

# CHAPTER SEVEN

## PARKS, OPEN SPACE & TRAILS

### 7.0 Parks, Open Space and Trails

One of the most significant elements of this redevelopment project is that it will provide people with numerous new waterfront access opportunities through the creation of approximately 33 acres of new upland parks and trails, and 6.5 acres of restored public beach. These signature parks and trails will link downtown Bellingham and adjacent neighborhoods to the waterfront and will feature outstanding areas to walk, play and experience the waterfront. Parks and open spaces within the Waterfront District will be interconnected by a network of pedestrian and bicycle trails, with connections to the Coast Millennium Trail system and other local parks and trail systems.

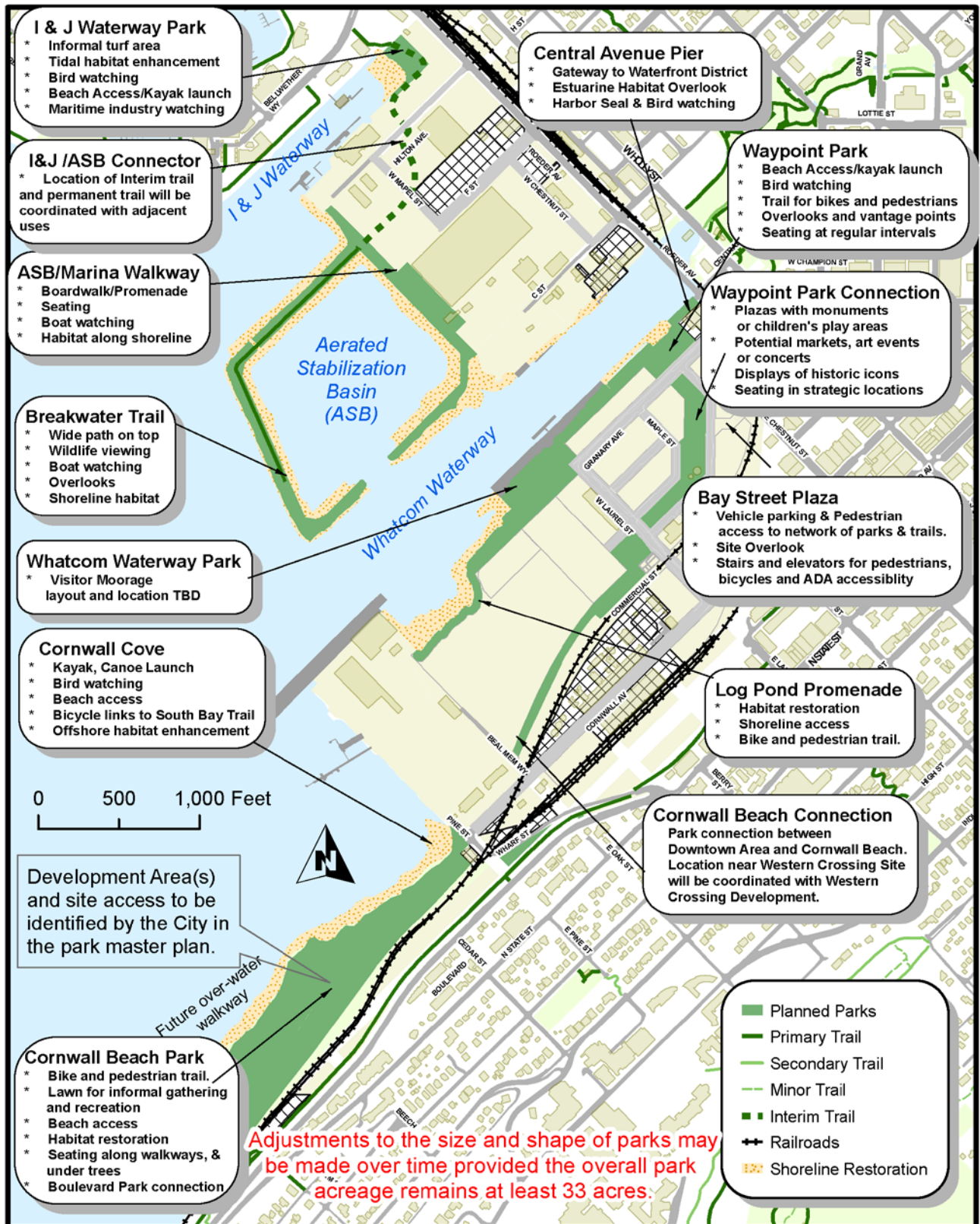
Approximately 18% of the Waterfront District land area is proposed for use as public park, trails and habitat, equaling approximately 33 acres of new upland parks, plus 4 acres of existing public land located east of the railroad tracks along the South Bay Trail, State Street and Boulevard Street. In addition, 6.5 acres of public beaches will be restored for habitat and public use. The Waterfront District will serve as an important linkage in developing a regional system of waterfront parks and trails. The majority of the shoreline within the Waterfront District will be dedicated for public access and improved for public recreation, water access and habitat. This will benefit the entire community as well as the future businesses and residential development located within the Waterfront District. The precise design and layout of the parks, trails and habitat within each development area will be determined through future planning processes integrated with the design of future building footprints and streets. The Waterfront District Sub-Area Plan suggests the general location, size and key elements of various park developments, but recognizes that community discussion under the direction of Bellingham Parks and Recreation Department will further guide the details of the parks, open spaces and trails in the Waterfront District.



