you want is a “been there, done that” website. You want potential visitors to come back from time to time. The site should be updated at least once a month with new events, new links, additional photographs, interesting facts, etc.

Cost: \$150 a month has been allocated for hosting and updates. If hosting can be done at no charge, the funding should remain the same to allow for more comprehensive updates to the site.

In the second and third years \$1,800 and \$2,000 respectively has been added for major updates to the site to keep up with new technologies and to make substantive changes to keep the site interesting and to reflect new visitor draws to Blaine.

38. Collateral brochure

The recommended brochure will be a full-color “rack brochure” that measures 4” x 9” when folded. We recommend that an eight-panel brochure be developed (four panels on each side). Samples are enclosed in the appendix for your review. The brochure would promote the Peace Arch, Blaine Harbor marina and boating, Semiahmoo (the resort and golf courses), the Millennium Trail, proximity to the border and Birch Bay, the Plover, local lodging, dining and shopping, events, and the sculpture theme.

A group of volunteers has worked hard over the past few months to create a brochure for the city. While we applaud their efforts, we recommend the development of a professionally produced piece. The brochure must be able to “close the sale.” The photography must be of National Geographic quality, and the brochure must do an outstanding job of “selling the experience” in order to be effective. Firms with experience in creating this type of marketing materials have done extensive research to know what will push visitors’ buttons in making the decision to visit and to stay for multiple days.

When travelers visit AAA offices, chambers of commerce and visitor information centers, they will be confronted with numerous racks chock full of competing brochures from dozens of communities. Blaine’s brochure must be powerful enough to out-compete other communities. When seen it should solicit a response of “Wow! We should go there!”

The effort produced by local citizens would be used for the first year and as a base for creation of the new brochure, so that effort has not been wasted, but will create a foundation from which to build. In fact, it would be beneficial if this group of volunteers visited several visitor information centers and collected brochures of other communities: brochures that made them want to go there. What was it that made the sale to them? The photographs? Activities? Attractions? Scenery?

Cost: \$14,500 (second year) which includes layout, design, copy writing, digital scans and other production costs, and printing of 25,000 copies. Once the brochure has been designed, reprints

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can be funded each year at a cost of approximately \$4,500 per 25,000 copies.

39. Distribution

Brochures are ineffective if only distributed locally or while sitting in a back room somewhere. Distribution of marketing materials is often overlooked but is an important element in marketing the community. Distribution should take place at least twice each year (April and September) with brochures being sent to approximately 100 visitor information centers, chambers of commerce, AAA offices, and CVBs in Washington and British Columbia. The cost includes the purchase of cardboard shipping containers (boxes), labels and shipping charges.

The visitor information center should be charged with implementing the distribution program. A part of the program includes printing of an “Oops!” card. A self-mailing card that is placed behind the last brochure in the rack. When the last card disappears, the visitor information center employee or volunteer can fill it out and drop it in the mail requesting additional brochures. A sample is enclosed in the appendix.

Cost: \$2,500. The cost of the “Oops!” card is approximately \$200 (a year or two supply), boxes will cost approximately \$400, and the balance is for actual shipping charges.

A list of key visitor information centers is included in the appendix of this plan and should be put into a database where it can be updated periodically.

40. Photo library

Development of a photo library will be very, very important to the overall program. Top notch photography directly translates to top-notch visitors (the ones with money to burn). Quality photography sells tourism more than any other form of promotion. Photographs, when promoting tourism, really are worth a thousand words.

Photography should include activities - not just scenic vistas. Visitors want activities that will keep them engaged. Views only last a few minutes. For instance, while Semiahmoo is incredibly beautiful, visitors are drawn there not only for the setting but for the spa, the fitness center, the dining, the relaxation. In marketing Blaine, activities will include charters and boating – photos of people in boats, not just boats in the marina. Activities will include birdwatching, biking the Millennium Trail, picnics and events at Peace Arch Park, etc. People in photographs is an aspect of the marketing effort. People relate to activities more than scenic vistas, places, or objects.

The photo library should include between 30 and 50 quality photographs that will be used in the brochure, on the website and will be included in the press kit for use by glossy magazines. To build the library, a bulletin is produced and sent to professional Northwest photographers who may have stock photos of the Blaine area that could be licensed to the city for certain uses. Likewise, some photography may be commissioned to provide specific photos for various uses.

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Then the usage is negotiated with each photographer. Remember: photographic rights always belong to the photographer. The city will simply “license” the use of photographs for a variety of uses through a contract with each photographer.

Cost: \$5,000 which includes professional assistance in developing the library, digital scans archived to CD ROM, and licensing fees. Of the \$5,000 cost, approximately \$2,500 would be spent in licensing and commissioned photography, \$1,000 in digital scanning and archiving, and \$1,500 in photo selection, management and negotiation for usage rights.

41. Advertising

During the first three years, we recommend a limited advertising program while Blaine creates the tourism amenities and attractions that will make Blaine a destination city. The initial idea is to get travelers passing through Blaine to stop. So we want to let these visitors know where Blaine is, and how they can get more information about the city (website, toll free phone number). To this end, new full-color ads would be created and placed in three important annual publications:

- Washington State Travel Planner Circulation: 350,000

This magazine is the fulfillment piece produced for Washington State Tourism. The recommendation includes the production and placement of a 1/3 page vertical ad.

Cost: \$7,100 including design, production, and cost of placement in the publication

- AAA Washington/Oregon Tour Book Circulation: 1,250,000

This publication has the longest use of any travel publication and is widely used by Northwest visitors. We recommend placement of a full-color 1/2 page ad in this digest sized publication.

Cost: \$9,200 including design, production, and cost of placement

- Whatcom County Visitors Guide Circulation: [50,000?]

This newly redesigned publication is the primary fulfillment piece for the county and is distributed by the Bellingham/Whatcom County Convention and Visitors Bureau (CVB). We recommend continuing with a 1/3 page ad in full color.

Cost: \$1,500 including design, production, and cost of placement

As Blaine becomes, more and more, a destination city, the advertising program would be expanded. Successful communities the size of Blaine spend between \$100,000 and \$150,000 a year in advertising, publicity, and promotion. We believe that in years four, five and six of this program, lodging tax revenues will be sufficient to cover an expanded marketing program of \$150,000 annually. By then, Blaine will also have additional activities and attractions which will provide more reasons to visit the city and will provide a greater return on the marketing investment.

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43. Professional marketing assistance

From time to time there will be events and/or exhibitions that require professional assistance in the development of marketing materials. It is very important that there be continuity between events, and that effective marketing materials be created for each. Organizations would request assistance from BTAC which would provide a small “grant” for these services. The professional firm would then provide a project estimate to BTAC for that individual project so that use of the funds can be monitored.

Communities that produce promotional materials and have them photocopied or poorly reproduced, diminish the value of the event AND the community.

Cost: \$2,000 which should cover the cost of some assistance in developing two or three of marketing pieces. This does not include the cost of printing or distribution.

44. Public relations & press kit

Where Blaine will see its greatest return on its marketing investment will be in producing a quality, professional public relations program. Central to that effort will be the development of a press kit. The kit will include a full-color photo sampler sheet, a letterhead using the new logo, and several inserts including a backgrounder, history of the area, events, contact information, attractions information, etc. The materials would be included in a presentation folder which is also included in the budget (500 would be printed). The budget includes design, layout, production and printing, writing, and all associated costs, to be produced in the second year.

Distribution of press kits is done in a one-on-one fashion with introductory phone calls to niche-media contacts.

After the press kit and photo library are created, one of the first orders of business will be to create a media list complete with names of travel writers, editors and editorial calendars for various publications. Once this has occurred story ideas can be “pitched,” and relevant press releases can be created and distributed. Suggested story ideas include:

- Seasonal weekend getaway suggestions
- Family fun in the sun
- Outdoor adventure
- Downtown historic district background/shopping and dining information

Public relations is a powerful marketing tool. A quality program will yield a 300% return on investment: \$3 in “earned media” (what the space would have cost had you paid for it) for every \$1 spent on the program. PR also has nearly three times the readership of ads, and finally, publicity lends more credibility because it’s seen as a third-party endorsement, whereas an ad is seen as you tooting your own horn.

The budget provides for a monthly retainer which would also includes all related costs such as

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mailings, long distance, overnight delivery charges, travel, etc. Publicity would be sought in soft-adventure and outdoor recreational publications and television shows, RV magazines and journals, fishing and hunting publications, cross country ski magazines, general consumer publications such as Sunset, Northwest Travel, Conde Nast Traveler, National Geographic Traveler, etc.

By tapping into numerous smaller and niche publications, Blaine can greatly expand its exposure to a variety of interest groups. Many publications also provide event information which provides an ideal way to promote events where advertising dollars would not be available - particularly cultural activities.

45. Partnerships

Partnerships will also be important. Particularly with Birch Bay, particularly in the first few years, and then working more closely with Semiahmoo, and eventually with Whiterock to create a true multi-day destination with day trips to Whiterock and Birch Bay- and to Blaine for guests staying in those other areas.

Throughout the marketing effort it will be very important to work closely with the Bellingham/Whatcom County Convention & Visitors Bureau (CVB) which can provide a variety of resources and marketing partnerships to assist Blaine in developing its tourism program.

46. Tracking and measurables

BTAC and the City should both be looking for return on investment. Every organization that receives lodging tax funds should report to BTAC at least once a year to provide details on what was done to bring visitors to Blaine. Over the first few years, this will be difficult to gauge as Blaine begins development of new attractions and amenities, and as new merchants begin to invest in the city.

Measurables should include:

- Traffic counts

Traffic counts at Subway to gauge increased traffic at the city's primary intersection. A traffic counter should be placed across Peace Portal Way (both directions) and should be counted every Friday afternoon and each Monday morning. This will provide traffic counts by month, weekend versus weekday traffic, and increases in traffic will gauge whether new and additional signage is effective in bringing visitors into Blaine's downtown core. The traffic counter should be managed by the City's Public Works department.

