

Chapter 3 THE HARBOR

Introduction

Gig Harbor’s downtown is widely recognized as quaint, charming, and historic. And although the City’s remaining historic structures are modest in size, materials, and form, they represent an important cultural identity that continues to draw visitors, shoppers, and residents to the area. That draw created economic pressures on the City and ultimately required the City to grow in the North and Westside of town to accommodate the needs of the new citizens without impacting the downtown character and form.

In response to concerns of growth to the downtown area, in 1992, the City of Gig Harbor held public forums to discuss the future of the downtown. It was evident from the forum that citizens like our small town scale, and favored development that reflects the town’s historic form of architecture and natural environment. In 1996, design standards were established to preserve and enhance the character of the City. In 2009, a downtown inventory of historic structures¹ was completed. The Inventory provided an Intensive- Level Survey of Historic Resources used for 2012’s second public visioning exercise that resulted in creation of a vision statement and boundary map for what is now defined as “The Harbor”. Both were adopted by City Council in December of 2012.

It is the intent of this chapter to address the community’s desires, their concerns for future development and how to best preserve the beauty found in downtown Gig Harbor. The following goals and policies reflect extensive public input and outreach that spans decades of work. It provides a framework for the future, allowing growth and vitality to occur in a manner that does not impact The Harbor’s historical context.

The Harbor Vision

Shaped by our maritime heritage, the Harbor is a reflection of our past and the foundation for our future. The Harbor is:

- *A vibrant place where residents, visitors and boaters enjoy a walkable waterfront, picturesque views, and the natural environment.*
- *A place that celebrates and perpetuates the character and traditions of a working waterfront and preserves historic neighborhoods.*
- *A place that supports and values local retail shops and services.*
- *A place that provides services for recreational and commercial boating.*

The Harbor is a place where people live, work, play, shop and explore.

¹ The 2009 Downtown Historic Inventory is available for review at Gig Harbor Planning Department and can be found on the Washington State WISSARD database.



The Harbor area as discussed in this chapter is outlined in blue on the map above.

THE HARBOR VISION GOALS AND POLICIES

It is the City’s desire to have mixed uses along the waterfront in Gig Harbor area’s including those commercial endeavors such as commercial fishing, boating, marine shops and services, restaurants and retail shops, as well as residential uses which provide the bay’s unique appeal. Continue to develop and enhance the recreation, tourism and marine industries along Gig Harbor waterfront as an economic asset in a manner that will enhance the public enjoyment of and public access to the bay.

Circulation

GOAL 3.1: Provide the opportunity to walk, bike, and utilize public transportation to move the residents, visitors, and boaters in a safe and orderly fashion in The Harbor.

3.1.1. Facilitate pedestrian access throughout The Harbor by linking the public park system for an inviting pedestrian experience.

3.1.2. Support and plan for public transportation opportunities and work in collaboration with public transit to establish “around town” transit service throughout the year, allowing residents, visitors and boaters accessibility to and from The Harbor.

Walkability

GOAL 3.2: Create and maintain a pedestrian-friendly environment throughout The Harbor by emphasizing safety, maintenance, and comfort.

3.2.1. Limit the speed limit for traffic throughout The Harbor to calm traffic.

3.2.2. Maintain stop signs and existing levels of services for vehicular transportation.

3.2.3. Incorporate features to facilitate pedestrian crossing and increase visibility for both drivers and pedestrians.

3.2.4. Provide amenities such as landscaping, common areas, seating areas, lighting, waste containers and signage in keeping with The Harbor’s character and scale.

3.2.5. Promote a clean and healthy walkable environment.

Views

GOAL 3.3: Protect the views of the bay from within The Harbor area and from the bay toward The Harbor.

3.3.1. Require waterfront developments to provide for additional docks, paths, walkways, overlooks, picnic and seating areas, fishing piers or areas, overlooks, and viewpoints as outlined in the City’s Shoreline Management Program.

