

3.7 LAND USE

The following section compares the probable significant impacts from the Preferred Alternative and the Straight Street Grid Option on land uses on the New Whatcom site and in the site vicinity to those analyzed under the Redevelopment Alternatives (Alternatives 1 – 3) in the 2008 *New Whatcom Redevelopment Project Draft EIS* (DEIS) and identifies any new or increased significant impacts and/or mitigation.

3.7.1 Affected Environment

The DEIS describes the historic and existing land use conditions on the New Whatcom site (the Waterfront District). The land use and building characteristics of the surrounding areas and existing land use character of the site area are also described. The existing Comprehensive Plan and zoning designations of the site and surrounding vicinity are highlighted. The existing land use conditions on the New Whatcom site and in the site vicinity have generally remained the same as presented in the DEIS; therefore, no changes to the discussion of existing conditions are warranted in this SDEIS (see DEIS Section 3.7.1 for a detailed description of the existing land uses).

3.7.2 Impacts

Draft EIS (Alternatives 1 - 4)

As described in the DEIS, temporary impacts to adjacent land uses could occur during the phased construction of the New Whatcom Redevelopment Project. Construction-related impacts that could occur over the 20-year buildout period include dust and emissions from construction equipment and vehicles; increased noise levels and vibration from construction activity; and, increased traffic associated with construction workers and vehicles. Although construction activities would occur incrementally over the long-term buildout period, such activity would move around the site and could result in temporary impacts to adjacent areas, when site construction occurs near the boundary of the site or in close proximity to these adjacent uses.

Operation of the assumed redevelopment under DEIS Alternatives 1 – 3 would convert the New Whatcom site from its current vacant and underutilized industrial condition to a new urban mixed-use neighborhood that would create an opportunity for the establishment of a new live-work-play environment and provide increased connections to Downtown Bellingham and the City of Bellingham in general. Redevelopment under DEIS Alternatives 1 - 3 would include between 7.5 million and 4 million square feet of new mixed-use space at full buildout. Building heights and density would increase on the site; maximum building heights could range between 100 to 200 feet. Land uses on the site would include a mix of office, institutional, light/marine industrial, marina, recreation, low-rise residential, mid-rise residential, high-rise residential, retail, and restaurant.

The Redevelopment Alternatives would also include between 15 and 33 acres of new parks, trails and habitat areas, as well as a new marina (up to 460 moorage slips) and boat launch. The proposed new trails would provide pedestrian and bicycle links to existing trails in the City of Bellingham. In addition, a majority of the onsite shoreline area, which is currently inaccessible to the public, would be transformed to parks, trails and habitat areas that would allow for increased public access to the waterfront.

As described in the DEIS, the No Action Alternative would include approximately 1 million square feet of new light/marine industrial development and reuse of approximately 1.15 million square feet of retained industrial space, and would not change the overall character or pattern of land use on the site. It is assumed that no new parks, trails or habitat areas would be developed on the site and most of the onsite shoreline areas would remain in their existing industrial conditions. A new marina (up to 600 moorage slips) and boat launch would be developed on the site.

Table 3.7-1 provides a summary of the proposed land uses on the New Whatcom site under the EIS Alternatives in 2026 (see DEIS Section 3.7.2 for details on these impacts).

**Table 3.7-1
PROPOSED LAND USE COMPARISON
DRAFT EIS ALTERNATIVES AND PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE – 2026**

	DEIS Alt. 1 Higher Density (Square Feet)	DEIS Alt. 2 Medium Density (Square Feet)	DEIS Alt. 3 Lower Density (Square Feet)	DEIS Alt. No Action (Square Feet)	Preferred Alternative (Square Feet)
Office	2,345,000	1,785,000	1,130,000	0	2,000,000
Institutional	570,000	570,000	570,000	0	670,000
Light/Marine Industrial	450,000	450,000	450,000	850,000	685,000
Warehouse	0	0	0	190,000	0
Low-Rise Residential	184,000	600,000	1,280,000	0	400,000
Mid-Rise Residential	2,906,000	1,670,000	310,000	0	1,320,000 ^t
High-Rise Residential	600,000	550,000	0	0	550,000
Retail	355,000	310,000	214,500	0	310,000
Restaurant	90,000	65,000	45,500	0	65,000
Total Building Area	7,500,000	6,000,000	4,000,000	1,040,000¹	6,000,000
Parks, Trails, and Habitat Area	33 acres	24 acres	15 acres	0 acres	33 acres

Source: CollinsWoerman, 2008.