- Requests for information

The new website (recommended in this plan) should have a traffic counter of its own that keeps track of unique visits to the site. Additionally, the VIC should tally the number of calls it gets

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each month, how many walk-in visitors it serves, and the number of pieces it mails each month. Since much of the advertising will promote the website and the VIC, these counts will certainly show how effective the ads and promotional efforts are. VIC personnel and volunteers should always ask three questions:

1. Where are you from?
2. How did you hear about Blaine?
3. Are you aware of the things to do and see around Blaine?

This third question will usually open up a dialog and the question should be followed up by asking what their particular interests are. The first question should be tallied by general area (South Puget Sound, Seattle/Bellevue area, North Puget Sound, Eastern Washington, Oregon, Vancouver region, etc.) The second question can be tallied by friends and family, articles, website, ads, etc. It is not necessary that it be specific.

- Retail sales revenues

Both the city and BTAC should watch lodging tax revenues on a monthly basis always comparing monthly or bimonthly reports to the previous two years. We have developed budgets based on a two percent increase in 2001, a 3-1/2% increase in 2002, and a 6% increase in 2003. While these numbers are conservative, we hope that in years four, five and six, the city will see annual increases of between 8% and 10% annually.

Another important measurable is retail sales. A tourism program will only be successful if retail sales and services also increase. Retail sales should include all retail sales, restaurant revenues, admissions (Plover counts), and services such as gas and food. It should not include liquor sales or non-tourism revenues such as construction, professional services, etc.

- Periodic surveys

It will be important that the Chamber and Arts Commission communicate regularly with the business community to determine how they are doing. Who are their customers? How is business? What are they doing to market their business? Are sales up? What do the attribute they increase (or decrease) to?

Surveys can also be tallied at events. We recommend that interns be secured for market research duties, where they attend events and randomly poll attendees asking them a few simple questions:

1. Where are you from?
2. What is your final destination?
3. How did you hear about the event?
4. Would you come back again next year?
5. What else have you done while here?

You may be surprised at how enlightening these simple surveys can be.

Administration / Funding & budgets

ADMINISTRATION

47. Fund administration

We recommend that administrative fees charged to lodging tax funds be reduced in 2001 and eliminated beginning with the 2002 budget. By state law the funds are to be used for the promotion and development of tourism and few, if any, communities charge the fund for administration. Use of the funds for administrative costs, as far as we are aware, is not illegal. However, Blaine needs every penny possible in order to further its tourism industry, including these administrative fees. Currently, administration of the fund - even though it's a small portion of the city's overall budget - takes a tremendous amount of time and energy. Particularly since the fund has been treated as a grant program, and since the city is, itself, managing the visitor information center.

With this marketing program in place, the administrative responsibilities should be reduced substantially, allowing administration of the fund to be absorbed as part of the city's standard operating budget.

The \$10,000 a year in savings will be used to better promote the community and will assist in providing the necessary funding for capital projects.

FUNDING & BUDGETS

Revenues

As you review the following budgets, you will notice increases in lodging tax revenues:

2001

We recommend that during the summer of 2001 the city council adopt the available 1% lodging add-on tax, which would be implemented as of January 1, 2002. We also used a projected revenue increase of only 2% over 1999 figures, to be conservative on revenue projections.

The 2001 calendar year will primarily be a "getting ready" year with the initial development of new capital projects, creation of new marketing materials, etc.

2002

In 2002, we used a revenue increase of 3-1/2%, still conservative. During this year, we have allocated funds to recruit a mid-priced hotel for the downtown Blaine area. We anticipate that it would be constructed in 2002 with an opening early in 2003.

2003

For 2003, we used a revenue increase of 6%, plus approximately \$35,000 in newly generated lodging taxes. If the new hotel included 60 rooms, and ran at a 50% occupancy rate (first year operations are usually lower than following years), at an average daily rate of \$80, it would

Funding & budgets

generate approximately \$35,000 in lodging tax revenues.

The increase of 6% is based on better marketing, a public relations effort, and the opening of new retailers, attractions, and amenities in Blaine's downtown area.

Add-on lodging tax

We recommend that the City of Blaine implement the available one-percent lodging add-on tax which will generate approximately \$62,000 a year in revenues, boosting annual lodging tax revenues to just under \$250,000 annually. These funds will be used primarily for capital projects.

We have recommended that \$150,000 a year be used for capital expenditures (debt service on \$2 million) leaving between \$75,000 and \$100,000 annually for marketing, visitor information services, and events.

Nearly every city in Washington which collects lodging taxes has implemented the full 2% add-on tax. No communities have seen declines in lodging revenues or occupancies as a result of the add-on tax. In the case of Blaine, Semiahmoo's overnight guests will be paying more than 90% of the total revenues generated by the tax and so it is important that they receive a benefit for the extra \$2 they will pay per night. The top activity enjoyed by overnight visitors is shopping and dining in a pedestrian-oriented setting. Additionally, the more there is to see and do in the immediate area, the longer they will stay.

The entire emphasis of this tourism development and marketing program is to develop the attractions, amenities, and activities that will draw visitors to the area for multiple days, and to create first-class marketing materials that will effectively sell the entire Blaine area including Semiahmoo.

The program will benefit Semiahmoo guests in many ways by:

1. Providing them with a nearby downtown area with multiple activities including a more vibrant shopping district, a sculpture and arts theme, a major attraction located in the marina park area, public restrooms, and a more centrally located visitor information center.
2. Guests will be able to gather better information through a professionally designed website, a new collateral brochure, and a toll-free information hotline.
3. Guests will be able to take advantage of visitor information services which will provide expanded operating hours, seven days a week.

Currently, Semiahmoo and Blaine have little "connection" other than the fact they are part of the same city. Yet resorts, including Semiahmoo, need shopping, events, activities, and attractions that will appeal to their guests and will keep them longer. This program is designed to do just that. We are recommending that the city borrow, against future lodging tax receipts, \$2 million

Funding & budgets

to develop capital assets that will make Blaine an attractive destination city. The debt service alone, with low-interest loans, will require annual payments of approximately \$150,000 annually. By collecting the full 2% add-on tax, the city will have another \$100,000 each year dedicated to professional marketing, advertising, public relations and the development of multi-day events that revolve around the arts and sculpture theme.

While lodging revenues have been relatively flat in Blaine over the past several years, we believe that a professionally produced marketing program will effectively increase overnight lodging substantially within a year or two creating a substantial return on investment.

In order for Blaine to create a dynamic tourism industry, it will be critically important to implement the additional one-percent add-on tax. The \$65,000 a year it will generate will help pay for nearly a million dollars in major capital projects. Projects that will easily benefit the city in terms of tax base and economic development will benefit local businesses, hotels and Semiahmoo Resort.

There is no reason why Blaine's downtown core area can't be as vibrant and successful as similar towns including Friday Harbor, LaConner, Paulsbo, and others. None of these towns has a true architectural theme (like Leavenworth, Winthrop): none have the scenic natural beauty of Blaine: and none have even a quarter of the traffic coming through town on a daily basis. We firmly believe that a coordinated, comprehensive program such as the one we've outlined herein, will make Blaine a very successful community in terms of tourism development, promotion, and resulting revenues. In order to do so, it will require all the funding possible from lodging taxes, millions more from grants, foundations and other sources.

It's important to remember that the \$2 million the city will invest in capital projects is only a fraction of the total cost – it's the city's "matching fund," so to speak. The major attraction will cost nearly \$20 million, the boardwalk will cost an estimated \$2 million, and there will be millions of dollars in donated and loaned art throughout downtown Blaine, and there will be other substantial improvements as well paid with grants and low-interest loans.

 The following is a list of the projects we've recommended, divided into funding categories.

Financed projects

Recommended capital projects that could be financed (long term) by lodging tax revenues include:

1. Purchase and renovation of the Subway building
2. Creation of sculpture gardens and exhibits
3. Gateway entrance sign at the VIC
4. Pier park improvements
5. Boardwalk development (city match for grants) and Marine Drive connector to the Pier park area
6. Discovery Center right-of-way improvement

Funding & budgets

Non-lodging tax projects

Projects we have recommended, but would need to be financed by other means include:

1. Marine Drive resurfacing
2. Relocation of adult bookstore
3. Peace Portal Way sidewalk reconstruction (along bluff)
4. Central Park project
5. Semiahmoo Lighthouse restoration project
6. Public parking

Non-financed projects

Projects that would be funded from lodging tax dollars, but not financed include:

1. City signage
2. Beautification projects
3. Creation and funding of a Blaine Arts Commission
4. Multi-day events
5. Tourism development recruiting program
6. Marketing program

Financed projects

We have recommended that seven projects be financed through lodging tax receipts. While we do not know exact costs, very rough estimates might be as follows:

<u>Project</u>	<u>Approx. Cost</u>	<u>Year</u>
1. Welcome Center/Restroom facilities		
Subway building purchase	\$350,000	
Architectural, engineering	20,000	
Exterior renovation, theme	60,000	
Interior construction	80,000	
Fixtures & furnishings	<u>15,000</u>	
Approximate total cost:	\$525,000	2001/2002
2. Creation of sculpture gardens		
\$110,000 each x five	\$550,000	2001/2002
3. Gateway entrance sign, landscape	60,000	2001/2002
4. Pier park improvements	65,000	2002
5. Boardwalk development		
Matching funds for grants	250,000	2003/2004
6. Discovery Center		
Right-of-way improvements such		
as parking, other on-site amenities	200,000	2004
(Plus the land donation)		
7. Misc. projects, A&E services	200,000	2001-2004
Improvements, landscaping	<u>80,000</u>	2003
Total capital projects:	\$1,850,000	

Funding & budgets

While the financing for first year projects would need to be put in place, actual debt service payments would not be required until 2002.

In 2002 and 2003, \$100,000 has been budgeted for debt service of the initial \$925,000 in capital projects. Based on a 20 year loan with one annual payment, at 6.5% interest, the debt service payment is \$83,950. It's quite possible that these projects could qualify and receive EDA or other governmental funding which can reduce interest rates to as little as 3%. In fact, many of the projects also qualify for state and federal grant funding which could reduce the capital expenditure significantly.

