



Port of Tacoma Shoreline Public Access Plan

July 2013



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Introduction

The City of Tacoma's updated Shoreline Master Program (SMP) requires public agencies, including the Port of Tacoma, to provide public access when development projects require a City shoreline permit. In the past, the City waived public access requirements for Port projects with safety or security concerns. Under the new program, if safety or security issues prevent public access from being provided on-site, the City requires public access to be provided at another location.

Public access is defined as the ability of the public to reach, touch and enjoy the water's edge, to travel on the waters of the state, and to view the water and the shoreline from adjacent locations [173-26-221 (4)(a)].

State law allows port authorities to develop their own public access plans through a public process to satisfy local government requirements.

Where a port district or other public entity has incorporated public access planning into its master plan through an open public process, that plan may serve as a portion of the local government's public access planning, provided it meets the provisions of this chapter. The planning may also justify more flexible offsite or special area public access provisions in the master program [173-26-221 (4) (c)].

This plan is a guiding document for providing future public access and enhancing existing public access over the 10-year planning period related to future Port development requiring a shoreline permit. This is a major shift from how the Port previously approached the shoreline permit application process. The Port intends to implement this plan over time consistent with the *Port of Tacoma Strategic Plan 2012-2022*, the Port's *Port-Wide Habitat Mitigation Strategy* and the City of Tacoma's Shoreline Master Program.

Goals

The Port has identified three goals of the Shoreline Public Access Plan:

1. Provide a streamlined and predictable permitting process
2. Provide shoreline access in appropriate and desirable locations
3. Increase public awareness of the Port

Goal 1: Provide a streamlined and predictable permitting process

Port development is typically market driven, rarely predictable and often undertaken with constrained timelines. Having a streamlined and predictable permitting process can enhance the timeliness of development and cut costs. This plan streamlines the permitting process by substituting case-by-case proposals for a comprehensive roadmap of adequate and reasonable public access related to future shoreline permit applications.

The Port and City have established periodic review of the Port's overall shoreline development and its associated public access provisions through an inter-local agreement dated July 2013. This accomplishes a streamlined and predictable permitting process by avoiding permit by permit negotiations during the application process and gives assurance to the City that adequate shoreline access is achieved. If, after periodic review, adjustments are necessary this plan will be amended to reflect new guidelines for performance.

Goal 2: Provide shoreline access in appropriate and desirable locations

The Tacoma Tideflats can be intimidating, yet fascinating, for those not familiar with such industrially intense places. It is important for the Port to identify potential access sites that serve the public's desires, including the ability to view maritime activity, while avoiding negative impacts or consequences to Port and port related activities.

The Port has created and currently maintains public access at several different locations within the Tideflats and adjacent areas. The Port's public access provides a variety of opportunities including: shoreline access and kayak launch, forested open space, wetland mitigation and Puyallup River viewing, and panoramic views of habitat areas and port maritime operations.

To better understand the community's access priorities, the Port conducted a community survey, held two open houses and completed additional stakeholder outreach. The Port learned the following through that outreach:

What works

- Access sites combined with habitat restoration
- Access to nature and views of Port Operations
- The Dick Gilmur Shoreline Restoration and Kayak Launch

What needs improvement

- Wayfinding and interpretive signage
- Safety
- Pedestrian and bicycle amenities

What's missing

- Trail connections
- Views of the Port and downtown from Marine View Drive
- Picnic areas
- Trailered boat launch

Using what we have learned, the Port can provide shoreline public access in appropriate and desirable locations over time and at a scale consistent with Port development.

Goal 3: Increase public awareness of the Port

The Port of Tacoma is owned by the citizens of Pierce County, who voted to create the Port district in 1918, and governed by five publicly elected commissioners.

Each year, the Port receives about 1.7 percent of the property taxes that Pierce County homeowners pay. The money helps pay off general obligations bonds for Port-related projects that benefit the broader public, such as road improvements and environmental projects.

The Tacoma Tidelands are removed from Tacoma's downtown core, making it difficult to engage with the public and build awareness about the Port's role in the region's economy. Washington is the most trade dependent state in the nation with ports accounting for a growing number of family-wage jobs.