¹ In addition to the 1.04 million square feet of new industrial space, it is assumed that 1.15 million square feet of existing industrial space would be reused.

In the broader context, redevelopment of the site would represent conversion of a “brownfields area” and would be consistent with the City’s Comprehensive Plan goals that call for urban infill and sustainable development, limiting sprawl and providing opportunities for public access to the waterfront. Dense infill development at the site could alleviate pressure for growth in outlying areas or at the fringe of the Urban Growth Area. Redevelopment would create substantial new public access opportunities to the waterfront and would create new connections between the site and the surrounding community, most notably the downtown business district.

Overall, redevelopment would result in increased building density, activity levels and access opportunities on the site; given the general compatibility of new uses with existing uses in the surrounding area, significant adverse land use impacts would not be anticipated (refer to Section 3.7 of the DEIS for detailed information).

Preferred Alternative

As described in Chapter 2 of this SDEIS, levels of redevelopment under the Preferred Alternative would be within the range of redevelopment assumed for DEIS Alternatives 1 - 3. Redevelopment under the Preferred Alternative would mix and match elements of Alternatives 1 - 3.

Construction under the Preferred Alternative would result in temporary, construction-related impacts to adjacent land uses, similar to those described under DEIS Alternatives 1 - 3.

Approval of the Proposed Actions would allow for the transformation of the site from an underutilized industrial site, that is currently separated from the surrounding community, to a new neighborhood with a mix of uses and open spaces that are connected to and integrated with the surrounding community. Under the Preferred Alternative, redevelopment of the Waterfront District would include a total of 6 million square feet of new uses at full buildout (see **Table 3.7-1** for a breakdown of assumed land uses on the site under the Preferred Alternative). As under DEIS Alternatives 1 - 3, over the 20-year buildout period the site would transition from a “brownfields area” to a new dense, urban mixed-use village. General redevelopment density under the Preferred Alternative would be similar to DEIS Alternative 2 and can be described as a medium density environment. The Preferred Alternative would include lower amounts of low-rise and mid-rise residential uses; the Preferred Alternative would include a range of employment opportunities and an increase in office, institutional and light/marine industrial uses as compared in DEIS Alternative 2. The increase in light/marine industrial uses would be primarily located in the Marine Trades Area north of the Whatcom Waterway.

Building heights under the Preferred Alternative would be similar to those analyzed in the DEIS. Low-rise residential, light/marine industrial, retail, and restaurant uses would range between one and three stories. Mid-rise residential, office, and institutional use heights would be between two and eight stories. High-rise residential uses could be six stories and higher. Variation in building heights would result in a diverse character of building development and design. This variation would also result in additional open spaces between buildings and more internal view opportunities.

Similar to the Redevelopment Alternatives analyzed in the DEIS, the proposed land uses, density, building heights and range of amenities of the Preferred Alternative would be generally compatible with and complimentary to surrounding land uses, including uses within the existing downtown area. Significant adverse land use impacts would not be anticipated. Activity levels

on the site would be anticipated to increase under the Preferred Alternative due to an increase in employees and residents on the site; this increase in activity levels would be similar to the levels analyzed for DEIS Alternative 2.

As described in Chapter 2 of this SDEIS, subsequent to the issuance of the DEIS and over the past several months, the master planning process has divided the Waterfront District into five major areas (see **Section 2.3** and **Appendix A** of this DEIS for details). Each area is defined by its primary uses, density and building heights, integrated with amenities such as pedestrian streets, parks, trails and habitat areas. This represents a more specific refinement of the land use concepts described in the DEIS.

As an example, the focus of the Marine Trades Area would be on providing a range of jobs in the marine-oriented and research and development sectors in an industrial setting; it is anticipated that the area would transition geographically from marine industrial uses to a mixed-use character. The Downtown Waterfront and Log Pond Areas would feature a mix of uses, the highest densities within the site, and a range of public amenities.