In 2004 and subsequent years, we recommend that \$170,000 a year be set aside for debt service. The remaining \$925,000 in capital projects (2002 through 2004) would require an additional annual payment of \$83,950 for a total annual expenditure of \$167,900.

With conservatively projected annual revenues of \$310,000, approximately 55% would be used for debt service and the remaining 45% for marketing, advertising, public relations, visitor information services, and events.

We believe that the city, using in-kind services, grants, and low interest financing, can reduce the total project costs from \$1.8 million to \$1.5 million or less. With regards to financing, the city has many alternatives which it should explore. Those might include councilmatic bonds, revenue bonds, conventional financing, interfund loans, federal and state low interest loans - all leveraged against future lodging tax revenues.

We do not recommend voter approved bond issues for these tourism projects. While local residents will be able to enjoy these terrific assets, amenities and attractions, visitors will be footing the entire bill through the payment of lodging taxes. We have found that visitors will easily pay the extra \$2 for every \$100 in overnight lodging rates (2% add-on tax) to be able to enjoy the boardwalk, pier park, sculpture gardens and exhibits, additional public parking, events, viewing areas and boardwalk, public restrooms, improved visitor information services, a comprehensive resource on the internet (website), etc.

One thing to keep in mind is that if, for some reason, lodging tax revenues dropped significantly (by 45% or more), the city could be faced with the very remote possibility of having to dip into general revenue funds to make up shortfalls in the debt service requirement.

In 1984, Ocean Shores passed a voter approved levy for construction of their \$1.2 million convention center. However, all payments since 1988 have been made from lodging tax revenues without any cost to local taxpayers. The bond issue, in this case, was simply a fall-back position - in case of an economic disaster. The convention center will be paid off in 2002. We are not recommending this for Blaine, but it does create a resource in case of disaster. With regards to natural disasters, insurance will often cover the loss of the facilities and the debt.

Funding & budgets

While we are relying on lodging tax revenues for nearly every recommendation made in this book, tourism will bring to the city many more revenues than simply lodging taxes. The city will see increased sales taxes, property taxes, utility taxes, as well as other revenues and payment for public services from new projects.

With regards to items that would be financed out of cash flow (incoming revenues): beautification, signage, events, Arts Commission, and recruitment.

This tourism development and marketing program is a major undertaking that will require a lot of volunteer committee assistance and a community-wide effort. We firmly believe, however, that Blaine will benefit tremendously from this program in terms of improved amenities, activities, attractions, and a much-improved quality of life.

THREE YEAR EXPENDITURE RECOMMENDATIONS

Calendar year	2001	2002	2003	2004+
Ending fund balance	\$50,000	\$26,874	\$21,234	\$26,358
REVENUES				
2% Basic lodging tax	\$126,116	\$130,530	\$138,362	+10%
1% Add-on tax	63,058			
2% Add-on tax		130,530	138,362	+10%
4% New hotel			35,000	70,000
FUNDS AVAILABLE:	\$239,174	\$287,934	\$332,958	\$375,000
TOURIST SERVICES				
1. Operation of VIC	69,400	45,000	45,000	45,000
2. Expanded ferry service	25,000	25,000	25,000	25,000
MANAGEMENT				
3. Beautification committee				
4. Arts Commission	2,500	25,000	30,000	20,000
5. Top Dog Committee				
BEAUTIFICATION				
6. Beautification/clean-up	5,000	10,000	10,000	10,000
7. Removal of blighted facilities				
8. Peace Portal Way sidewalk repair				
9. Removal of Anchor Inn sign				
REGULATORY CHANGES				
10. Allow sandwich boards				
11. Perpendicular signage				
12. Awnings				
13. Adult bookstore regulations				
14. Building fees & code review				
15. Move auto-oriented zoning				
ANNUAL PROGRAMS				
16. Sculpture theme				
17. Recruitment program	10,000	25,000	25,000	25,000
EVENTS				
18. Reduce event funding/expand sculpture theme				
Peace Arch Art Festival	6,000	6,000	6,000	6,000
Sculpture related events	4,500	4,500	9,000	14,000
Skywater committee	0	0	0	0
Chamber events	5,000	2,500	0	0
CAPITAL TOURISM PROJECTS/IMPROVEMENTS				
19. Highway signage	10,000		To be determined	
20. Gateway signage		12,500	10,000	5,000
21. Architectural theme				
22. Sculpture theme				20,000
23. Subway purchase			Covered under debt service	
24. Public restrooms			Covered under debt service	
25. Major attraction			Covered under debt service	
26. Boardwalk & viewing decks	6,200		Covered under debt service	
27. Millenium trail				
28. Public parking				
29. Marine Park interpretive signs	2,500	0	0	0
30. Semiahmoo lighthouse restoration				
31. Central Park				
JOINT PROJECTS W/PORT				
32. Pier Park improvements			Covered under debt service	
33. Marine drive improvements				
34. Marine Drive boardwalk	5,000		Covered under debt service	
MARKETING				
35. Professional services				
36. Marketing logo	5,000	0	0	0
37. Website development	8,500	1,500	2,400	0

Three year budget (cont.)

Website hosting & updates	1,200	1,800	2,000	2,000
38. Collateral brochure/reprints	14,500	14,500	4,500	4,500
39. Distribution program	2,500	2,500	2,500	2,500
40. Photo library	5,000	0	0	0
41. Advertising	17,800	16,900	17,200	20,000
42. Bham/Whatcom County CVB	14,200	16,000	17,000	18,000
43. Professional marketing assistance	2,000	0	0	0
44. Public relations/press kit	8,000	8,000	36,000	36,000
45. Marketing partnerships				
46. Tracking & measurables				
ADMINISTRATION				
47. Fund administration	5,000	0	0	0
FUNDING				
48. Implementation of 1% add-on tax				
Debt service for capital projects	50,000	50,000	65,000	120,000
TOTALS				
Total expenditures	\$212,300	\$266,700	\$306,600	\$373,000
Carryforward to next year	\$26,874	\$21,234	\$26,358	\$28,000

APPENDIX



Visitor information research

As a potential visitor to Blaine, I conducted research to find out what I could about staying in the city, what there was available to do for a few days, and what my impressions were of the city from the materials I could find and the people I spoke to. I attempted to plan my trip as any tourist might who was not familiar with the area.

The first place I looked was a Washington State road map, planning a trip into Canada, and thinking I would stop someplace near the border for a few days on my way. Blaine is very easy to spot on the map, and its location, close to the water and right on the border near the Peace Arch Park (also marked on the map) made it look like it would be an interesting and enjoyable place to stop for a few days.

To find out more about Blaine and what it had to offer, the next place I looked was on the internet. I used two different search engines, searching under “Blaine, Washington,” “Washington State,” “Washington/Canada border,” “Peace Arch,” and “Whatcom County.” I did not find a lot of information about Blaine.

The links that showed up under “Blaine” included links.expedia.com, which had no information on Blaine, and the link from it to Blaine doesn't work. Hometownusa.com/wa/Blaine.html also showed up, but didn't have any information on Blaine either. Horizon-bank.com/cities/Blaine/dining.html did have a list of dining establishments in Blaine. Lodging.com had no information listed. Three other sites had a little information: roomsplus.com/motels/wa/b/wab10008.htm had a small hotel listing, cdsalesman.com/golfersweb/semiahmoo.htm had golfing information from Semiahmoo Resort, and the Semiahmoo home site came up as well. The City of Blaine official site must be under construction, as I reached Network Access Service's home page when attempting to link to the site. The Blaine School District site was very nice.

The search into “Washington State” yielded the Washington State Tourism site, which did make reference to Blaine in the Whatcom County information, and listed only Semiahmoo Resort as lodging in Blaine. There was no description of Blaine. My search for Washington/Canada Border yielded nothing.

I found some information about Peace Arch Park when I searched for “Peace Arch.” There were several sites with photos of the park or descriptions of the area, such as on theslowlane.com, wccog.org, travelcascadia.com, parks.wa.gov/peace.htm, and ohwy.com/wa/p/peacewsp.htm.

My search for Whatcom County gave me the Bellingham/Whatcom County Convention & Visitors Bureau's visitor site, and it mentions Blaine. The local lodging listing includes four listings in Blaine. I linked to the Semiahmoo Resort, and looked through their site, which I found to be very attractive and informative. It really made me want to stay there.

From the Washington State Tourism site, I found the phone number for the Blaine Chamber of

visitor assessment & research

Commerce. So I called the chamber for some information. The woman who answered the phone was very pleasant and helpful. I told her that I was planning to travel to Canada in November with a few friends. We wanted to stop near the border for a couple of days on our way, and I was trying to find information on lodging and what local activities might be available.

She suggested two lodging facilities. The first, The Inn at Semiahmoo, she said was very, very nice, kind of expensive, but it was a full resort. She gave me their phone number. She also suggested Motel International, and said it was also very nice, and gave me their phone number, too. She asked if I would like her to send out a packet of information on the area, so that I could see what activities there are in the area. I said that would be great, so she took down my name and address, and said she would mail it to me.

She was very, courteous, pleasant, and helpful. I was definitely encouraged to visit Blaine. From the conversation, I felt that Blaine was a friendly place that I would really enjoy visiting.

I looked into our copy of the AAA Tour Book, and found the information and ad for the City of Blaine. The text describing Blaine gave me more information than any of the internet sites. It described Semiahmoo County Park, the passenger ferry MV Plover, Peace Arch Park, and the shopping at Peace Arch Factory Outlets.

With Semiahmoo County Park and the 19th Century bunkhouse buildings and museum, the beaches to walk on, the nearby shopping, the ferry, and the amenities at the Semiahmoo Resort, I think a few days visit in Blaine would be very enjoyable. It was difficult to find much information about Blaine, though. I really had to search.

I received a packet of brochures from the Blaine Visitor Information Center after only four days from my request. I was sent an impressive amount of literature; the postage was \$1.43! I received the 2000/01 Bellingham Whatcom County Visitors Guide, a guide to Birch Bay & Blaine, a Blaine Community Profile, a brochure about Peace Arch Park, and even a new Washington State map!

