

*City of Bainbridge Island*  
**PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT**



**MEMORANDUM**

TO: Mayor and City Council

FROM: Libby Hudson, Long Range Planning Division Manager

DATE: October 2, 2008

RE: Council Workshop of October 8, 2008 – 5:30 to 6:00 p.m.  
Presentation of Open Space Study

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I am pleased to present the final Open Space Study to the Mayor and City Council at the Council Workshop of October 8. The work to accomplish this study began last year and involved two citizen committees (one recommending that such a study be undertaken and another to serve as a stakeholder group during the study). The report is an important component necessary to continue the work of the 2025/2030 Project, which will eventually result in amendments to the City's Comprehensive Plan. Our consultant, Jim Keany, Ecologist from EDAW, will present the methodology and be available to answer questions regarding the study. After Council has had time to read and absorb the report, it will be placed on a future Council agenda for official acceptance and direction.

**Background**

In May of 2007, the Mayor's 2025 Growth Advisory Committee recommended changes to the City's current growth strategy of the Comprehensive Plan to address the anticipated population for the year 2025. As part of the preferred option of the *Final Report: Mayor's 2025 Growth Advisory Committee* (2025 Report), the Committee recommended that the City complete an Island-wide open space study to identify existing open space and future opportunities, and prioritize the preservation of the open space. As supported in the 2025 Report, the first principle of better development is to determine where not to develop. Due to the interrelationship of growth and open space preservation, the 2025 Report recommended that the open space study be developed prior to any growth strategy or land use changes. Once priority open space was identified, the Committee advised that planning efforts to conserve open space and to accommodate anticipated growth should then move forward together through continuation of the 2025/2030 Project.

The City Council approved funding for the open space study in the 2008 annual budget, and in February, 2008 the City contracted with EDAW, Inc., after a competitive round of proposals. The City formed a Stakeholder Group comprised of representatives of City citizen committees and other community groups with an interest in open space. The Stakeholder Group provided input and feedback on the City's study and assisted at public meetings.

### *Park District Planning*

As the City began the open space study, the Bainbridge Island Metropolitan Park and Recreation District began their update to their 2002 Comprehensive Park Plan. The Park Districts update addresses park additions since adoption of the previous plan, and current and future park needs, based on community values and priorities. The Park District contracted with Beckwith Consulting Group to provide professional assistance for their plan update.

The City and the Park District joined together in much of the public involvement process of these two separate, but related planning efforts. Information generated from public meetings was shared, as were work products. Each of the projects informed the other, and through the shared communication process each of the planning efforts will hopefully lead to a more coordinated and integrated plan for open space conservation and protection. There was considerable overlap in the public input provided for these two planning projects. However, the Park District Plan update primarily addresses the public needs related to recreation and the human enjoyment of open space, while the City's planning effort is intended to serve multiple purposes, as described below.

### **Purpose of City Open Space Study**

As supported in the 2025 Growth Advisory Report, the City's open space study is intended to be developed using green infrastructure principles and to include the following:

- 1) Identify priority open space based on community values, including identifying land valued for ecological, recreational or cultural purposes;
- 2) Build on previous work using the green infrastructure approach, which helps identify priority open space and form an interconnected network;
- 3) Provide a focus for the needs of Winslow;
- 4) Coordinate with the Parks District on their related Comprehensive Park Plan; and
- 5) Identify appropriate conservation mechanisms to protect and conserve the identified open space areas.

### **What is Green Infrastructure?**

Green infrastructure is the interconnected open space network of the Island (including natural features, public and private conservation lands, working landscapes with ecological aspects, and other protected open space lands). As an example, our existing Wildlife Corridor Network would be considered part of our green infrastructure. Also, a green infrastructure approach is a process promoting a systematic and strategic method to land conservation based on ecological principles. EDAW employed this approach and other landscape ecology methodology to identify ecologically valuable lands. Through landscape ecology methodology and public involvement, EDAW determined the priority areas that are of highest value to our community.

### **Recommendations**

As a result of the analysis, the report presents identified priority lands and illustrates these as high, medium or low priority Island-wide. In addition, Winslow was treated slightly differently since this area has less availability of open space than other areas of the Island, and therefore the priority open space needs were based primarily on public input rather than ecological analysis.