In terms of potential land use impacts, the further refinement of the five major areas and the assumed mix, density, heights and amenities within each area does not change conclusions reached in the DEIS – redevelopment under the Preferred Alternative would be compatible with surrounding land uses, including the downtown; it would open up the shoreline to public access and a range of amenities; and would not result in significant, adverse land use impacts.

The Preferred Alternative would include approximately 33 acres of new parks, trails, and habitat areas, similar to DEIS Alternative 1. New parks and trails on the site would provide increased recreation opportunities for the community, as well as new pedestrian and bicycle connections to downtown Bellingham and surrounding neighborhoods. As under DEIS Alternatives 1 – 3, the new parks, trails and habitat areas would also provide opportunities for public access to the shoreline area, which is essentially inaccessible under the existing conditions (the majority of the site's shoreline would be accessible to the public). In addition to the new parks, trails and habitat areas, a new marina would be located in the former ASB area.

As indicated above, the Preferred Alternative features a refinement of the parks, trail and habitat network described and evaluated in the DEIS (see **Section 2.3.4** and **Appendix A** to this SDEIS for further details). A wide range of parks and open spaces would be provided; the specific design of these spaces would be determined as part of future planning and design efforts by the Port and City. There would be limited differences between the parks, trails and open space network under the Preferred Alternative with that assumed under DEIS Alternative 1; differences include changes in the trail system in the Marine Trades Area, the configuration of the parks and trails in the Downtown Waterfront Area, and the inclusion of the “community green” areas as public gathering places. These community greens would be connected to the waterfront, allowing additional pedestrian access pathways from both on and off site areas (see **Section 2.3.4** of this SDEIS for details). In addition to the designated public places, there would also likely be privately-sponsored open space elements of future redevelopment projects, such as courtyards, plazas and other open space areas. The conclusions reached in the DEIS regarding shoreline and park/open space uses remain valid; significant adverse impacts would not result under the Preferred Alternative.

The proposed street network under the Preferred Alternative would be developed under a phased approach and would include the following streets: Hilton Ave., C Street, F St., Paper Ave., Bloedel Ave., Bay St., Commercial St., Log Pond Dr., Cornwall Ave., Oak St., and Ivy St.

(see **Figure 2.6**, in Chapter 2 of this SDEIS). Similar to Alternatives 1 - 3, the proposed street and trail network under the Preferred Alternative is intended to increase vehicular, pedestrian, and bicycle connectivity between the New Whatcom site, downtown Bellingham and surrounding neighborhoods. The proposed street network is also intended to promote view corridor opportunities and public gathering places. For further analysis of the proposed street network refer to **Section 3.10** Aesthetics and **Section 3.12**, Transportation, of this SDEIS.

Straight Street Grid Option

Under the Straight Street Grid Option, it is assumed that the proposed mix of land uses, density and parks, trails and habitat areas on the New Whatcom site would be the similar to those described under the Preferred Alternative (6 million square feet of building space and 33 acres of parks, trails and habitat areas). The proposed roadway network and configuration under the Straight Street Grid Option would represent the primary difference; it would follow the existing alignment of the surrounding City of Bellingham street grid. The Straight Street Grid Option would also allow for increased connection opportunities to downtown Bellingham and the surrounding neighborhoods when compared to existing conditions. It could be argued that the Straight Street Grid would also provide efficient vehicular, pedestrian and bicycle connections between the Waterfront District, downtown Bellingham and surrounding neighborhoods due to the potential creation of smaller blocks that would promote more pedestrian activity and increased street-level retail activity. However, it should also be noted that the Straight Street Grid Option would feature less direct connections to the downtown area, due to the elimination of the Commercial Street Bridge connection that would be provided under the Preferred Alternative.