The Community Profile included a directory of many businesses, accommodations, golf courses, restaurants, churches, and shops in Blaine, as well as a list of events. The guide to Birch Bay & Blaine was a very nice publication, full color, glossy paper, with very helpful maps of Blaine and Birch Bay, directories of accommodations, shops, and things to do. The Peace Arch Park brochure included information about the International Sculpture Exhibit, which is no longer there, and included other information about the park as well. The Bellingham Whatcom County Visitors Guide offered a wealth of information about the entire area. I thought the Washington State map was a very nice, helpful touch.

In summary, I found that it was not very easy to find much information about Blaine, but what I did find encouraged me to visit. The Chamber of Commerce volunteer I spoke with was so friendly and helpful, and that had a big impact on my first impression of Blaine.

On-site visitor assessment

Blaine Report

October 17, 2000

Traveler's Note: We left Seattle at 9:45 a.m. and returned home by 5:15 p.m., traveling 252 miles.

Traveling north just before the Canadian border there is a sign that reads Blaine, next three exits. The first exit read Peace Portal Scenic Drive and we didn't think we were interested in that, so we kept going. The second exit was nondescript and suddenly we realized that this was the final exit before crossing into Canada, and we'd better get off! The exit announced Blaine City Center. When we got off we went under the freeway and immediately turned left onto Peace Portal Drive, which turned out to be the "Main Street" of Blaine. Turning in we couldn't help but notice at least two good-size vacant business buildings on either side of the street. About two blocks later it felt like a more viable business area.

With no particular agenda we just kept driving to see what there was to see. The street was basically empty of traffic. Looking to our right we saw glimpses of the bay and the marina. To our left, side streets moved into residential areas and a few businesses, with H Street being a more prominent street. We saw a few motels and a bed and breakfast along the way, and before long we were at a crossing directing us to Birch Bay and we realized we had probably done the Peace Portal Scenic Drive coming from the North! Not interested in going to Birch Bay my friend and I turned around to take a closer look at Blaine.

There were two signs marked Visitor Center along the route, but no Visitor Center in sight. I was ready to give up, when my friend spotted a sign at the very end of town we had originally entered. I guess I didn't see it the first time because when we were coming off the freeway I was concentrating on where/how to turn into Blaine. We turned left and soon found ourselves driving along the water's edge past a park with interesting whale sculptures. With no other signs to guide us, it seemed awhile before we came to the Visitors Center, which of course was well marked. I parked and we went in.

There were a few people in the Center. I asked about a restroom and was directed outside across the way to the backside of an adjacent building. I was glad it wasn't raining and the restroom was clean! There were lots and lots of racks holding brochures describing Northwest and Canadian sites. A section for Blaine (and Birch Bay I think) was clearly marked. We spent some time looking at the literature and collecting brochures. The Center was warm and inviting. I asked the young woman what there was to do around town. She mentioned the Peace Park, Marine Park (the park along the water we had driven by), Birch Bay and the grounds at Semiahmoo. In our conversation it became clear there was lots to do here for people who liked hiking, bird watching, boating, etc.. We asked about antique shops and she directed us to one we had seen earlier. It was close to lunch time and when we inquired about where to eat, she mentioned a restaurant in the Marina that had great fish and chips and a Mexican restaurant in town that had good food. She also suggested Dutch Mothers in Lynden, if we wanted a real treat, and gave us directions to

On-site visitor assessment

get there. I asked her about the International Center I had read about in a brochure and she told me it was on the other side of the freeway off of H Street, which was a side street with some businesses on it. Otherwise, there was just the downtown area we had already driven through.

Not in the mood for fish and chips, we drove back into the main part of town and decided to check out the antique store. The woman proprietor was very friendly and we conversed with each other off and on as we looked around. She had more than we first thought and the prices were pretty good. We asked her suggestions for lunch, and again, depending on what we were in the mood for, she mentioned the fish and chips and the Mexican restaurant and Pizza. She also mentioned a restaurant just up the block that had great homemade soups if we wanted something simple. I told her I had friends who asked me to check out places to stay in Blaine. She said Semiahmoo would be nice, but when I told her that was too expensive probably, she suggested the International Hotel as a good, clean place to stay.

We thanked her, and not being very hungry, decided to go for the soup idea. Walking across the street and up a few store fronts, we came into Annies Deli. It became immediately clear that this is a family run business where all the locals eat – Mom and Dad were in the kitchen behind an open counter and a little one was out and about and being warned to stay out of the kitchen! The woman took orders and easily greeted the towns people. Unsolicited, a couple recommended the soup of the day to us, saying it sounded strange, but it was a great combination! We ordered a couple of cups of soup, a sandwich to share and a I had a latte. The restaurant was warm and crowded. There were a few odds and ends on some shelves for sale, but no decorating. The tables and chairs were a “mixed bag.” When I went to pay the bill I asked about things to do around town. The husband and wife exchanged smiles and said there wasn’t anything, really. She volunteered it was a shame it wasn’t summer because in the summer there was a walk on ferry ride that went to an old cannery that was fun. She also mentioned Birch Bay and local bird watching.

We decided to go to Lynden. Driving to H Street we saw a business called Goeff (we assumed it was a locally owned furniture store or something like that, but we couldn’t really tell), a tavern with gambling, a video store advertising x-rated movies and a store called Children’s Closet Clutter, which we didn’t care about. We were aware there were no boutiques, Hallmark card shops, clothing stores, etc. to entice us. We remembered seeing an antique store further down the street, but we didn’t feel like checking it out. The town looked clean and we noticed planted areas by the corners and some trees planted along the way, but there was just nothing to do!

The drive to Lynden took about 25 minutes. We went straight over on H Street as the young woman at the Visitor Center had suggested. We noticed some newer bank buildings on the side street (I don’t remember if it was on H Street) and the Performing Arts Center at the school. We passed the International Center along the way, but it was a generic strip mall with the usual stores and we didn’t care about it. It was beginning to rain and we were glad to be in the car!

As we got closer to the main part of Lynden, we went through a very attractive residential area,

On-site visitor assessment

and stopped to pick up a flyer about a house for sale just to see the price of real estate in the area. The first thing to greet you when you come into the main part of the business areas is a huge windmill decorated in blue lights. There were many stores and some vacancies sprinkled throughout. The Dutch theme was apparent and there were obviously some attempts to have the building facades and the business signs communicate this. (There was the opposite impression in Blaine, that is, no theme was apparent and each business clearly stood on its own – left to make its own impression via signage, building facade, etc.) A banner was strung over the street announcing a Harvest Festival next weekend. Like Blaine, parking was free, but in the town was crowded. I parked the car and we began to stroll. We stopped at a large Dutch restaurant and looked around. It was pleasant and plenty busy. A variety of businesses beckoned – yardage shop, Hallmark, jewelry, home furnishings, banks, restaurants, bakery, etc. We stopped at a large antique mall that was located in a basement with a restaurant and four or five other businesses in an enclosed business building above it. The prices were good and there were many stalls to explore, but it was getting later and later to drive back to Seattle, so we didn't stay long.

When we left Lynden, we took the same route back and when we came into Blaine decided to explore the marina a little before leaving town. This time when we drove by the water we noticed Marine Park was more extensive than we first thought. Of course you are soon in the marina and with all the boats tied up there you can imagine what it is like on a bustling weekend. We drove to the Marina Restaurant and thought about stopping in, but it looked deserted, so we turned around in the empty parking lot and left for home.

Internet Research regarding Blaine

Sites:

HYPERLINK "<http://www.stateguide.com/wa/blaine>"

No information about Blaine, per se area attractions listed – only one accommodation listed: Semiahmoo

Googles cache search engine:

HYPERLINK "<http://www.ci.blaine.wa.us/>"

Headline: Blaine, home of the Peace Arch Park – when I went to the options listed on the menu everything was under construction

hotbot search engine: Blaine web page sponsored by Horizon Bank had the best information – population, real estate, border traffic, places to visit, 11 listings for dining, 5 local motels for accommodations, etc.

Excite search engine: no listing using www.blaine.org, but there is a listing using www.lynden.org and www.oceanshores.org

Assignment: Research cities with a sculpture, weathervane, or fountain theme:

There are a few cities that call themselves the “City of Sculpture” or the “City of Fountains.” The city of Waupun, Wisconsin, population 9,630, has seven sculptures by several different artists around its town. The sculptures were given to the town by one of the artists, over a period of 10-20 years (1920s and 1930s.)

Philadelphia has 332 sculptures, memorials and fountains.

Covington, Kentucky has 19 sculptures that were installed over a long period of time. Some are from the early 1900s, some from 1940, and seven were commissioned in 1988.

Long Island City has a sculpture park, which has twice yearly outdoor exhibits of contemporary sculpture, an outdoor studio, and free workshops.

Owensboro, Kentucky is planning a sculpture park on some vacant land donated by the state. They will have it professionally landscaped, then add, over a period of time, stone pillars with metal lattices, geometric paths of stone, brick or pebble, and a fountain. They hope to hold arts-related events and exhibit artwork by students and regional sculptors.

Canberra City, Australia, is planning on refurbishing its city center by adding five site-specific sculptures. They have published a request for “Expressions of Interest” from artists to apply for doing the work. They have stated that “the visual impact of each of these artworks will contribute to attracting visitors and residents into central Canberra.”

Jersey City has a program, “Art In Plain View,” which sponsors limited-run public art exhibits. They felt that it would be advantageous for exhibitors to stage shows in highly visible, heavily trafficked locations, eliminating many of the expenses usually associated with exhibiting in a gallery or museum. They also felt that placing site-specific art in a public space would encourage artists to experiment with presentation and audience expectations. In addition, they wanted to spread awareness of contemporary art.

Kansas City calls itself the “city of fountains.” It is said to be the home of more fountains than any city in the world except Rome. Most new commercial building projects incorporate a fountain of some fashion into their design. One of the city’s oldest fountains, the Rozzelle Court Fountain, was brought there from Rome, and dates back to 200 A.D., and is thought to be one of the imperial baths of Rome.

Portland, Oregon is known as the “City of Roses,” and as the “City of Fountains.”