Similar to the transportation system, the parks, open space and trails will be phased as the site develops. Each phase of development will be accompanied by the creation of new public recreation, open space and habitat areas.

The public parks and open spaces described on the following pages will allow a variety of passive and active uses. Once development occurs within the Waterfront District, there may also be private open spaces within development parcels, such as courtyards, plazas and rooftop gardens. It will be important for designers to pay close attention to the transition between public and private open spaces.

Figure 7-1: Parks, Open Space & Trails



## *Park and Open Space Descriptions and Acreage by Planning Sub-Area*

**NOTE:** *Park acreage may be reallocated between Planning Areas during the City Sub-Area Plan review process, provided the overall park acreage remains at least 33 acres.*

### **Marine Trades Area**

*(9-acres of upland park plus one acre of restored public beach)*

The parks and open spaces within this area will create a dramatic new public access trail along the top of the Aerated Stabilization Basin (ASB) breakwater. An interim trail has been constructed from Bellwether to a point half way around the lagoon. In the future, a public trail with pockets of natural vegetation and seating will extend along the length of this breakwater. People who walk to the outer end of the breakwater will experience an unencumbered feeling and unique views of Bellingham Bay, the city center, Western Washington University and Sehome Hill. The new breakwater trail will connect to a wide promenade or boardwalk with landscaping, public gathering areas and amenities fronting the future Marina. A multi-use trail or wide sidewalk along Hilton or F Street will connect the marina boardwalk and trail system to an existing trail at the head of the I&J Waterway and a network of parks and trails at Squalicum Harbor and Bellwether on the Bay. A new beach park will be created at the north eastern end of the I&J Waterway for passive uses associated with hand-carry boat launching, exploring the beach or contemplating nature. Shoreline habitat will be enhanced at this park and along portions of the Whatcom and I&J Waterways in areas where existing bulkheads are removed.



### **Downtown Waterfront Area** *(5-acres plus .5 acres public beach)*

Maritime Heritage Park will link to the waterfront when the new park and trail areas take shape in the Downtown Waterfront Area. Much of the water frontage along the southern side of the Whatcom Waterway will become a public trail and park. The Central Avenue Pier was recently upgraded for non-motorized pedestrian and bicycle access, with light penetrating grating to preserve habitat under the extended portions of the pier. The shoreline south of Central Avenue has been restored by removing the concrete Clarifier, a treated timber and steel bulkhead, dozens of treated timber piles and dolphins and tons of concrete debris. Waypoint Park with a restored public beach was constructed during 2018.



Additional sections of the waterfront edge will be softened over time by removal of historic bulkheads, pilings, and over-water shading to provide a more natural shoreline along the Whatcom Waterway. Several sections of the existing GP wharf may be retained to support public access, environmental remediation activities and water-dependent uses through the first three phases of development.

A shoreline trail will extend south through the Downtown Area of the Waterfront District along the southern edge of the Whatcom Waterway. This trail may continue through the Log Pond Area if compatible with industrial uses. A network of trails and sidewalks will eventually lead to Boulevard Park via an over-water walkway from the Cornwall Beach Area. The shoreline trail may be designed as a wide esplanade with benches, a railing and ornamental lighting along the GP Wharf or top of the restored shoreline bank, with a few shoreline overlooks or viewing platforms. Lighting along the trail will be appropriately directed and shielded to provide adequate light for park and trail users, and avoid unnecessary glare on adjacent habitat and residential areas. This esplanade will merge with wide walks in front of waterfront mixed-use buildings, which will encourage cafes and restaurants to incorporate outdoor seating along the walk. The park space in this area will feature landscaped pockets, seating and spaces for passive recreation on lawn or turf between the shoreline trail and adjoining development. Areas between the trail and the water's edge will likely feature habitat restoration with designated public water access points at docks, overlooks and beaches formed where the bulkheads are removed and the banks are softened.