3.3.2. Establish a program that would provide incentives for view corridors that exceed

requirements.

3.3.3. Explore opportunities to underground utility lines throughout The Harbor.

3.3.4. Recognize that trees and vegetation are assets; allow trees and vegetation to be a part of the view both from the water and towards the water. Panoramic views, when they occur, are not intended to be void of trees and vegetation, even in the foreground.

- a) Limited numbers of trees and shrubs should not be considered an obstruction to a view.
- b) Recognize that every tree impacts someone's view to one degree or another.

3.3.5. Establish landscape standards that support the desire to view the bay while walking and driving along Harborview and North Harborview Drive throughout The Harbor area.

Natural Environment

GOAL 3.4: Protect the native and built environment from degradation and pollution, and require low impact development where feasible.

3.4.1. Encourage open waters and sustainable land development and building practices in the construction of new development.

3.4.2. Develop measures to conserve native vegetation along shorelines.

Maintaining well-vegetated shorelines is preferred over clearing vegetation to create views or provide lawns. Limited and selective clearing for views and lawns should be allowed where slope stability and ecological functions are not compromised. Trimming and pruning are generally preferred over removal of native vegetation.

3.4.3. Establish environmental protection incentives to strengthen the ecological functions in The Harbor.

3.4.4. Preserve and protect habitat which provides the shoreline's unique value, including the Crescent Creek and Donkey Creek estuaries, and critical saltwater habitats which include kelp beds, eelgrass beds, spawning and holding areas for forage fish such as surf smelt and sand lance, sand spits, mud flats, and areas with which priority species have a primary association.

3.4.5. Maintain or enhance the quantity and quality of surface and ground water by effectively managing the location, construction, operation, and maintenance of all shoreline uses and developments.

City Properties & Parks

GOAL 3.5: Establish and manage a well-balanced system of public properties along the waterfront of The Harbor to meet the needs and desires of the community.

3.5.1. Create complementary parks and uses throughout The Harbor. Balance services and active recreational uses for all users of the park system.

3.5.2. Develop existing publicly owned shoreline properties to provide additional public access where appropriate. Create a mixture of active and passive recreational uses that do not intrude on the natural features of the shoreline or the residential neighborhoods.

3.5.3. Coordinate with outside public and private agencies and organizations to acquire and preserve additional public shoreline and open water access.

3.5.4. Maintain that publically owned parks are available for public use and uses that provide the greatest public benefit of citizens and visitors alike.

Historic Character

GOAL 3.6: Retain and protect the unique character of historic business and residential neighborhoods within The Harbor.

3.6.1. Maintain the Design Manual to reflect the traditional characteristics of The Harbor.

3.6.2. Establish and define the integrity of small planning areas which have common boundaries, uses and concerns using transition land-use areas and buffers/open space.

3.6.3. Establish design standards and development regulations shall recognize and complement neighborhood characteristics.

- a) Adopt setback, height and building size standards which reflect historic development patterns.
- b) Review minimum lot size standards and impervious coverage requirements to allow development patterns consistent with historic densities.
- c) Regarding lot division, address size compatibility with historical standards.

3.6.4. Define standards which encourage building forms consistent with existing historic designs (e.g., massing, roof styles and scale).

3.6.5. Respect existing topography and minimize visual impacts of site grading.

Existing topography should be maintained while still providing usable yards and open space. Retaining walls, when necessary, should be terraced and enhanced and/or screened to minimize their visual impact.

Historic Scale

GOAL 3.7: Encourage maintenance and/or adaptive reuse of existing structures. If existing structures cannot be practically preserved or modified, ensure that re-development complement the human form and historically recognized scale of commercial and residential structures within The Harbor.

3.7.1. Allow retention of existing heights, setbacks and massing of historic structures which are renovated.

3.7.2. Maintain an appropriate scale and relationship between structures in residential and commercial neighborhoods, and specifically at points where the zones meet.