Berne, Switzerland is also called the “City of Fountains,” and has many artistic fountains dating from about 1550.

Theme research

I found no cities that called themselves the “city of windvanes.”

I also searched for any “themes” used by other border cities, and must admit I was stumped! I searched from a map of the U.S. to find the names of cities near the border, and could find no cities that had any theme.

Interviews

Over the past several months, we have interviewed many people regarding ideas, information, plans and other things that pertain to tourism in Blaine. Those interviewed included:

- Terry Galvin, Community Economic Development Director
- Grant Stewart, Public Works Director
- Ed Magner, Chamber President, Chairman of Skywater, Member BIG
- Dr. Ken Ely, President of BTAC
- Sandy Heydt, Marketing Director – Semiahmoo
- Michael Burnett, Northwest Discovery Center
- Carroll Solomon, Visitor Consultant, Blaine Visitor Information Center
- Christina Alexander, Peace Arch Anniversary Association
- Jim Jorgensen, Head of Marine Education Foundation, BTAC member
- Shirley Nelson, Miss Blaine Pageant, Blaine Ambassador Program, Member BTAC, Chamber Board member
- Art Morrison, Owner of International Motel, Restaurant and Card Room
- Richard Sturgill, Plover
- Stephanie Pierce
- Brad O’Neill, Planning Commission
- Chuck Green, Harborview Real Estate
- Ron Freeman, Doug Freeman Real Estate
- Joyce Vanderpol, Vanderpol Real Estate
- John Cooper, Bellingham/Whatcom County Conventions & Visitors Bureau
- Gary Tomsic, City Manager
- Jim Darling, Director, Port of Bellingham
- Pam Moore, State Representative Georgia Garner’s staff
- Bob Libolt, Trillium Corporation

We also visited with other city staff members, visitors, local workers as well as lodging professionals in Bellingham and other areas.

The following are random comments, suggestions, challenges mentioned during the many interviews.

- It is unwise to hire a top person to lead the tourism marketing until there are enough attractions in Blaine to justify it.
- The best project for tourism is the boardwalk.
- Parks and trail systems play a significant role in tourism.
- Look at refurbishing and reopening Semiahmoo Park Museum, presently boarded up.
- Likes fishing village theme.
- There is no Amtrak service to or through Blaine. There is some work being done to start

Interviews

- service through State Representative Georgia Garners office and her assistant, Pam Moore.
- Blaine’s future lies in development and recruiting of businesses relating to light manufacturing, pick and pack and warehousing.
 - Emergency overflow storage tank: Grant Stewart does not believe the proposed lighthouse being built on top of the existing emergency overflow storage facility should happen. The tank is laden with asbestos and Grant believes it should be demolished.
 - Existing sidewalk challenges. There is a challenge in trying to improve the existing sidewalks along the western edge of Peace Portal. Some of the erosion is caused by problems with the elevated support foundation system that is situated on both public and private land. The city cannot go in and improve private property by repairing the foundation system for the elevated sidewalks.
 - Pending new sign ordinance and zoning regulations, streetscape improvements and the turn of the century theme are positive movement for tourism.
 - New and continuing projects Public Works is involved with include:
 - Boardwalk project.
 - Commercial street improvements. The total overall cost of the improvement project is estimated at \$1.7 million. 3rd Street and Martin are in or near construction.
 - Blaine residents voted for \$1.3 million in residential street improvements. Projects include Cherry and 6th Streets.
 - A bike and walking path down the hill to connect marina area to downtown beginning at War Memorial pocket park at end of G Street. This project could be done using labor from the Jail Alternative Program.
 - New freeway interchange at mile marker 274. This potential project is driven by the Canadian need to extend their queuing area further south at the border crossings, therefore worsening the ability for south bound travelers to exit at Blaine, and by the need to cater to the more industrial type industries. The benefits derived from this new exchange would be improved access to the industrial area and a new entrance into Blaine, which could result in expanded development on the west side of the freeway and potential for siting a new grocery store and other retail. Grant says this project has broad support from WAsDOT. Will be investing \$200,000 into study soon. Possibility to have completed in 5 years.
 - Sewage treatment facilities. We learned that a major project is in the works to, potentially, completely redo sewage treatment facilities and collection network. One of the elements will include building a new 500,000-gallon storm water drainage tank in the marina park area that will replace the existing emergency hold tank. Grant would love to come up with creative ideas on how to make this tank multifunctional. Very preliminary ideas could include using the tank for a skateboard park or other recreational use during the “off” season – May through September, or building something on top of

Interviews

the facility such as a hotel or interpretive center. Planning is underway and this project should be completed in 3 years.

- Bay improvement project. There has been discussion about making a concerted effort to clean up the bay so that an oyster farming operation could happen. This could be very beneficial to encouraging tourism at the marina area.
- Regarding the three potential sites for a new hotel, each presents very real challenges dealing with soils and foundations. Comments on each include:
 - Peace Portal Way sites. Because of the cost for parking under the hotel, there would probably be a need for off site parking across the street. The train noise could be more of a concern on this site because the rooms would be directly above the train tracks. Train vibrations could also play into design and cost.
 - Marina Park landfill site. Because this would be redevelopment of a brownfield site, as the old garbage landfill, funding may be available to help. Because of the need for very wide footings, parking below may be a consideration. May be the best site.
 - Boat storage site. Challenge with little or no view and possible foundation problem.
 - Skywater organization comments: Had run for 25 years then not for three.
 - Chamber decided to restart. Began with idea to run huge event trying to attract 15,000 people. Reevaluated because there was no place for people to stay. Evolved into a program that essentially sponsored six events over the summer. Idea is to attract 500 – 600 at an event, including large kick off event in June, July 1st Peace Arch Toast, July 4th celebration, car show and sponsoring of Lady Washington. Skywater, the first year, was very successful. Intended to let people experience events that were staying in the area so they would come back and tell their friends. Invested \$25,000 in 2000 and will request equal amount next year for expanded program starting with golf tournament in April.
 - Tourism: Efforts on Peace Arch Sculpture events very nice because it lasted 120 days.
 - Need to market to a wider audience.
 - Need to market boating and charters.
 - Tourism should build slowly. “Worse thing you can do is to do a big time promotion and not be able to do it with quality.”
 - The boardwalk is a good investment.
 - Likes the idea of three smaller interpretive centers - Semiahmoo spit, Marine Park area and

Interviews

Peace Arch Park.

- Many think the VIC should be downtown, not at the marina.
- Many like the idea of a federally funded interpretive center at the border.
- There is a large Icelandic population - Look at how to tap into that culture.
- Tourism is very dependent on weather. Can lose a lot if rainy summer.
- Blaine Improvement Group (BIG) is/was a volunteer group pulled together by past city manager. Had Tourism Director act as staff support. Instrumental in downtown infrastructure improvements. Participated in Main Street Program. Attended conference in Wenatchee. When that project was finishing up, there was a change in city managers and the Tourism Director was gone. So, BIG has kind of waited around for further instructions. Inactive for nearly one year.
- Tourism needs to be boosted incrementally. Most logical first component is constructing boardwalk. Appears to have most promise for grants, provides excellent connector to Port.
- Need Plover to expand its schedule to better connect Semiahmoo with Blaine. Supports the idea to have operation headquartered at Semiahmoo spit.
- Should have Plover dock at end of pier where crab operation is currently being run. This would create a short 6 minute run between Blaine and Semiahmoo.
- There needs to be a major brain storming session with Blaine, the Port and Semiahmoo in putting this plan to action and deciding on a short and long range strategy on how best to work together in the future
- Cannot just market downtown Blaine. Must include Semiahmoo, Birch Bay and region.
- Keep in mind that the main thing the area is selling is water - fishing, the Plover, cruises, kayaking, views from the boardwalk, restaurants hotels, etc...
- (Third party note): Port feels it is positioned to promote tourism at the marina through encouraging more restaurants and shops. Port is also continuing to improve its promenade.
- Semiahmoo is also looking to capitalize on water theme. Really searching for idea on themed promotion. They have been acquiring property for future development.
- Need to encourage Trillium to expand retail facilities on their side so there are additional reasons to come over on the Plover or by other means. This would greatly help in promoting

Interviews

Blaine and Semiahmoo together.

- Many like the idea of running an international boat to White Rock and Point Roberts. The fact is that the Plover is not the right boat for the operation. Plan would be to bring in larger boat with some subsidies.
- (Third party note): Port is just beginning to look at the idea of a research center and aquarium in Blaine Harbor.
- There is also an idea to create a wooden boat building facility at the Semiahmoo spit with the idea of also building a Lady Washington type vessel.
- Incremental tourism 101. First step - get people to just spend the day in Blaine, then expand.
- Best hotel site - Where the boat storage is because it provides a very smooth link between downtown and the marina area. Could serve as the connecting boardwalk. In order for that site to work, boat storage and any unattractive things would need to be relocated.
- Tourism challenges for Semiahmoo include:
 - Must attract more group business in the off-season.
 - Must work on perceived off season challenges regarding weather and transportation issues.
- Semiahmoo was involved in the Salmon Run event. Not a success with too many participants coming, participating and then leaving.
- Semiahmoo also worked with Blaine in cosponsoring the July 4th event. Very successful and should continue.
- Promotions that are occurring at Semiahmoo include summer musical concert series, beach bon fires (moved indoors during harsher weather), volleyball, horseshoes, biking, roller blades, jogging, sailing, kayaking, water tours, indoor/outdoor tennis, health club and spa, and golf.
- There is an effort to move the Plover over to the spit and to revitalize a large cannery building to include retail.
- The city needs to improve its look and attract new retail businesses so that when Semiahmoo advises visitors to go to Blaine they can have a good experience.
- There are too many events and not enough volunteers resulting in mediocre results. Would suggest that the city subsidize building owners to fix storefronts and that Blaine would do itself well to create an artsy theme.

Interviews

- Semiahmoo is against increasing the lodging tax by one percent.
- The Discovery Center project has been worked on for a number of years. Originally, a brownfield site in Bellingham was targeted as the optimum site for the center. As it became more apparent that this Bellingham site may take a very long time to develop and be heavily involved in politics, the organizing group stepped back and formed a small advisory group to re-look at the whole project.