The report also provides recommendations to the City on open space conservation strategies, suggesting that the City take a long-term, multi-pronged approach to open space preservation. The report offers a suite of conservation planning and funding strategies, many of which the City has successfully utilized in the past. It recommends broadening the mandate of the Open Space Commission, strengthening our partnerships with the Park District and the Bainbridge Island Land Trust, and suggests providing shared staff support to the Open Space Commission from both the City and Parks District. The executive summary includes an overview of the study and a summary of the recommendations.

### **How Should the Report be Used?**

As stated earlier, this study was primarily undertaken to identify priority lands valued by the community that are part of our green infrastructure or that enhance our interconnected network, and which are not presently protected or conserved. This study can be used as a framework tool, a discussion paper, an idea paper, an action plan, and a greenprint to build and enhance protections of our natural systems and connected open space. Our open space plan should reflect the values of the community, layout the greenprint for further action, and allow for opportunities that meet our goals in a different way than we might imagine today.

The recommended priority lands and conservation strategies can provide a framework to inform planning efforts in the following ways:

- **2025/2030 Project** – As a tool to identify areas that should not be considered for additional development to accommodate anticipated population growth to the year 2030. Also, in developing an improved Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) program that targets development rights transfers from identified priority open space areas to areas appropriate for density increases, such as our Neighborhood Centers, as suggested in the 2025 Growth Advisory Report.
- **Comprehensive Open Space Planning** – To provide the basis for a comprehensive, strategic conservation plan for the Island’s open space in coordination with the Metro Park District and the Bainbridge Island Land Trust and other partners. Serve as a tool and a springboard to strengthen our partnerships in open space planning, development and maintenance.
- **Winslow Greenspace Planning** – As a framework for developing a comprehensive greenspace/recreation plan for the Winslow area to meet the needs of the anticipated growing population and meet the goals of Winslow as a livable place to live, shop, and work.
- **Non-Motorized Transportation Plan and Trail Network Development** – As a tool to inform future amendments to the City’s Non-Motorized Plan and the Metro Park District’s Trail Plan, integrating and enhancing the recreation and transportation pieces of our trail system and including these in our interconnected green infrastructure.

Open space planning should be strategic and dynamic, and this study and the identified priority areas will require further development as additional knowledge and understanding of our Island landscape is developed. Although this is the final report of a study conducted by the City, it is not the final word in the Island's open space planning. We should recognize that further work is needed to reach our goals, and the City and our partners will need to incorporate other appropriate priority lands that may be identified through future planning efforts, including:

- **Shoreline Master Program Update** – The Open Space Study purposefully limits consideration of shoreline areas because it was not included in the scope of work, and as part of the City's upcoming Shoreline Master Program Update, the City is required to develop a shoreline restoration and conservation plan. As analysis is completed in respect to our shorelines' aspects, the open space priority map can be expanded to include appropriate ecologically important shoreline areas and areas that provide public access opportunities.
- **Tree and Landscape Code Consolidation Project** – Because trees and canopy coverage are an important part of our Island environment and valued by our community, the refinement of our tree and landscape regulations and incentives may provide additional information and/or identify potential ecological areas of concern that should be incorporated into our green infrastructure and priority open space map.
- **Strengthen partnerships** – Strategic open space planning requires working in a comprehensive manner with many partners that share our common goal of maintaining a healthy, connected green network. Coordinated efforts to create an interconnected green network in Winslow will require strong partnerships with the Metro Park District and the School District and other partners.

### **Next Steps**

- Bring the study to the City Council in November to accept and consider next steps and introduce the study to the Park District and Planning Commission
- Provide Council direction on incorporation of the priority lands into the 2025/2030 Project and the growth strategy amendments to the Comprehensive Plan
- Consider recommendations of the study, including
  - Expanding the charge of the Open Space Commission and staffing needs
  - Formalizing relationship with Park District in respect to open space planning
  - Formalizing relationship with the Bainbridge Island Land Trust
  - Developing open space acquisition and preservation program with partners

Our community's efforts in open space conservation have already protected valuable areas of our Island and provided the main components of our green infrastructure. This study identifies how we can build on that work, improve our strategies and maintain and protect areas that are most valuable to our community. By working together, we can accomplish much in these challenging economic times. Strengthening our partnerships will allow us to work even more effectively to conserve those areas our community most values, for today's Islander and for generations into the future.