In areas where sections of the GP wharf remain, the shoreline trail will be constructed along the upland edge of the wharf.

**Log Pond Area** *(5-acres of upland park and 2 acres of restored shoreline)*

The shoreline trail described within the Downtown Waterfront Area will continue along the Log Pond shoreline to provide public access to the restored Log Pond shoreline. Fronting onto the restored Log Pond, this park will offer a mixture of naturalized shoreline habitat, public overlooks and some water access. The existing Log Pond shoreline may be reconfigured for more optimal habitat creation.



To the extent it is compatible with future industrial use, the Log Pond shoreline trail may continue through the Log Pond area to connect to the Cornwall Beach park and the overwater boardwalk. An additional public trail is proposed along the southern edge of the Log Pond area adjacent to the BNSF railway. This route will provide a direct bicycle and pedestrian connection between the Downtown Waterfront and Cornwall Beach area. The location of the trail along the Western Crossing site will be coordinated with Western Crossing.



**Shipping Terminal Area** *(No new park acreage)*

The boundary of the Shipping Terminal was previously modified to add additional land along Wharf Street and exclude the Cornwall Cove pocket beach, which is part of the Cornwall Beach area. A parcel of City land with a short section of the existing South Bay Trail runs through the eastern Shipping Terminal boundary at the top of the bluff.

## Cornwall Beach Area

*(14-acres new upland park, 3-acres restored natural beach)*

The Cornwall Beach Area will provide the largest park in the Waterfront District, similar in size and experience to Boulevard Park, including a long natural beach for diverse recreational experiences.



This park, once a landfill, may include space for active and passive recreation use. A Master Plan for the Park has been adopted by the City with proposed shoreline restoration, and the creation of a new beach along the southern shoreline. This entire area is a landfill, so shoreline reshaping will be required in some areas to cap and restore the shoreline. The park may include longer stretches of publicly accessible and walkable beach. This park will enable the realization of long term goals of connecting Cornwall Beach with the proposed over-water trail to Boulevard Park and the Taylor Avenue Dock to the south. A through trail will intersect with a looping system of pedestrian trails or walks weaving through the park. This park could also be accessed in the future via a pedestrian bridge over the railway tracks from the South Bay Trail.

The Waterfront District boundary includes approximately four acres of City and County land along the bluff above the Cornwall Beach planning area, which is currently used for public open space. The South Bay trail crosses through a portion of this public land. The trail could be extended along the Railroad Ave. right-of-way north of Wharf Street, or along the base of the bluff on BNSF land if an agreement can be reached with BNSF to allow a trail to be constructed. This proposed trail would connect to Depot Market Square and the surrounding businesses and residences. The Cornwall Beach area also includes a small pocket beach adjacent to the Port Maintenance Shop, which has been discovered by the community as the perfect place to launch a kayak, enjoy a picnic or watch a sunset over Lummi Island. A small lawn area will provide gathering space and a location for boaters to prepare for launching, while areas adjacent to the beach will be restored to natural conditions to provide wildlife habitat. The size of this park is currently constrained by the location of the existing Port Maintenance Shop and parking lot and the existing location of Cornwall Avenue. If the Maintenance Shop site redevelops in the future, the size of this park, amenities and associated parking may be expanded.



## Waterfront District Guiding Principles and Implementation Strategies

The Waterfront Advisory Group sponsored a public involvement process during 2005 and 2006, which led to City and Port adoption of “Guiding Principles and Implementation Strategies” in 2006. The following Implementation Strategies provide guidance related to Parks, Open Space and Trails:

- Establish signature design elements, a memorable park system, interconnected pedestrian and bicycle routes, and public amenities which set the New Whatcom area apart from other urban waterfront areas.
- Work with Lummi and Nooksack leaders to facilitate their development of cultural and educational facilities which feature Native American culture and history.
- Identify and preserve artifacts on the Georgia Pacific site, including equipment and storage tanks which have historic or aesthetic value, and utilize them as displays or art at community gathering points in the redevelopment project. Develop interpretive signs and information about the historical uses of the site.
- Develop an interconnected system of waterfront access and viewpoints, public parks, open spaces, pedestrian walkways and bicycle routes which will be the backbone of the New Whatcom redevelopment project.
- Make the majority of water’s edge accessible via non-motorized means of transportation, including pedestrian walkways, bicycle trails, motorized and non-motorized boat access, and transient moorage, connected to a network of parks, trails and transit connections. Restrict or control public access to areas used for water-dependent industry, sensitive habitat or government agency uses where public access would conflict with public health or safety, habitat protection or national security.
- Develop the Whatcom Waterway and its adjacent waterfront access as a community amenity, extending the Maritime Heritage Park to the Bay.
- Connect the New Whatcom open space and trail network to Boulevard Park with an over water trail from the south end of the Cornwall Landfill to Boulevard Park.