The recommendations coming out of those meetings included a need to expand the project, create an international focus and, perhaps, look at or near Blaine as an alternative site. There is a facility (MOTE) in Florida that is being looked at as a framework for this project. The theme of borders and boundaries is being developed to “discover” the natural and political challenges presented by the US – Canadian border.

Discovery Center organizers plan to visit Washington, D.C. to request \$200,000 - \$300,000 in seed money for the project. They have already had meetings with key State legislators. Potential funding sources include Washington State private citizens like Bill Gates and Paul Allen, the Federal government and Trillium Corporation.

After the Washington, D.C. trip, Michael will be working to bring key national leaders together for a brainstorming event, hosted at Semiahmoo.

Others connected to this project include:

- Jim Miller – Executive Director for Whatcom County Council of Governments
 - Brad Smith – Dean of Huxley College – 360-650-3385
 - Jim Darling – Port of Bellingham
 - Steve Brinn – Trillium Corporation – 360-676-9400
- Types of visitors have changed recently. In the past, the most asked questions by US visitors was what they should expect at the border crossings. Now more visitors are coming in because they are visiting the area and are looking for things to do including day trips. VIC gets significant numbers of visitors from Semiahmoo and Trend West Resort in Birch Bay.
 - The Blaine VIC had a major problem with visitors finding the VIC until they put the signage up at the intersection (Subway). Now, it is not a problem.
 - There are mixed feelings on the location of the VIC. In its present location at the marina, the VIC gets lots of people during events held at the marina. Overall, VIC would probably get more people if they were on Peace Portal Way.
 - A priority should be placed on capitol improvements more than events.
 - Local schools are highly rated, that all school levels are situated on one campus and the

Interviews

- Superintendent is also located on the campus. Police are very involved with students. Great place to raise kids.
- Marine Park has a 2.37-acre parcel in the middle that could accommodate a hotel or interpretive center and might be welcomed by the Marine Park group. There are several ideas floating around about the 2+ acre site. The City and Port are talking about how they can work together in regards to the park, the 2+ acres and the street. Five years ago a developer showed an interest in building a 50 room hotel on the site, but decided against it after the city council questioned the real value of the land now that someone had shown a development interest.
 - Budget: In 2000, the Marine Education Foundation received \$7,500 for 5 interpretive signs that have been produced and are currently being placed. The Foundation plans to request \$4,500 to \$6,000 for 3 or 4 additional interpretive signs for the year 2001.
 - The Blaine Ambassador Program has been active for 25 years. A number of girls are selected and trained for 4 months. Then, a nonpartisan dignitary assists in choosing 3 Ambassadors who travel throughout Washington and British Columbia. Previously, the Ambassador Program was funded at \$5,000 per year, which only covered travel expenses. Separately, the Blaine float had funding of \$8,120 in 1997. In the year 2000, a miscommunication through the Chamber of Commerce occurred that resulted in the Ambassador Program not being funded for the year 2000.
 - In the past, comments from the public may include references to “sin city” (Blaine). Now, comments are more favorable and people that Shirley talks with usually comment on how friendly people from Blaine are.
 - Many really like the work that has been done on both commercial and residential streets. People tend to fix up their businesses and homes when city improves streets.
 - Biggest problem: Blaine relied too heavily on value of Canadian dollar. Now that is coming back against them with the present low value.
 - Challenge/opportunity: Semiahmoo has the only on site meeting rooms with accommodations. In Blaine, there are only two buildings with meeting space – the Port building and the local library.
 - Ideas:
 - Need to build something in harbor area that can be seen from Canadian crossing.
 - Continue positive work being done at the Port.
 - Plover: Passenger ferry built in 1944 – on National Historic Register. Carries 17 passengers with inside accommodations for all. Can sit 12 outside. Port provides space at no charge.

Interviews

- Blaine to Semiahmoo: Had 26,000 boardings in 2000. Operates 3 days per week (Fri – Sun) – Memorial Day through Labor Day (typically 50 days of operation). There is no fare charged. Donations are accepted and this year averaged 71 cents per boarding.
- Plover wants to expand service. Ideas include operating the other 4 days of the week on a demand response basis with fares. Extending weekend service into Spring and Fall.
- White Rock: 25 minutes from Semiahmoo to White Rock. Experimented this year with going to White Rock. Want to expand that service in the future with direct run from Semiahmoo to White Rock.
- Future plans for the Plover:
 - Move operations location to Semiahmoo.
 - Working very closely with Semiahmoo on a variety of projects including application for a Heritage Grant to restore a Wharf building (12,000 sq ft). Over \$400,000 project. \$216,000 already pledged (\$100,000 from Semiahmoo). Richard is in charge of raising an additional \$200,000. Potential projects include interpretive space, artists in action and wooden boat building.
- Richard Sturgill is also working with Trillium Corporation on Whatcom County's portion of the Pacific Coast Trail (Millennium Trail) which stretches from Canada to Mexico. Trillium contributing \$400,000(?) in land and cash towards project.
- Problems:
 - Absentee owners price vacant buildings too high.
 - New mall has taken businesses away from core downtown area.
 - Wanted wider sidewalks.
- Ideas:
 - Whatever is promoted needs to be carefully measured and done with quality.
 - Heritage tourism is big business and Blaine/Semiahmoo needs to capitalize on that.
 - Need to build expanded pathway in marina area that would include benches, interpretive signage (including distance in kilometers) and water.
- Blaine does not need a “big” draw. Need good restaurants, views, arts, antiques and retail.
- Wants tall ship at port. Perhaps even building one.
- Does not want to block views along Peace Portal Drive.
- Need to develop more frequent recreational activities.
- Wants to repair historic marine railroad, located at Semiahmoo spit.

Interviews

- Expanded service of Plover to White Rock will help provide activities for “golf widows” staying at Semiahmoo.
- Challenges:
 - Nothing for the kids to do. Theater and bowling alley are gone.
 - History of town - kind of loose place with numerous adult book stores and taverns.
 - Remaining adult book store doing well, yet there are people who want it out of town.
 - Blaine used to do just fine with those businesses and now – not so fine.
 - Tavern is now being converted to art gallery – for what?
 - Expensive hook up rates
 - Too many development restrictions.
 - Many owners will not pay to redo their building facades.
 - Skywater Festival used to be fun – street dances – a real festival. Now it’s just turned into lots of vendors selling stuff.
- Ideas:
 - Theater coming to factory outlet mall location just South of Blaine.
 - Need incentive program for start up businesses – low interest loans – like Little Red Caboose.
- Lighthouse Project: In 1905 The Semiahmoo Lighthouse was opened. The Victorian structure was built on pilings over the water just off the Semiahmoo spit and operated until 1944, when the house was torn down and replaced with a light tower. Brad became interested in the structure after seeing numerous pictures and drawings.

After years of talk about the Port investing in the Marina area, several key people got voted in at the Port and a steering committee was formed. That committee hired the Makers Corporation out of Seattle. Based on the results of that study, the Port has invested over \$12 million in improvements at the marina. The one thing that was overlooked was the existing batch plant or storm water overflow tank that sat in the middle of all the improvements. The circumference of the batch plant is quite similar to the lighthouse structure. From this thought has risen the concept of constructing a replica of the Semiahmoo Lighthouse on top of the holding tank with pillars around the perimeter of the tank to cover it up and to give support to the structure above. One idea was to make the facility ADA accessible and to have one floor be the VIC with an outside observation deck. There would be a low intensity beacon rotating North and West that would shine towards the cars crossing the border from the North. This project would be 64 feet tall and could cost between \$500,000 - \$750,000 (very rough estimates).

- Reasons this project makes sense:
 - Resurrects and rejuvenates a lost historical monument to Blaine’s nautical past.
 - If the tank must remain, the new facility would transform and disguise it. Brad is not tied into having to have the tank or that particular site. He does think it needs to be

Interviews

- on Marine Drive with excellent visibility to the Canadian crossing.
- Helps promote tourism by serving as a “Welcome to Blaine” beacon, creating interest from those folks traveling South to stop in Blaine.
- Lighthouse would be uniquely Blaine and would serve as the visual anchor and monument for the new revitalized Blaine Marina.
- Could be used as VIC.
- Ties in nicely to turn of the century theme.
- Fits in nicely with Port’s effort at marina – not too tall, quaint, unique.
- Creates something for the long term. Blaine needs this type of long term investment.
- Establishes partnership with the Port. The Port has committed \$30,000 towards the project.
- Project is grant accessible.

Brad is working on the project from a grass roots level. He has obtained the support of the Chamber, the Maritime Heritage group, the Parks Board and the Port. Brad is the CEO of a newly formed, not for profit corporation – the Semiahmoo Lighthouse Resurrection Society. That group is presently in a wait and see position, waiting for the city to take some type of action in planning. The \$12,000 requested and pledged by BTAC for the year 2000 is earmarked for structural analysis and geo-tech work needed at the tank site. Brad’s group is not tied to the tank or its location.

- Boardwalk is most important major infrastructure improvement needed.
- Blaine cannot go after something too big. Too many changes with staff, people lose interest.
- Doesn’t matter where hotel is sited.
- Greatest assets for Blaine. Infrastructure in place, harbor not badly polluted.
- Need to tie Peace Arch in with rest of downtown.

Real estate interviews and general comments

- Blaine should attract manufacturing businesses for biggest impact.
- Hard to attract any businesses because of high utility fees and taxes.
- Semiahmoo has been purchasing a lot of property including the Loomis Trail’s Golf Course.
- The airport should be privatized with possible hotel development.
- Semiahmoo First Nation: They are a Canadian Tribe who is applying for recognition in the US. They have an interest in developing something in Blaine. Contacts are Sharon Charles

Interviews

604-536-3101 or Bernard Charles.