3.7.3. Floor area ratio standards should be established for the distinct historical neighborhoods and districts. This would require new development to maintain a reasonable proportion of building to lot size.

3.7.4. Encourage houses which engage the neighborhood through front porch design, window placement, etc.

3.7.5. Encourage quality building materials that reflect Gig Harbor's historic structures.

3.7.6. Support architectural design that respects and complements the built environment in relation to the history and cultural aspects of The Harbor.

3.7.7. Properties considered eligible for the City's historic register have an important historical value to the community and should be carefully preserved as close to their original form as possible.

3.7.8. Adopt zoning, financial and design incentives and adaptive re-use provisions for eligible properties and those listed on the City's Historic Register in order to streamline the permitting to encourage preservation of such structures.

3.7.9. Design Standards should allow for adaptive reuse.

3.7.10. Refine historic district zoning boundaries to better reflect each historic district or neighborhood.

Design

GOAL 3.8: Promote the highest quality design standards for future development within The Harbor which recognize the unique historic character and structures of The Harbor.

3.8.1. Emphasize active public orientation of structures by providing common areas and direct access from surrounding public areas (street and water ward). Discourage blank walls and privacy fences.

3.8.2. Develop incentives to encourage mixed-use structures in commercial areas and nodes.

3.8.3. Incorporate visual points of interest into building and landscape design that is viewable from the public street. Design landscaping to complement the site design and not create visual barriers.

3.8.4. Minimize asphalt coverage along waterfront parcels.

Standard parking requirements have prompted removal of structures characteristic of Gig Harbor's historical development and have encouraged bleak expanses of asphalt along the waterfront. To counter this trend consideration should be given to:

- a) Revised parking standards for waterfront districts.
- b) Development of off-site parking areas, public and private, and/or shared parking areas.

- c) Use of low impact development paving materials.
- d) Parking standards shall respect neighborhoods and limit impacts.

3.8.5. Maintain a balance in land use development so that from a number of viewpoints any single structure does not overpower or detract from the others. Maintain a human scale so that new structures do not overpower existing development and do not dominate the existing character in terms of size, location or appearance.

Cultural Heritage

GOAL 3.9: Support and enhance recognition of the cultural heritage of The Harbor.

3.9.1. Support the commercial fishing fleet as a significant cultural resource.

3.9.2. Identify, preserve, enhance, and promote the evolution of Gig Harbor's multicultural heritage, human history of the City and its neighborhoods, traditions, and cultural features including historic sites, buildings, artworks, objects, views, and monuments.

3.9.3. Identify and incorporate significant historic and cultural lands, sites, artifacts, and facilities into the public waterfront.

3.9.4. Support the development of collaborative educational programs that focus on The Harbor's cultural heritage.

3.9.5. Support the efforts of organizations which provide cultural programs and activities to the public.

3.9.6. Encourage the owners of historic sites and structures to provide increased public access through the establishment of an incentive program or as mitigation for new site development.

3.9.7. Support and promote the signage of landmarks to educate the public on Gig Harbor's culture and history.

Vibrancy

GOAL 3.10: Support the diversity of The Harbor through a balance of uses.

3.10.1. Retain and support a mix of uses including fishing, boating, retail, commercial, and residential uses.

3.10.2. In order to meet the needs of current and future residents, promote job/housing balance in The Harbor.

3.10.3. Encourage appropriate commercial and retail services at street level to improve the pedestrian experience.

3.10.4. Increase residential mixed use in commercial nodes.

3.10.5. Create a balance between services, amenities, and uses within The Harbor to be

accessible by all.

Housing

GOAL 3.11: Encourage the development of a variety of housing types, sizes, and densities compatible with the neighborhoods within The Harbor in order to accommodate the diverse needs of residents.

3.11.1. Support development that provides a mix of attached and detached housing units.

3.11.2. Ensure that standards for attached and detached accessory dwelling units on a single family lot enhance the character of the established neighborhood.

3.11.3. Promote fair and equal access to housing for all persons and prohibit any activity that results in discrimination in housing.