We work to strengthen our community relationships by providing access points for the public to appreciate the beauty of our region and the jobs that help sustain it.

Other ways we build awareness:

- Provide signage describing port-related information at key locations
- Social media
- E-newsletters
- Community events/booths
- Tours

Priorities

Public access provisions are prioritized as follows:

1. On-site. The priority is to provide public access at the site of development impact, except where access may interfere with safety, security or port operations. Given the nature of the industrial activity and the geography of the Tidelands, on-site opportunities are rare.
2. Off-site, on Port-owned property. When access cannot be provided on-site, the Port will look for opportunities to provide access off-site on property owned by the Port. This may be in locations where habitat mitigation is planned or existing in order to leverage limited resources.

Sites include, but are not limited to:

- Dick Gilmur Kayak Launch and the associated Saltchuck mitigation site
 - Julia's Gulch and NE Tacoma Trail Network
 - Youth Marine Foundation
3. Partnership with the City or other public agency. The Port will partner with the City and/or other public agencies in developing shoreline public access when a project meets the established criteria as described in this Plan. Partnership with the City requires fee-in-lieu per the ILA dated July 2013.

Sites include, but are not limited to:

- Chinese Reconciliation Park
- West Foss Central Park
- Waterway Park
- Balfour Dock Esplanade
- Schuster Corridor Multi-Use Trail
- 11th Street Public Boat Launch

Criteria for Public Partnerships

- Is the project located in Pierce County and in an accessible, appropriate and desirable location?
- Does the project avoid negative impacts to port-industrial activity and sensitive habitat sites?
- Does the project support the Port's Strategic Plan?
- Is the project identified as a priority by the partnering agency?
- Has the partnering agency gathered community support for the project through outreach efforts?
- Can Port participation leverage grant funding opportunities for the project?
- Does the project have dedicated funding separate from Port funding?
- Does the project have a plan for ongoing operation and maintenance?

Policies

1. Habitat mitigation sites as described in the Port's *Port-Wide Habitat Mitigation Strategy* are preferred sites for public access except where the environment is too sensitive to support human activity or where public access is incompatible or would interfere with port or port-related uses. The Port should consider including or enhancing public access at existing mitigation sites where appropriate.
2. Recognizing the popularity of the Port's Observation Tower on Sitcum Waterway, preferred sites are those that offer similar views of maritime activity.
3. When economic development requires the conversion of existing public access the Port will, to the extent feasible, replace the access in its equivalency elsewhere.
4. Seek and establish partnerships with other agencies, including the City, to develop public access sites identified through the agency's plans when the Port is unable to provide access at its preferred locations.
5. Sites should be designed and maintained with a focus on the public's personal safety and prevention of public nuisance. Safety design features could include lighting, appropriate vegetation, and fencing.

6. Maintain the ability to temporarily block access to sites that become unsafe or are a public nuisance. The Port will, to the extent feasible, remedy the situation as quickly as possible for reuse by the public.
7. Port-owned public access sites will be maintained either through the Port's Habitat Stewardship Program or by Port Maintenance.
8. Consider developing design standards as guidelines to assist in the same "look and feel" of each site to provide continuity and distinguishing features.
9. Continue to collaborate with the City, separate from the permitting process, to ensure the Port is providing adequate and reasonable public access associated with shoreline development. Amend this plan as necessary to reflect specific guidelines for achievement.
10. Port tenants who independently secure a City shoreline permit for development that triggers the requirement for providing public access have the option to work directly with the City, or can work with the Port using the *Tenant Improvement Procedure* and the ILA dated July 2013 to document and implement adequate and reasonable public access provisions.
11. Public access provisions should be compatible with: the Port's six strategic goals and associated initiatives in the *Port of Tacoma Strategic Plan 2012-2022*; existing and/or future Port and port-related uses; port maritime security; and established at desirable locations which serve the public interest.
12. Consistent with Goal 6 of the *Port of Tacoma Strategic Plan 2012-2022*: Strengthen the Port's Community Connections; continue to search for ways to increase awareness of the Port and its opportunities to provide access to the shoreline.