- Comments: Feels that the health of both residential and commercial real estate only rates between 2 to 3 on a ten scale for the Blaine area. While tourism is good, Blaine needs decent paying jobs for its permanent residents. Suggested that warehousing, light manufacturing and “pick and pack” companies should be recruited. His reasoning is that with the 100-year low value of the Canadian dollar and the Free Trade Agreement, the opportunity for attracting businesses from Canada that produce and or ship products to the mainland.
- Recruitment challenges include immigration laws and the City of Blaine. The City of Blaine has discouraged businesses from relocating or expanding to Blaine because of its development impact fees, lack of consistency in departments and a lack of trying to help solve challenges. Recruitment of tourism businesses would also be effected.
- Hotel site development. Three locations. Peace Portal, Marine Park and Port area by boat storage. Comments on each. Peace Portal – parking challenge, blocking view, boardwalk? Marine Park – Who controls, taxable, old garbage landfill. Port – location adjacent to boat storage, blocking view of Peace Portal buildings, dredge fill site.
- Chamber had major political challenge last year. Lots of strong emotions and divisions.
- Challenges: Economy has been going downhill for 2 – 3 years.
- Retail lease rates are high, caused by absentee owners with inflated ideas on value.
- New mall, which may have been recently sold to California group, has taken business from core downtown area.
- Did have second grocery store located downtown.
- Not emphasizing marina enough – need fishing derbies.
- Need more businesses including industrial.
- Utility hook up charges are high.

In speaking with Trillium and Semiahmoo, the following are some general comments, suggestions and ideas that we brought to our attention:

- Trillium has been very supportive of Blaine tourism efforts and understands that if Blaine has a strong retail tourism presence, Semiahmoo will benefit.
- Trillium owns 1,000 acres at the spit where Semiahmoo is located, 1,800 acres at Birch

Interviews

- Point and 1,300 acres at Cherry Point, South of Birch Bay.
- Trillium recently acquired an additional golf course and is using that to split time with its existing course at Semiahmoo for private members.
- Trillium would not be opposed to the 1% tax increase, as long as Trillium could see that the money was being invested wisely to help Blaine and Semiahmoo promote additional tourism.
- Trillium could decide to investigate being the hotel developer for the mid-range hotel in Blaine.

Projects currently being considered and/or worked on:

1. Larger scale, year around passenger ferry service connecting Blaine, Semiahmoo and White Rock. There will be a need for a larger vessel accommodating 50 – 100 passengers. Progress has been made with the Federal government regarding “border crossings” and there is optimism that this project could become a reality.
2. Renovate 12,000 square foot warehouse that is built over the water and has docking around perimeter. The project received a \$218,000 grant to help restore docks. Total needed for dock restoration is approximately \$650,000. The idea includes housing the Plover at the dock and providing an office for the Plover operation in the newly refurbished warehouse. Trillium would then renovate the warehouse to include space for the Plover operation, coffee shop and some retail. In addition, the plan includes moving the existing artifacts from the museum located on the spit to this warehouse site (first floor). The second floor could be meeting space and additional retail in the form of a book store, etc. This is still in the concept stage with much more planning required.
3. Expand on a theme created recently regarding outdoor music events at the tip of the spit. Plans may call for construction of an amphitheater and expanded music program. For foul weather protection, the other warehouse could be used in nearly its present, rustic condition.
4. Near these activities there is a potential to create a wooden boat building facility, which would offer cultural and educational opportunities.
5. In place of the three existing buildings where the present museum (presently closed) stores its items, a plan is being worked on to create an international totem pole exhibit, featuring numerous Native American tribes. There is growing support among the tribes for this type of facility. There is an artist rendering of what this exhibit may look like.
6. Semiahmoo wants to promote the arts.
7. Create a pathway along the shoreline.
8. Create an area to promote unique Northwest food experiences such as boiling crabs.

Interviews

Other ideas:

1. It will be critical to improve the speed of crossings at the international border in order to reduce the time it presently takes. Perhaps a shuttle bus could bring groups to the border where they could walk across in kind of an express line and then be picked up on the other side by another shuttle bus. This could provide service between Blaine, White Rock and Semiahmoo.
2. It is very important that the City of Blaine take a leadership role in restoring the waters in the harbor in order to recreate an oyster farming industry and the tourism that industry would support.

Comments and notes:

- Subway building. \$425,000 – including business – takes home \$40,000=- per year. 2,400 sq ft lot. Bldg. constructed in 1993. Has 1,100 sq ft space for lease.
- Vista Pizza store on East. For sale at \$259,000. Built in 1978.
- Vacant property on bluff. \$225,000 (should be \$175,000). Kratzig Realty was going to build 3-story structure with parking below, retail on main floor and hotel or condos above.

Observations – Ferndale:

- Has decent signage coming North on I-5
- 2 signs approaching exit
- “1/4 mile to Main Street – City Center”.
- Decent signage at bottom of ramp leading to downtown.
- Nice looking VIC.
- Downtown has two lanes with center turn lane plus parallel parking.
- Fair to good look with North side of street looking better with trees and building improvements.
- Gateway to downtown not attractive .
- Closed Copeland Lumber Store.
- Unattractive bridge.
- One positive is Nursery business on South with nice signage.

MEETINGS

Chamber meeting - November 1, 2000

Patrick from Birch Bay Chamber spoke. There is a marketing study being conducted to see how Birch Bay can be promoted. Semiahmoo is to the North and to the South. Patrick would like for the two chambers to work together in the future.

Duane Salmons - Economic Development

- Waiting for City and Port to develop a plan. Result of meeting with Port, City and Semiahmoo resulted in recommended plan to construct boardwalk.

Interviews

Carroll Solomon - VIC

- Number of visitors is increasing 300 - 400 per month in shoulder season.
- Attended State Tourism Conference in Ocean Shores. Learned that the state has money for grants for bird/wildlife festivals. Blaine has 8 - 10 groups from Audubon that come to Blaine regularly.

Birch Bay efforts

VISION STATEMENT

Preamble

The Vision Statement is a verbal snapshot of Birch Bay Community in the year 2020. It summarizes the desired character and characteristics of our Community and provides the ultimate goal for all of our Community planning and development efforts.

The vision statement is intended to be realistic, yet is more than a mere prediction. Rather than describing the features of Birch Bay Community as we think they are likely to be, it expresses what we would like our Community to become and believe we can achieve. It acknowledges past and current trends in Birch Bay Community's relationship to external factors, but also assumes an ability to shape the future in a positive way. The Vision Statement, therefore, is optimistic, affirming and enhancing the best of our past and existing attributes and aspiring for those we now lack but hope to have.

We the People of Birch Bay

We the people of Birch Bay hereby set forth a vision statement and pledge our commitment to achieve a common vision for the future of the Birch Bay Community.

We the people of Birch Bay have identified a set of central values which we as a Community hold in common:

- We believe that the essence of a prosperous and vibrant Community is found not in its structures but in the collective spirit of those who live and work within the Community. We hold that the built aspects of a community - its transportation network, utility system, buildings and other facilities - should not be considered ends in themselves, but as means for enhancing the quality of life and enriching the human spirit.
- We respect the picturesque setting of Birch Bay and believe that any development along its shores must achieve harmony between this natural and man-made environment.
- We believe that certain controls on the choices of individual action are appropriate to ensure that the community's best interests are realized.
- We believe that human activities should be considered as one component of a complex system of relationships among living things and their environment and that we have a responsibility to ourselves and to future generations to seek a mutually supportive balance within this system.

Birch Bay efforts

Our Vision for Birch Bay

1. **Residential, Recreational, Resort Community.** Birch Bay in 2020 is an attractive, vibrant, and inviting Community in which to live, work and vacation. The Community has maintained a balance between residential development and tourism related activities. Our neighborhoods are secure and stable, creating the foundation for our quality of life. They also have variety both in population and land use. People from all economic, age and ethnic groups live here. New businesses and high-tech industry has moved into our Community, providing shopping and employment opportunities to our residents. Serving the tourist population continues to be one of the primary economic activities of the Community. Tourism that was primarily a summer phenomena is now occurring year round. In addition to hotels and condominiums around Birch Bay Drive, recreational vehicle parks continue to be very popular, particularly during the summer-time. Gift shops and art galleries are reappearing as profitable businesses.

The people in the Birch Bay Community, in search of self determination and home rule have formed the City of Birch Bay. The City of Birch Bay has quickly gained prominence among municipalities in Whatcom County and is widely known as a place where scenic beauty is harmonized with urban development and job creating activities. Birch Bay, the natural saltwater inlet or bay is and remains to be the “soul” and the “heart” of the Community.

2. **Land Use and Development.** Land use and development patterns have changed significantly over the years. Tourist related developments such as hotels, motels, timeshare condominiums, recreation vehicle parks, restaurants and other tourist related service facilities have been built along Birch Bay Drive, capturing the marine view of Birch Bay. The new tourist service related facilities have replaced some of the existing single-family residential uses along Birch Bay Drive. At the same time, much of Birch Bay Drive remains in single-family residential use. Commercial development, serving the resident population, is dispersed throughout the Community at specific nodes along the intersections of major roads and streets. Newly created employment centers, including high-tech industry, have chosen to locate adjacent to the numerous wetland areas creating idyllic campus-like setting. Residential development has retained its high-ground location, capturing the views of Birch Bay. Additional residential development has taken place in planned communities or subdivisions ranging in size of a few homes to hundreds.

3. **Public Spaces.** Public spaces, namely parks, open space, pedestrian and bicycle trails, and recreation sites have increased significantly during the past twenty years. The new pedestrian and bicycle trail, running from the Canadian border to Bellingham and south, has gained in popularity. Pedestrians and bicyclists along the trail stop at Birch Bay for restaurant and other services, contributing to the economy of the Community. Open space has been set aside and parks

Birch Bay efforts

and recreation facilities have tended to locate near or adjacent to wetland sites.