Economic Vitality

GOAL 3.12: Support and encourage a strong, diversified, and sustainable economy, while respecting the natural and cultural environment and preserving/enhancing the quality of life in the community.

3.12.1. Identify and amend current regulations and procedures that inhibit economic vitality within The Harbor.

3.12.2. Work with the downtown businesses, property owners and community groups to establish a stronger economic base in The Harbor.

3.12.3. Support the establishment of additional parking opportunities through the development of a public parking structure or a shared parking program, without sacrificing or impacting the historical structures and waterfront.

3.12.4. Encourage historic preservation and cultural conservation that supports economic development.

Economic Diversity

GOAL 3.13: Support local efforts to retain existing businesses and attract new businesses that provide a diversity of products and services desired by Gig Harbor residents and visitors.

3.13.1. Identify and encourage sectors of the economy within The Harbor where opportunity might exist to create additional jobs and identify potential strategies for attracting employment.

3.13.2. Encourage local business development opportunities through the promotion of small business programs and reuse of structures, particularly for small startup businesses which may be owned by or employ local residents.

3.13.3. Provide reasonable guidelines and standards for the siting of home-based businesses in residential neighborhoods. Ensure that home-based businesses do not alter or impact the

residential character of neighborhoods.

3.13.4. Encourage evening activities in the commercial districts.

3.13.5. Support the establishment of small-scale entertainment venues for little theater and musical performances.

Revitalization

GOAL 3.14: Increase economic opportunities through the revitalization of and reinvestment in properties.

3.14.1. Assist with planning and development efforts to reuse older buildings, redevelop vacant properties, and revitalize older commercial and business districts within The Harbor.

3.14.2. Encourage and support the revitalization of commercial areas through a variety of incentives such as, but not limited to:

- a) Reduced fees for permits or utility connections; and
- b) Consideration of waivers from land use performance standards, as appropriate; and
- c) Multi-Family Tax Exemptions; and
- d) Reduced parking standards.

3.14.3. Help local private and public organizations structure special improvement districts including parking and business improvement authorities, local improvement districts, or other programs necessary for the effective revitalization of older business and commercial areas of The Harbor when such ventures provide public benefits and are appropriate to the long-range goals of the city.

Maritime Services

GOAL 3.15: Promote The Harbor, bay, and related waterfront lands with improvements and features that support uses related to commercial and recreational boating and water activities.

3.15.1. Promote use of mixed use developments, buffer zone setbacks, common shoreline or dock improvements, and other innovative concepts which conserve, allow, or increase the possible retention of valuable fishing and recreational water activities within The Harbor.

3.15.2. Support the development of temporary docking facilities for visiting vessels, while retaining the open surface water area for watercraft circulation.

3.15.3. Recognize the need and support the development of a fuel dock for boating needs.

3.15.4. Encourage expansion of supportive service facilities (public showers, waste connections, etc.) within the bay for use of transient boaters, commercial fishing fleet, and residents alike.

3.15.5. Define and protect adequate navigation corridors and access within the bay.

Commercial Fishing Fleet

GOAL 3.16: Promote and preserve the Gig Harbor commercial fishing fleet as a significant cultural and economic resource.

3.16.1. Allow over-water, water-dependent development that directly supports the commercial fishing industry such as net sheds and load/unloading docks.

3.16.2. Allow and encourage commercial sales and services directly related to or supportive of the commercial fishing industry, such as marine fueling facilities and direct dock sales of sea food products.

3.16.3. Promote development or rehabilitation of facilities consistent with the fleets needs including retention and redevelopment of waterfront parcels that provide a substantial and direct contribution to the commercial fishing industry.

3.16.4. Promote the recognition of the commercial fishing industry as an important component of the economic, cultural, and community life of Gig Harbor through the continuing support of educational opportunities and community events.

3.16.5. Encourage important fleet supporting services and promote development of additional moorage and docking facilities consistent with the fleet's needs.