

ShoreScore Update

July 28, 2012



Our shorelines finally are heating up this summer, as is discussion of their future before Bellevue's Planning Commission.

As you walked from your dock Wednesday evening after that late afternoon boat ride or having enjoyed the last vestiges of the sun sinking to the west, the Commission was being addressed by WSSA and its attorney. But, why an attorney and what were the issues?

WSSA's efforts, now extending back more than 3 years, have required the use of professionals to provide reason and fact to a process tainted by efforts blind to State law and the reality of what really impacts our shorelines and our lakes. Threatened by an overzealous planning staff, replete with attorneys, the citizen Planning Commission characteristically has defaulted to these City "professionals".

With continuous pressure from shoreline residents and with legal assistance, WSSA (and other similar groups around the state) has underlined where the requirements of the State Shoreline Management Act end and "funny business" begins. The situation three years ago was bleak, including –

- Bellevue shorelines were simply going to be declared critical areas with stringent restoration to "native" conditions required accompanied by the threat of dwellings being declared non-conforming uses.
- Shoreline trees, if toppled into lake waters, would remain there as essential "debris" for migrating young salmon.

Two years ago WSSA conducted a public forum revealing these and other positions promoted by staff should be questioned.

Another year elapsed and in May 2011 the City held a public hearing attended by hundreds of citizens, the vast majority questioning contents of a draft plan that spanned more than 350 pages, even prescribing the tools you'd be allowed to use to maintain your yard. Concurrently, WSSA submitted "The Sensible Shoreline Plan" and its attorney supplied an extensive critique of the City staffs' draft plan.

And so began the past year. But something had changed... Rather than a commission in lock-step with staff, questions began to emerge about staffs' proposals. Major issues such as artificially high water levels, induced wetlands, and the developed nature of Bellevue shores were considered. The response too often from staff was a threat that State Ecology would never approve of the alternative concepts being discussed.

But the clock ticked on. The Commission continued deliberating major issues, and then another draft plan, supposedly incorporating redirection from the Commission, was released earlier this month. Though streamlined in size, WSSA members again noted issues and sought legal advice on the implications of language too often couched in vague terms –

- What was meant when the rules said “New development” ... would this include replacing/repairing your home? (Answer – Yes)
- What would be considered “structure” and be restricted in the shoreline setback... would this include a slatted deck or a barbeque or even a patio constructed of pervious pavers? (Answer – Yes)

Could answers to these and similar questions be obtained before the Commission? We feared not, since there’ve been tight limits on the amount of time the public is allowed to speak before our governing bodies, and the Commission only meets twice a month; other issues having to be addressed as well.

Last Wednesday night the earth shifted again in downtown Bellevue. You may not have felt it as you walked from your dock, but it shifted. A gracious 40 minutes was granted WSSA to offer its critique. Commissioner interest piqued as issues were raised. The Commission extended the discussion; then again; and nearly 2 hours of unparalleled exchange took place. Among our concerns -

- What of the Commission’s direction to staff that the current SMP’s 25 ft. shoreline setback be retained, not extended? (Answer – **Staff had added a footnote extending the setback another 25 ft., thus restricting 70% of the activity in this zone.**)
- What of the Commission’s direction that the City minimize it’s regulation of docks, yielding instead to state and federal agencies that have the final say? (Answer – **Staff proposed confusing rules with the addition of restrictions that, effectively, would eliminate use of boat canopies.**)

Three year ago the Commission would not have taken the time to do this. It was refreshing.

Help Keep the Lights On!

You’ve made this 3 year effort possible through your donations to WSSA. Our efforts need to continue to assure remaining portions of the draft SMP (to be reviewed in September) have the same level of scrutiny and to assure our presence before the Planning Commission and Council. Please contribute as soon as possible and keep the light shining on what’s being proposed for our shorelines!

Contributions can be sent to:
WSSA, P.O. Box 6773, Bellevue 98008
Or via PayPal at WSSA.ORG