4. **Transportation.** East-west traffic movement between Birch Bay and I-5, that has been a problem for years, has improved significantly. The two main routes, Birch Bay - Lynden Road and Grandview Road, have been widened by providing adequate shoulders and center left-turn lanes. Access to Birch Point and Semiahmoo has been improved by widening SR 548 or commonly known as Blaine Road. Blaine Road also functions as a north-south collector/distributor road taking the traffic load off Birch Bay Drive, leaving it for local access traffic and for bicycles and pedestrians. A number of pay parking lots have appeared east of Birch Bay Drive, camouflaged and tucked away behind commercial facilities with their storefronts facing Birch Bay Drive. Bus service has improved considerably, enabling workers to travel to out-of-the-area job locations in Semiahmoo, Blaine, ARCO and Bellingham. Pedestrian and bicycle trails have become an integral part of all major road improvements. For example, along the trail, bicyclists can now travel, in their own right-of-way from the Canadian border to Bellingham and further south. Birch Bay Drive, that used to function as a north-south arterial road, now has resemblance to a beach-front promenade, integrating the people oriented development on the east side of the Drive with the water oriented activities on the west side.

5. **Utilities.** Endless supply of fresh water, that was taken for granted many years ago, no longer exists. The Birch Bay Water and Sewer District has been able to meet the growing fresh water demand by a combination of increasing its supply, curtailing its use by conservation measures and using treated wastewater to irrigate golf courses and supply industrial users. Wastewater collection system has been expanded and the treatment plant has been enlarged. All of the troubled septic systems along Drayton Harbor have been corrected, either by connecting them to the sewer system or modernizing their operations through technological advances. Improved utility systems have significantly improved the water quality conditions in Drayton Harbor. Oyster growers are again bringing in abundant healthy crops.

6. **Education.** Birch Bay now has a school. The Blaine School District has built an elementary school in the area and has named it Birch Bay School. It sits on the bluff, nestled among residences, overlooking Birch Bay. The school is a high-tech center, not only for elementary students but also for adults taking evening courses in arts and other humanities and improving their internet skills. The school is also equipped with a sizable auditorium and meeting rooms, functioning as an after-school community center. Fiber optic cable service that was a rarity a few years ago can now be found spread throughout the Community.

7. **Public Safety.** Crime that periodically raises its ugly head in all communities, has subsided considerably in the Birch Bay Community as a result of crime prevention education and increased police presence. Further, the Community has matured, neighbors know their neigh-

Birch Bay efforts

bors and neighborhood crime watch programs have caught on. Fire service has also improved. Fire and emergency medical response time has decreased considerably due to having constructed additional fire stations and staffing them with full-time fire and emergency medical service personnel. As a result of improved fire services, the fire insurance rates on residential structures has decreased significantly. Fire and police safety seminars are being conducted throughout the community on a regular basis.

8. Economic Development. The economy of Birch Bay Community has increased considerably over the years. Tourists demand for hotel and motel space has created additional jobs. Cherry Point continues to be an important employment center providing jobs to many of the Community's residents. High-tech industry, particularly light manufacturing, has discovered Birch Bay. Small plants and operations have located throughout the Birch Bay Community, providing year-round family wage jobs. The additional population, jobs in hotel industry, high-tech, and light manufacturing, all have created additional jobs in the service industry, such as restaurants, convenience and specialty stores, personal services operations, and services to businesses and residences.

Birch Bay efforts

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NOVEMBER 2000 STATUS REPORT - BIRCH BAY COMMUNITY PLANNING

In early 1999, the Birch Bay Chamber of Commerce initiated two efforts to assist the Birch Bay Community in planning for the future. The two projects are:

1. **Birch Bay Planning and Community Development Group**
2. **Birch Bay Shoreline Enhancement Project**

In addition to this Chamber sponsored work there is another project in process which has direct benefit to Birch bay: **The Coast Millennium Trail**.

Following is a brief description of each of these projects as well as a progress report on the work being done.

1. Birch Bay Planning and Development Group

Description: With the Port of Bellingham providing a facilitator and \$20,000 for a consultant and related costs, the project originated as a Strategic Marketing Plan for Birch Bay. After several meetings of the 28 person business and residents group co-chaired by Emily Weaver and Patrick Alesse, it became apparent that a number of community maintenance and planning issues needed to be addressed first to make Birch Bay more livable, attractive and therefore more marketable. **In expanding their scope, the Group also felt that more community input and community consensus was needed to forge a vision of the future Birch Bay.**

Result: The Birch Bay Action Plan for Economic Development.

Process: Since early 1999 in monthly meetings, the Group first identified issues and did a physical inventory of the community. In March of this year a vision statement of Birch Bay in 2020 was crafted, blending residential growth with economic development and tourism. In June, an extensive random survey of the community was done to further identify issues and opportunities. In September the Group published its report with findings and recommendations.

Then What? The report strongly recommended the need for a Phase II, more comprehensive community planning effort. It also recommended the forming of 11 neighborhoods within the study area so that all residents would have the opportunity to participate in the preparation of a Community Plan. The Scope of Work will consist of the following elements:

- | | |
|----------------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1. Land Use and Housing | 6. Utilities |
| 2. Parks and Recreation | 7. Economic Development |
| 3. Shorelines and Critical Areas | 8. Public Education |

Birch Bay efforts

- | | |
|-------------------|-----------------------------|
| 4. Public Safety | 9. Governance and Financing |
| 5. Transportation | 10. Community Involvement |

The Chamber is currently in the process of approaching agencies and organizations for funding and for technical support. Preliminary Phase II work has begun. Community-wide participation will be solicited in early 2001.

2. Birch Bay Shoreline Enhancement Project

Description: The project is a revisit of two portions of Whatcom County's 1976 Birch Bay Comprehensive Plan with more emphasis this time on the biological processes and habitat.

1. Wolf Bauer's 1975 Shore Resource Analysis with recommendations concerning the geohydraulic characteristics of the bay waters and shoreline. One of the key issues being studied is whether or not some of the concrete structures on the beach (Groins) should be removed.
2. The 1976 conceptual drawings for berm building and public promenade use of Birch Bay Drive.

Result: A Plan to restore, preserve and enhance the Birch Bay shoreline compatible with natural processes.

Process: The grant is the result of a proposal to enhance public protection and usage of Birch Bay Drive made in Spring 1998. There is a Technical Workgroup made up of coastal geohydrologic consultants; experts from the State Departments of Ecology, Fish and Wildlife, and Natural Resources; representatives from Whatcom County Departments of Public Works, and Planning and Development; and chaired by Barry Wenger of Ecology. They began work in March 2000 to determine the opportunities and constraints for the shoreline. Under the leadership of Birch Bay resident Nick Jerns, a Citizen's Advisory Group is working concurrently with the Technical Workgroup and design consultant Jim Zervas, Zervas Group Architects, to craft a Plan by early 2001. This plan will then be presented and reviewed by the community at large.

Then What? Besides becoming a key part of the overall Community Plan, the intention is to pursue further grants for engineering drawings to implement the Plan.

3. Coast Millennium Trail

Description: Implement Phase 1 of a 3 Phase program for a trail corridor from Pt. Roberts, WA through the lower mainland of British Columbia, Canada and ending in Skagit County, WA. The project emphasizes bicycle travel but also provides for pedestrian and equestrian use. Phase 1 is a \$2,410,000 Transportation Enhancement Program project with 50% funding from the Federal Government.

Five of the 15 site-specific improvements are within the Birch Bay/Blaine area:

1. Pedestrian enhancements through Birch Bay State Park.

Birch Bay efforts

2. Trail construction in certain areas of Semiahmoo and Birch Bay.
3. Providing a link between Drayton Harbor Rd. and Old Drayton Harbor.
4. Dock enhancements for the MV Plover foot ferry.
5. Drayton Harbor Rd. improvements and bridge construction over California Creek.

Result: Sixty miles of scenic, safe and user friendly trail of statewide significance when the entire project is complete.

Process: Property acquisition and permits is about complete. Construction for the Birch Bay/Blaine area is scheduled to start by January 2001.

Birch Bay efforts

DRAFT RESOLUTION (November 2 Version)

REGARDING BIRCH BAY COMMUNITY PLANNING

Whereas: The Birch Bay community, on September 7, 2000, completed an Economic Development Action Plan which includes:

1. A 2020 Vision Statement
 2. An extensive Community Attitudes Survey
 3. Action Strategies and Recommendations which stress the need for the community to undertake a more comprehensive community planning process.
- And

Whereas: The area concerned (Shown on the attached map) includes:

1. The Birch Bay Urban Growth Area
2. Part of the Cherry Point Urban Growth Area
3. Part of the City of Blaine Urban Growth Area. And

Whereas: The Birch Bay community is more urban in nature than most areas of unincorporated Whatcom County and therefore relies on its ability to interact with agencies and organizations such as the existing Special Districts, various County and State agencies as well as major sector business and non profit organizations. Therefore

Be It Resolved That:

A consortium of public and private entities agrees to assist the community in its efforts to institute a planning process which would culminate in the publication of a Birch Bay Community Plan. The Plan would have as a cornerstone the formation of Neighborhoods to better assure cross sectional community involvement. Further, the Plan would have major Goals of compatibility and / or compliance with:

1. Whatcom County's Comprehensive Plan
2. The Washington State Growth Management Act
3. Washington State Transportation Planning Standards
4. The Washington State and Whatcom County's Shoreline Management Acts and Programs
5. The Washington State Environmental Policy Act

The consortium would assist in the following manner:

1. By contributing funds needed to pay for necessary consultants, document preparation and other hard costs required.
2. By having representation at meetings as required.

Birch Bay efforts

3. By providing in kind services such as planning related documents, budgets, etc.

Whatcom County and / or the Port of Bellingham, acting as a Facilitator, would administer the consortium contributions. Each public agency would enter into a separate Interlocal Agreement with the Facilitator.

Each Agreement would spell out the specific direct and indirect benefits to the participating agency to assure that the funds contributed are spent legally and in compliance with Board / Commission policies.

The Consortium and the funds contributed by each consists of:

1. Whatcom County	\$25,000
2. The Port of Bellingham	25,000
3. The Trillium Corporation	25,000
4. Public Utility District #1	10,000
5. Puget Sound Energy	10,000
6. Wash. State Department of Ecology	8,160
7. Birch Bay Water & Sewer District	2,040
8. Blaine School District	1,360
9. Fire District # 13	680
10. Fire District # 7	<u>680</u>
Total	\$107,920