The Straight Street Grid Option would feature lower maximum building heights (75 foot height limit) than under the Preferred Alternative, except within the shoreline area. In order to achieve the overall density contemplated under this Option, the specific mix of uses and density within each of the five major areas onsite may vary as compared to the Preferred Alternative. While it is assumed that the 6 million square feet of overall density could be achievable, a 75-foot height limit could result in a pattern of building development that is more uniform in character, with less variety in height and building design and less opportunity for additional open space areas (beyond the 33 acres) as part of future redevelopment. In addition, less view opportunities from onsite buildings to the Bay and other distant viewpoints could result due to the uniformity of heights to achieve the overall density. This could result due to the need to retain more developable land on site for buildings than under the Preferred Alternative (which would feature higher maximum height limits and a range of building heights to achieve 6 million square feet); to achieve the same total density more land would be needed due to the 75-foot height limit.

One additional distinction between the Straight Street Grid and the Preferred Alternative relates to the community greens included as elements of the parks and open space plan. Under the Straight Street Grid Option, the "greens" would essentially serve as pocket parks and would not connect upland areas with the waterfront.

In terms of potential land use impacts, the assumed mix, density and amenities of the Straight Street Grid Option would not change the overall conclusions reached in the DEIS or those related to the Preferred Alternative. Significant adverse land use impacts would not result.

3.7.3 Conclusions

Levels of redevelopment of the New Whatcom site (Waterfront District) under the Preferred Alternative would be within the range of alternatives analyzed in the DEIS. The Preferred Alternative would provide a “mix and match” approach and would be comparable to DEIS Alternatives 1 and 2. In general, proposed redevelopment levels would be similar to those analyzed under DEIS Alternative 2 (6 million square feet of total building space). However, the Preferred Alternative would include a slight decrease in the amount of proposed residential uses when compared to Alternative 2 and an increase in office, institutional and light/marine industrial uses. Parks, trails and habitat area provided under the Preferred Alternative would be similar to Alternative 1 (33 acres). The proposed street network is intended to provide increased opportunities for vehicle, pedestrian and bicycle connections between the site, downtown Bellingham and surrounding areas and help to create an extension of the downtown area. Significant, adverse land use impacts would not result.

The Straight Street Grid Option would assume the same level of redevelopment as described under the Preferred Alternative (6 million square feet of building space and 33 acres of parks, trails, and habitat areas). Under the Straight Street Grid Option, the proposed street network would be slightly different and would continue to follow the existing City of Bellingham street grid. This layout is also intended to provide efficient connections from the site to downtown and surrounding areas and promote pedestrian activity. The assumed height limit (75 feet) could result in a more uniform character of building development than under the Preferred Alternative.

3.7.4 Mitigation Measures

Mitigation measures to address any potentially significant land use impacts of DEIS Alternatives 1 – 3 were identified in the DEIS (see DEIS Section 3.7.3 for a list of these measures). These mitigation measures would also apply to the Preferred Alternative and the Straight Street Grid Option. Because no additional adverse land use impacts were identified for the Preferred Alternative or the Straight Street Grid Option, no additional mitigation measures would be warranted.

The Preferred Alternative includes features to achieve the community vision of a new urban, waterfront community. These include a mix of complimentary uses, a range of public amenities and enhanced public access to the site, vehicular and pedestrian connections to the surrounding downtown and neighborhoods, view corridors, etc.

As mentioned in the DEIS, specific development regulations would be established to guide long-term redevelopment of the site (along with the Development Agreement and other applicable regulations and standards). Since issuance of the DEIS, the Port and the master planning team have formulated a preliminary set of development regulations for each major redevelopment area of the site (see **Appendix D** to this DEIS). These preliminary regulations would assist the Port and City in ensuring that significant adverse land use impacts would not result over the long-term. These regulations could be refined as part of the ongoing master planning effort and would ultimately be reviewed and considered by the City as part of the decision-making process for the Waterfront District Master Development Plan (Subarea Plan).

3.7.5 Significant Unavoidable Adverse Impacts

Similar to the Redevelopment Alternatives analyzed in the DEIS, redevelopment under the Preferred Alternative and the Straight Street Grid Option would result in the intensification of land uses on the site, an extension of the downtown area, and an increase in activity levels on the site. It is assumed that redevelopment would occur consistent with adopted standards, guidelines, and regulations for the Waterfront District, including the Master Development Plan, the Port and City Development Agreement, and the Planned Action Ordinance, as well as the City's Comprehensive Plan and Shoreline Master Program. Significant adverse impacts would not be anticipated under the Preferred Alternative or the Straight Street Grid Option.