## 7.1 Park, Open Space and Trail Policies

### *Park Policies*

1. An interconnected system of waterfront access and viewpoints, public parks, open spaces, pedestrian walkways and bicycle routes should be designed and constructed to form the backbone of the Waterfront District.
2. Each park should be designed with a distinct character to provide a variety of park sizes, amenities and experiences for passive and active recreation for people of all ages, including water access and natural areas for wildlife habitat and viewing.
3. The detailed design, funding and construction of parks, open space and trail improvements should coincide with environmental clean-up, habitat restoration and the installation of streets and utilities for each phase of development.
4. Where appropriate and compatible with park plans, parks and open spaces should include some areas with natural or low-water use vegetation, utilize reclaimed wastewater for irrigation, or include water features which double as stormwater treatment or detention facilities.
5. Shoreline parks should include restored shoreline buffers and incorporate habitat enhancement projects consistent with the Bellingham Shoreline Master Program and Restoration Plan. Shoreline buffers may include trails and designated water access points, where no net loss of shoreline ecological function occurs to critical saltwater habitat. (See related policies in Chapter 3.)
6. Appropriate locations for off-leash dog areas should be identified within parks, with attention to conflicts with habitat areas. Off-leash dog use should be restricted in areas with eel grass or sensitive off-shore habitat, such as the Log Pond and pocket beach adjacent to the ASB.
7. Patios and private open spaces should include space for community gardens to allow residents to grow produce and flowers.
8. Reduce opportunities for crime and inappropriate activities by designing parks and trails with adequate lighting and visibility from adjacent roads, businesses and residents. Avoid isolated blind spots.



### *Open Space Policies*

9. Within areas identified for development, buildings and landscaping should be designed to include public and private open spaces, plazas and roof top gardens for the use and enjoyment of residents, visitors and the general public. These spaces may be dedicated as public parks or managed by property developers, but are not counted as part of the 33 acres of new public park land described in this plan.
10. Public open space within development areas should be designed to be welcoming to the general public,



with clearly defined access points to and from adjacent parks, sidewalks and pedestrian ways.

- Private open spaces should be designed to accessible by residents, employees or business patrons.

*Trail Policies*

- Public parks and open spaces should be connected by a network of pedestrian and bicycle trails to establish a continuous corridor of non-motorized trails from Squalicum Harbor to the over-water walkway to Fairhaven.



- Recreational trail systems within parks should include clear directional signage and convenient connections to sidewalks and on-street bicycle routes.

- Bicycle and pedestrian trails should be designed to comply with the accessible design provisions of the American Disabilities Act (ADA). Multi-modal trails should be at least 10 feet wide.

**7.2 Implementation Strategies**

- At full build-out, include at least 33 acres of new public parks and 6.5 acres of restored public beach, divided between the various development areas as follows. Park acreage may be reallocated between Planning Areas during the City Sub-Area Plan review process, provided the overall park acreage remains at least 33 acres.

- Construct early access park and trail features with Phase 1 and 2 development and infrastructure improvements to provide public access along the Downtown Waterfront Area and Cornwall Beach Area.

Development Area	Upland Park	Public Beach
Marine Trades Area	9 acres	1 acre
Downtown Waterfront Area	5 acres	.5 acres
Log Pond Area	5 acres	2 acres
Shipping Terminal Area	0 acres	
Cornwall Beach Area	14 acres	3 acres
Total	33 acres	6.5 acres

- Work with Lummi Nation and Nooksack Indian tribal leaders to identify appropriate locations and facilitate the development of art work, displays and cultural facilities which feature Native American

culture and history. These may include projects developed and operated for public use such as museums, heritage centers, etc. or facilities owned and/or operated by tribal partners such as offices and commercial space.

- Where feasible and desirable, identify and preserve artifacts on the Georgia Pacific site that have historic or aesthetic value, including salvaged building materials, equipment and storage tanks, and utilize them as displays or art at community gathering points. Develop interpretive signs and information about the historical uses of the site.
- Locate and design parks to serve as view corridors where appropriate. In those parks which are designated as view corridors, design landscaping and buildings to avoid obstructing views and limit



the height of any structures to no more than 35'. Limit building height to 25' within shoreline parks designated as "Recreational Shorelines" in the Shoreline Master Program.

6. Restore natural shorelines and provide public access to the water's edge at the head of the I&J Waterway, the pocket beach northwest of the ASB lagoon, the restored shoreline within Log Pond Park, the pocket beach at the end of Cornwall Ave., referred to in this plan as Cornwall Cove, and the beach at the southern end of the Cornwall Ave. landfill.
7. Include hand carry boat launch areas and facilities for boaters within parks where topography and water depth support water access, with attention to potential impacts on near-shore habitat.
8. Restore shoreline buffers and natural systems within parks and set them aside as habitat, with landscaping, fencing or topography barriers to protect natural areas from more active recreation uses.
9. Restrict off-leash dogs and boat moorage within sensitive near-shore areas, including the Log Pond and pocket beach north of the ASB, and develop a signage program to inform visitors about the location and importance of habitat areas.
10. Develop the south side Whatcom Waterway and its adjacent waterfront as a community amenity, extending the Maritime Heritage Park along the Whatcom Waterway. Design a variable width system of parks and trails to be constructed over time as adjacent properties are developed. Develop interim access routes through or around areas where environmental cleanup or interim uses are not compatible with early public access.
11. Connect the Waterfront District park and trail network to existing parks and trails within adjacent neighborhoods. Connect to Bellwether on the Bay and the Squalicum Promenade through a new park at the head of the I&J Waterway. Provide access to Maritime Heritage Park with a pedestrian and bicycle connection at Central Avenue. Access the South Bay Trail with connections at Cornwall Ave. and Wharf Street, and construct a link to Boulevard Park with an over-water trail connecting to the large new park at the south end of the Cornwall Landfill.
12. Work with BNSF, the City Public Works and Park Department to develop additional pedestrian connections over the railroad from the Cornwall Beach area to the South Bay Trail at Laurel Street and connecting Broadway to Bellwether Way, over time as funding is available.
13. Develop a park and trail along the frontage of the Aerated Stabilization Basin, with a public trail, natural vegetation and seating areas extending around the ASB breakwater.
14. Establish development regulations and incentives which encourage the development of public open space within areas proposed for development. Provide floor area bonuses for



projects that provide public open space or plazas for public use.

15. Explore options for increased parking adjacent to the Cornwall Cove pocket beach, including on-street parking along Cornwall Ave.
16. Provide a density bonus or impact fee credit to developers who fund the construction of public parks or open space.
17. Park plans for the first phase of the Whatcom Waterway Waterfront Park should identify a location for a small visitor float, pier or beach area for access and temporary storage of kayaks, dinghies and other small vessels.
18. Develop a permanent off-road trail connection between Bellwether Way and the Breakwater trail. The specific location of the future permanent trail will be coordinated with future industrial uses to avoid unnecessary conflict with Port and/or Port-tenant operations.
19. Develop a continuous waterfront trail along the south side of the Whatcom Waterway and Log Pond shoreline from Roeder Ave. to the Northeasterly edge of the Shipping Terminal. This trail should be extended through the Log Pond planning area to connect to Cornwall Ave. if compatible with industrial and/or cargo uses in the Log Pond area. Public access along the Log Pond trail may be suspended for public safety or site security purposes during periods when upland uses conflict with trail use. Construct an additional pedestrian and bicycle trail along the south side of the Shipping Terminal to provide a direct connection between the Downtown Waterfront area and Cornwall Beach area.
20. The breakwater trail around the Aerated Stabilization Basin should include a flat surface to accommodate a variable width public trail with a minimum width of 12-15-feet, several public gathering areas and gently sloping public beaches suitable for public use.
21. Develop launching facilities and services for hand carry boats in one or more of the following areas: at the head of the I&J Waterway, north of the ASB lagoon, the South side of the Whatcom Waterway, Cornwall Cove, and/or south of the Cornwall Avenue Landfill.
22. Newly developed public boat launches or visitor moorage should comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act.



### LEED ND Credit Opportunities

Note: LEED ND, developed by the US Green Building Council, is one of many different voluntary rating systems to address and achieve sustainability goals. The following plan features provide potential credit toward LEED ND certification:

At least 50% of dwelling units and building entrances will be located within 1/4 mile walk distance of a multi-use trail at least 3 miles in length.

Recreation facilities and trails will be designed according to the accessible design provisions of the ADA.

At least 90% of the dwelling units and business entrances within the Waterfront District will be located within 1/6 mile of a park, green plaza or square at least 1/6 acre in area and average park size is greater than one half acre.